Dynamics of Trust in the

Employment Relationship

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Author's Declaration

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Abstract

Trust is a topic that has long been of interest to organisational scholars. Over the past two decades, numerous studies have scrutinized the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of trust within organisations (i.e. intra-organisational trust) sharpening our understanding of its complexity and describing all the benefits that trust can confer. However, most intra-organisational trust researchers have arguably developed an over-optimistic vision on the possibilities of building trust relationships. This seems in fact to clash with the outcomes of recent surveys and employee engagement measures, which have recorded a significant trust deficit with levels of trust at historic low within Western organisations.

Within the literature, such declining levels of trust are often considered as the consequence of deficits in people management skills and practices, while failing to acknowledge the existence of wider structural issues within the employment relationship. This thesis argues that, in order to better understand the current declining levels of trust, trust researchers need to take a sociological and critical turn and move beyond the micro-foundations and the psychological reductionism characterizing most of the intra-organisational trust literature. It proposes a multi-level study, which captures the essence of how micro- and macro-levels forces simultaneously influence the development of trust at both the interpersonal and the organisational level.

To bridge the micro-macro gap, specific attention has been given to the role of the Human Resource function, which sits at the heart of the employment relationship. The findings demonstrate that the development of intra-organizational trust is influenced by the specificities of the job role, by interpersonal dynamics, as well as by numerous other organizational factors. They also reveal a fractured and dysfunctional situation for Human Resource professionals. Paradoxically, despite being normatively committed to trust-building models of employment relations, HR staff are instead largely not trusted as they find themselves squeezed between

their conflicting roles of 'strategic partner' and 'employee champion'. The thesis provides new evidence to the recent crisis of trust faced by the Human Resource profession, as well as it demonstrates that trust is inherently context-dependent and that trust relationships are inevitably embedded in the structural context of the employment relationship.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Trust Research and Theory: the way forward

Trust is a pervasive phenomenon of organisational life and a topic that has long been of interest to organisational scholars. Over the past three decades, a wide number of authors have explored the means by which trust can be fostered and developed within and between business organisations, making trust a core topic of organisation theory and an established field of studies in management research. According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000), the beginning of a systematic study of trust by social scientists can be dated back to the late 1950s, when empirical studies of trust and mistrust were produced due to the conviction that science could find a solution to the escalating suspicion created by the Cold War and to the dangerous and costly arms race that had resulted. In the late 1960s, the study of trust shifted then to a more individual focus, trying to investigate the suspicion of people toward contemporary institutions and authorities. By the 1980s, researchers shifted their interest and attention toward the study of interpersonal relationships, but it is only from the 1990s onward that fundamental changes in the use of technology and in society more generally determined a radical surge of academic studies, with trust becoming an important subject of study in sociology, economics and in organisational science (Kramer and Tyler, 1996; Rousseau *et al*., 1998).

Within organisational sciences and management research, studies of trust have enjoyed an explosive growth in the past fifteen years (Li, 2012) to the point of becoming today an established field of investigation. Numerous studies have already scrutinized the

antecedents, processes, and outcomes of trust in organisations (i.e. intra-organisational trust) attesting to the numerous benefits that trust can confer. However, despite the breadth and richness of the trust research, the literature has been characterized by a disappointing lack of coherence in the pattern of findings (Searle and Skinner, 2011; McEvily and Tortoriello, 2011; McEvily, Perrone, & Zaheer, 2003).

Dietz and Den Hartog (2006) suggested, for example, that competing conceptualizations and definitions of trust have emerged within the literature, as a consequence of the different perspectives and academic disciplines of those scholars who have investigated the term. While Mayer and Davis (1999) suggested that the nature of a topic such as trust, belonging to the world of everyday explanations, has led to a proliferation of approaches to understanding it, given the numerous connotations involved in the usage of the term. Trust within organisations is in fact an extremely complex and dynamic phenomenon and any decisions to trust can be based on a huge amount of often conflicting evidence.

Consequently, despite a proliferation of middle-range theories about trust, an integrative theory of organisational trust has continued to elude researchers (Kramer, 1999). McEvily and Tortoriello (2011) have claimed that the 'Balkanisation' of measures currently endemic to the field of trust needs to be replaced by a more coherent and unified approach to allow the expanding body of research on trust to have an enduring impact on the literature. According to the authors, a common approach would be required to be able to compare and synthesize across studies and to integrate findings across disciplines. Conversely, while empirical evidence has continued to accumulate at a rapid rate in recent years, enduring debates about the nature of trust have continued to go undressed.

According to Searle *et al.* (2011b), most works on trust in organisational studies have tended to focus on the interpersonal level, analysing how trust is determined by the conduct and the character of the individuals involved. Unfortunately, by focusing on the socio-psychological aspects of business relationships, such analyses have often paid too little attention to the organisational context and to how this may affect the development of trust. Indeed, despite a number of calls within the literature asking to better account the role of the organisational context in authors' analysis (Johns, 2001; Rousseau and Fried, 2001), there has been little systematic study of the organisational determinants of trust and of the extent to which the conditions, or context of work, independently affect the development of trust (Blunsdon and Reed, 2003).

Aside from the work done by some early scholars adopting a sociological perspective (Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Shapiro, 1997; Luhmann, 1979; Fox, 1974; Carnevale and Wechsler, 1992), and few more recent attempts to link trust to significant organisational dimensions (Mayer and Davis, 1999; Gould-Williams, 2003; Perrone *et al.* 2003; Six and Sorge, 2008), the literature on intra-organisational trust has been filled by studies, which have analysed trust in the workplace abstracting it from the organisational context. As Dietz and Den Hartog (2006) explained, in line with the psychological tradition of studying a phenomenon abstracting it from the context of its manifestation, too often trust relationships have been assumed to be fully autonomous and immune from the organisational context in which they are embedded.

It is the content of this thesis that much of the current literature on intra-organisational trust is limited in its ability to represent the true functioning of trust within organisations due to a lack of focus on the organisational context. As Siebert *et al.*

(2015) have suggested, the literature needs to take a sociological and critical turn and move beyond the micro 'truster-trustee' model and the psychological reductionism characterizing the majority of trust researchers, which often have analysed the problem of trust in abstraction from the organisational context (Kramer, 2006).

While there are no doubts that characteristics of an individual and his relationships at work are key factors influencing the development of trust, other contextual factors need to be better accounted for. Gillespie and Dietz (2009) suggested, for example, that in the face of the current economic crisis, structurally embedded pressures and constraints – such as performance targets and tight budgets – might be the causes of many of today's amoral and malevolent behaviours within organisations, as they have produced a working environment which has become more demanding, more unpredictable and more conducive to trust failure. Similarly, other scholars have reported that the employment relationship might have become more risky and precarious within Western organisations, due to major challenges such as organisational restructuring, downsizing, and increasing pressures to provide more efficient and effective services (Coyle-Shapiro and Kesler, 2000).

Many employees appear to be today more afraid, cynical and less engaged with their organisation. Indeed, several surveys have provided in recent years consistent evidence of a breakdown of trust within numerous business, governments and public institutions (Edelman, 2009, 2012, 2015; Pew Research Centre, 2013; Harris, Moriarty, & Wicks, 2014; BlessingWhite, 2008). However, much of the current literature tends to consider such declining level of trust as a consequence of deficits in people management skills and practices, failing to acknowledge instead the existence of more deep-seated issues within the employment relationship.

Following Fox (1974)'s recommendations, this thesis makes the case that the context of work is crucial to better understand the development of trust within organisations. The concept of trust cannot be fully understood and exclusively studied at either the psychological or the organisational level, because it thoroughly permeates both. In other words, trust needs to be studied as a function of both collective level conditions and interpersonal relationships. As Rousseau *et al*. (1998) suggested, conceptualizing trust in only one form risks of missing the rich diversity of trust in the organisational setting. Trust needs instead to be considered and treated as a 'meso' concept, which integrates together micro-level psychological processes and macro-level organisational arrangements.

The first objective of the thesis is therefore to shed some new light on the development of trust in the workplace and on its dynamic interplay between "micro" and "macro" realms (Bamberger, 2008). It proposes a multi-level research framework to investigate how trust can be moulded at the interpersonal level - influenced by the characteristics of interpersonal transactions between organisational actors - as well as formed at an organisational level as a consequence of specific organisational features or other contextual factors. By answering the first research question - i.*e. "What are the main factors influencing the development of intra-organizational trust at an interpersonal and organizational level?"* - the thesis attempts to respond to Currall and Inkpen (2006)'s call for a new era of trust research that shifts the attention toward a multi-level analysis of trust, which extends the literature's perspective predominantly based on a single-dimensional understanding of trust.

In order to efficaciously analyse both levels, the research focuses on the development of trust within the employment relationship, drawing on the classic insights of the

British industrial sociologist, Alan Fox (1974), whose work on the employment relationship was regarded as seminal among industrial relation scholars (Edwards, 2014; Ackers, 2011) but has been surprisingly less influential among the majority of trust researchers in organisational studies (Siebert *et al.*, 2015). Fox's key contribution lays in showing how intra-organisational trust is embedded in the institutional system and how trust dynamics cannot be accounted for by structural or micro-organisational factors separately. Instead, as both Möllering (2005) and Siebert *et al.* (2015) recognized, these require a theoretical device which can better reconcile the structure–agency analysis of intra-organizational trust.

In order to bridge the micro-macro gap, a specific attention has been given to the Human Resource (HR) function, which in many sense sits at the heart of the employment relationship. Little attention has been paid within the trust literature to organisational actors other than managers (Searle, 2013). No studies have yet investigated, for example, to what extent the HR function is trusted by other organisational actors, and whether HR professionals do play a significant role in the development of trust relationships. The second objective of the thesis is to empirically fill this gap by answering the second research question, i.e. "*What role does the Human Resource function play in the development of intra-organisational trust, and to what extent is it perceived positively or negatively by organisational members?*".

So far, researchers' attention has mainly focused on human resource management (HRM) policies covering the full employment cycle, examining either distinct combinations of practices or distinct policy areas. Studies have focused, for example, on the impact of HRM policies on trust levels (Searle and Skinner, 2011; Whitener,

1997), or they have analysed trust as a moderating variable influencing the impact of HRM policies and practices on organisational performance (Innocenti *et al*., 2010; Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Tzafrir, 2005). Evidences have shown that both the content of HRM policies, as well as the perceived fairness with which they are delivered, are central to employees' perception of organisational trustworthiness (Mayer and Davis, 1999; Searle *et al*., 2011a). Employees interpret these policies as statement of intent, indicative of the organisation's commitment toward them (Skinner *et al*., 2004; Whitener, 2001).

However, as Siebert *at al.* (2016) have recently suggested, trust research that links to HRM practices is typically underpinned by a 'unitarist' ideology (Siebert *et al*., 2015), which emphasises consensus around common goals and harmony of interests. Unfortunately, this dominant functionalist perspective might have precluded deeper questioning on the development of trust in organizations. This approach tends in fact to neglect the plurality of interests and power asymmetries within the employment relationship; or, in other words, that there might be conflicts of interest between employers and employees. Indeed, as Sibert *et al*. (2015, p.14) commented, 'the question of whose interests are served when employees' trust…in the enterprise is preserved simply does not arise".

Managing employee-employer conflicting interests, while maintaining positive trust relationships, is a crucial issue for the HR function. HR professionals often sit uneasily between opposing managers and employees' interests (Caldwell, 2003), as they are charged by the organisation with finding satisfactory solutions to meet the demands of both parties while also protecting its interest. They are in a unique position to comment on trust dynamics in the employment relationships as, besides being normatively

committed to trust-building models of employment relations, they might often paradoxically be involved in designing and implementing trust-reducing practices (Searle, 2013). For example, recent downsizing, financial re-engineering and perpetual restructuring involving modern organisations might have positioned HR professionals to the fore in performing a complex role in the development, implementation and management of policies that may significantly erode trust in organisations.

Furthermore, we have also been assisting at a significant shift in the delivery of HR services in recent years, with HR specialists trying to play a more strategic role within organisations (Ulrich, 1998). These structural changes might have distanced HR from the workforce, with a consequent lack of opportunities for them to play the role of 'employee champion'. Consequently, declining levels of employees' trust in organisations should be explained not as a deficit in people management practices, as implied by much of the current trust literature (Siebert *et al*., 2016), but in the light of the critiques of 'soft' HR as a 'failed project' (Thompson, 2011).

The literature chapter is divided into two main sections. Section 1 provides an overview of the empirical and conceptual literature on intra-organisational trust, analysing its main themes, core concepts, and academic debates. It discusses the vital role of trust in modern Western organisations reporting the literature's core debates. It also describes trust's several advantages and different definitions, and it provides a comprehensive overview of its main antecedents, processes and outcomes.

Section 2 discusses instead the documented shortfall of trust in the public and private sectors and the lack of its systematic analysis from trust scholars. This represents the incipit for moving the discussion on some of the limitations of the current trust

literature and on the need to simultaneously studying trust at both the interpersonal and the organisational level, due to its context-dependent nature. The last part of the chapter discusses instead the role and the influence of the organisational context in the development of trust. It first revisits the classic insights of the British industrial sociologist, Alan Fox (1974), and then the need of studying the dynamics of trust within the employment relationship. A separate section has also been dedicated to the study of trust in relation to the Human Resource function. The chapter finally concludes by summarising the two main research questions.

To investigate the main factors influencing the development of trust at both the interpersonal and organizational level, the methodology chapter argues the need for a qualitative, contextually rich analysis, which allows analysing trust as a multi-dimensional construct. The chapter firstly adopts critical realism for its ontological and epistemological foundations, and it then discusses some of the implications on the way trust relations can be analysed within this framework.

The data finding chapter discusses the distinct types of mechanisms influencing the development of trust in the two selected organizations. The data show how, despite the large consensus on the importance of trust for the effective functioning of the organizations, research participants manifested very dissimilar opinions when questioned on their own level of trust. This is because they do refer to several types of trust mechanisms operating at either a personal, interpersonal, or organisational level. Finally, the chapter presents the collected data on the role of the Human Resource function in the development of intra-organisational trust and on how the organizations' HR staff tend to be perceived by other organizational members.

The discussion chapter reviews the findings of the thesis in relation to the core research objectives, providing a broader critical reflection upon central themes and concepts raised in the literature review and methodology chapters. Firstly, it analyses the importance of intra-organizational trust in the employment relationship and the identified mechanisms which influence the development of trust at the interpersonal and organizational level. By developing an awareness of the various sources of intra-organisational trust, the chapter outlines circumstances in which high-trust dynamic and low-trust dynamic can simultaneously coexist within the two organizations. Secondly, the chapter discusses the collected data on HR staff and on their capacity of building and promoting trust relationships. The revealed lack of trust toward HR staff in both the organizations confirms, as Siebert at al. (2016) suggested, that the normative HRM literature fails to acknowledge the existence of an inherent conflict of interest between employees and employers within the employment relationship that HR practitioners really struggle to mediate.

Finally, the concluding chapter reaffirms the importance of developing a perspective that combines the structurally influenced and agentive aspects of organizational trust relations to go beyond the typical high-trust analysis and the sophisticated HRM prescriptions characterizing much of the current trust literature. The discovered lack of trust toward HR staff within both the organizations confirms, as Kochan (2004) has suggested, that the typical HR dilemma of championing employees, while simultaneously endeavouring to be part of the management team (Reilly and Williams, 2003), can determine a loss of HR's legitimacy and a crisis of trust for HR professionals. More generally, this demonstrates that, by shifting the attention to the employment relationship through a multi-level analysis, it is possible to recognize the

different interests of the organisational actors and that a lack of trust may potentially

develop as a result of structurally influenced behaviours or practices.

CHAPTER 2

Literature review

Section 1

2.1.1 The new trust society

In the past 30 years, the topic of trust has received increasing attention from scholars in organisational science and related fields. Numerous social scientists have highlighted the central role of trust in organisational affairs, exploring the role that trust plays in processes of intra- and inter-organisational cooperation, coordination and control (Kramer, 1999). This research has sharpened our understanding of the myriad and often subtle benefits of trust and enhanced our appreciation of the complexity of its construct. As Kramer (2006) suggested, significant theoretical advances and empirical developments have been achieved in recent years (Rousseau *et al*., 1998; McEvily *et al*., 2003) and these have pushed the topic of trust to the centre stage of organisational theory and research.

Indeed, according to Bachmann and Zaheer (2006), over the past two decades, a series of special journal issues (Bachmann *et al*., 2001; McEvily, Perrone and Zaheer, 2003; Rousseau *et al*. 1998) and edited volume on trust in work organisation (Hardin, 2002; Kramer and Cook, 2004; Kramer and Tyler, 1996; Lane and Bachman, 1998) have erected a rapidly burgeoning literature. This has also been further complemented by several scholarly integrations and critical assessments of the organisational trust literature (Creed and Miles, 1996; Kramer 1999).

Several interdependent factors seem to have contributed to the rise of trust as a new core concept of business and as an established field of management research. According to Bachmann and Zaheer (2006), the recent increased competition in the global markets, the disintegration of productions processes, the availability of advanced communication technology and systems, and post-bureaucratic form of work organisation have all been the causes of the vast degree of uncertainty and the need for flexibility characterizing modern organisations. On one hand, the increased global competition and rising level of turbulence in organisational and inter-organisational relationships have made uncertainty an intrinsic feature of modern business; on the other, the need for more flexibility have demanded and facilitated more cooperativeness in intra- and inter-organisational relations. Consequently, within a context in which flexibility is required and uncertainty abounds, trust has been needed more than ever and it has become a critical feature of contemporary organisations.

Without trust uncertainty would pervade organisations, destabilizing the coordination of their economic activities. Several scholars have investigated trust as a key organizing principle for businesses to coordinate tasks and promote cooperation both inside and outside organisations (Bachmann and Zaheer, 2006; McEvily et al. 2003). Leewicki and Bunker (1996) argued for example that dramatic changes in modern organisations have favoured the formation of new organisational linkages, strategic alliances, partnerships and joint venture in order to achieve and maintain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Such new linkages have required organisations to move away from more traditional hierarchical forms, toward network and alliances form of organisations in which trust relationships play a critical role.

More recently, Searle *et al*. (2011a) have suggested that increased interdependency within organisations through flatter hierarchies, team-based structure and relational contracting have enhanced the request for trust relationships. Similarly, McEvily *et al*., (2003) previously argued that the concept of trust has become a critical feature of several contemporary organisational forms, such as strategic alliances, distributed groups, and knowledge-intensive organisations. According to these authors, trust is a relevant organizing principle that warrants consideration whenever actors are simultaneously dependent on, and vulnerable to, the actions and decisions of others. Lane and Bachmann (1998) also suggested that more knowledge-intensive products and more information-based mode of production characterizing modern society have made trust a highly desirable propriety, a key intangible asset, and a valuable social capital for organisations. As other authors have argued, knowledge generation, development, and sharing depend on employee's commitment, collaborative teamwork and a sense of shared destiny, for which mutual trust is a critical precondition (Bromiley and Cummings, 1995; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Therefore, companies are required to improve their knowledge management capabilities by strengthening employees' trust. Very similarly, reviewing recent trends in the employment relations, inter-divisional relations and inter-firm relations, Adler (2001) also argued that we should expect a greater reliance on trust as knowledge becomes increasingly important in our economy. According to Adler, high-trust institutional forms will proliferate as a consequence of the uniquely effective properties of trust for the coordination of knowledge-intensive activities.

Furthermore, other scholars also attempted to legitimize trust as a new core issue of organisational theory and management research on the assumption that it is a more consistent mechanism to support organisational changes and developments in today's volatile economy than hierarchical power or direct surveillance. Trust has been promoted in fact as a 'social mechanism' – besides price and authority – in order to make the transaction cost approach more complete and realistic (Cummings and Bromiley, 1996; Ring and Van de Ven, 1992). Möllering *et al*. (2004) explained that today's organisational competitiveness in the market seems to be mainly determined by a mix of flexibility, cooperation, and learning, which in turn requires organisational openness both structurally and with regard to individual behaviours. Consequently, several researchers and practitioners have turned to the concept of trust as a mechanism to reduce social uncertainty and vulnerability, while enabling managers to achieve organisational openness and ultimately competitiveness. In this regard, Creed and Miles (1996) suggested that trust may have moved from the category of ethical 'ought' to the category of 'economic must', thus increasingly been viewed as a precondition for superior performance and competitive success in the new business environment. While others scholars have stressed the indispensable role of trust in today's economy, arguing that while in the 1980s risk was a central focus of social and organisational theory - and some scholars saw this category as the hallmark of that time (Beck, 1992) - today we may be living in a trust society, where much of our well-being depends on the phenomena of trust (Bachmann and Zaheer, 2006).

2.1.2 The advantages of trust

The rise of trust as a major focus of organisational research reflects accumulating evidence of the substantial and varied benefits of trust for organisations and their members (Kramer, 1999). Indeed, numerous scholars have agreed that trust can be highly beneficial to the functioning of organisations (for a review see Colquitt, Scott & LePine, 2007; Dirks and Ferrin, 2001, 2002) and they have demonstrated how trust directly affect organisational performance, as well as indirectly boost performance by fostering desirable work-related behaviours, attitudes, and a cooperative climate.

A vast amount of research has also emphasised the benefits of trust in inter-organisational relationships such as partnerships or alliances. For example, higher levels of trust have been found to facilitate contractual relations between business partners (Williams, 2003; Carnevale and Wechsler, 1992), as well as to facilitate the operation of network-form of organisations (Miles & Creed, 1995; Powell, 1990). It has also been suggested that trust makes possible an enlarged scope of knowledge generation and sharing, by enhancing knowledge exchange in inter-organisational networks (Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000) and in knowledge communities (Brown and Duguid, 1991). However, this type of research is beyond the scope of this thesis, which focuses instead on intra-organisational trust, i.e. the development of trust relationships between organisational actors belonging to the same organisation.

As Kramer (1999) described, within an organisational setting, the positive effects of trust have been discussed primarily on three levels: 1. reducing transaction costs within organisations; 2. increasing spontaneous sociability among organisational members; 3. facilitating an appropriate form of deference to organisational authorities. In their

review of the literature spanning 40 years of empirical studies, Dirks and Ferrin (2001) commented that trust research has either explored the direct, positive effects of trust on outcomes of interest - such as communication, conflict management, negotiation process, satisfaction, and performance – or it has focused on trust as a facilitator or moderator of other work attitudes, perception or behaviour. In such scenarios, trust creates and enhances the conditions under which cooperation, higher performance or more positive attitudes and perceptions are likely to occur.

Trust has been cited as necessary for the generation of competitive organisational advantage (Barney and Hansen, 1994), for enhancing support, cooperation and the improvement of coordination mechanisms (Rocha, 2001), lowering transactions costs within organisations (Williamson, 1993; Creed and Miles, 1996), speeding up business processes by producing a work atmosphere which is less stressful, more productive (Davis and Landa, 1999) and conducive to organisation's innovativeness and creativeness (Newell & Swan, 2000). Additionally, it has also been suggested that trust facilitates the rapid formation of ad hoc work groups reducing harmful conflicts (Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer, 1996), it facilitates the operation of network-form of organisations (Miles and Creed 1995; Powell, 1990), it promotes knowledge development across teams (McDermott, 1999) and more generally inside organisations (Collins and Smith, 2006; Huemer, Von Krogh, & Roos, 1998; McNeish and Mann, 2010), and it inculcates acceptance and deference to organisational authority (Tyler and Degoey, 1996).

On an individual level, high trust has also been found to provide specific advantages in motivating individuals to work toward collective rather than individualistic goals (Tyler and Degoey, 1996; Mishra, 1996), to promote discretionary behaviours such as

extra-role activities, contextual performance and Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (Konovsky and Pugh, 1994; McAllister, 1995; Podsakoff et al., 2000), as well as to stimulate employees autonomy (Whitener *et al.*, 1998) and their willingness to share knowledge with colleagues (Andrews and Delahaye, 2000). Furthermore, it has also been found that trust significantly affects job-related attitudes thus impacts upon job satisfaction (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002; Yang and Mossholder, 2010) and organisational commitment (Aryee *et al.*, 2002; Tan and Tan, 2000; Pillai, Schriesheim & Williams, 1999).

2.1.3 The different conceptualizations of trust: a multi-disciplinary view

Social science disciplines such as economics, psychology, and sociology have appeared united on the importance of trust in the conduct of human affair (Hosmer, 1995) and have promoted a substantial range of discourses concerning trust from very different perspectives. Such different approaches have influenced the study of trust in organisational sciences. As Bingley and Pearce (1998) suggested, the non-scientific origins of trust and its wide-ranging appeal as a social science construct label have determined its array of diverse meanings in organisational sciences. The extent of its conceptual diversity seems to be largely a consequence of the different theoretical perspectives and research interests of those scholars who have investigated the term, rather than of the inherent features of the phenomena they were seeking to explain. Unfortunately, many of these scholars have talked past, rather than to each other (Korczynski, 2000), each approaching the problem of trust with their respective disciplinary lens and filters. Striving to address very different set of problems, researchers have in fact defined trust in a variety of ways and at various levels of

abstraction and - although they have recognized that trust may occur at a number of levels and involves a number of different dimensions - they have very often concentrated only on a single level, or on those specific dimensions that they have considered as essential for their respective research.

Some scholars have attempted to bring together the conceptual diversity in the trust literature by suggesting typological systems intended to organize the vast interdisciplinary research on the subject. Expanding on the work started by Worchel (1979), Lewicki and Bunker (1995, 1996) suggested, for example, four basic categories (or traditions) to encapsulate such vast interdisciplinary research area. Researchers from each category have distinguished themselves from the others by focusing on very specific conditions that promote the emergence and the development of trust. They offer insights for understanding the concept of trust in organisations by focusing on different units of analysis, i.e. personality, manifested behaviours, underlying socio-psychological processes, and the organisational context.

The dispositional tradition

The first category includes the work done by scholars who have adopted a personality theory approach, investigating whether some individuals tend to trust more readily than others. These scholars have conceptualized and investigated trust as a *dispositional orientation* that is deeply rooted in the personality of each individual (Rotter, 1980; Worchel, 1979). J.B. Rotter (1980) has been the first scholar to investigate the trust construct as a personality's attribute, assuming the existence of specific factors within a particular individual that predispose him or her to trust more or less other people. He described the concept of trust as a fairly stable belief or a *generalized expectancy* that

the statements of others can be relied upon, or their promises will be fulfilled. According to the author, individuals develop such expectancy in varying degrees depending on their personal experience and early-life socialization. As these expectancies are generalized from one social agent to another, trust eventually assumes the form of a relatively stable personality characteristic. Such personality factor has also been referred within the literature as *disposition to trust* (Kramer, 1999), or t*rust propensity* (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

Following Rotter's widely recognized and acknowledged work, several other researchers have then attempted to measure trust as a personality factor, adopting a number of psychometric scale techniques. Through laboratory experiments and field-based research, they have confirmed that individuals differ significantly in their general predisposition to trust others (Johnson-George and Swap, 1982; Gurtman, 1992). In their dilemma game study, Parks, Henager, and Scamahorn (1996) demonstrated, for example, that those with a high propensity to trust tend to be more sensitive to signs of trustworthiness, whereas those with a low trust propensity are more sensitive to signs of betrayal. Furthermore, other researchers have also described how trust propensity can influence individuals' behaviours, with high trust propensity's individuals displaying more frequent cooperative behaviours (Parks *et al*., 1996; Brann & Foddy, 1987).

The behavioural tradition

The second category comprises the work done by experimental economists and behavioural psychologists, who have conceptualised trust as a manifested behaviour, or as an observable choice, made by an actor in a relatively rational, calculative manner

(Cook, Yamagishi, Cheshire, *et al*., 2005; Hardin, 1993; Kramer, 2006). Assuming that individuals are motivated to make rational, efficient choices to maximize expected gains or minimize expected losses from their transactions, these scholars have relied on behavioural measures of trust during laboratory experiments (Williamson, 1993; Bohnet and Zeckhauser, 2004; for a review see Camerer, 2003). For example, they have observed behaviours in simulated interactions and structured games, such as the widely replicated 'Prisoner's Dilemma' (Axelrod, 1984) or 'Investment-trust games' (Berg, Dickhaut, & McCabe, 1995), wherein cooperative behaviours have been accepted as an observable manifestation of trust. Within these simulated interactions, the `trustor` (the focal decision maker) is paired with his counterpart `the trustee` (or receiver of trust) in an interdependent task involving risk, and must rationally decide whether to cooperate or not. The trustee's intentions, motives, and trustworthiness are inferred from the frequency and level of cooperative choices made.

As Flores and Solomon (1998) explained, here the most fundamental essence of trust is the choice to cooperate or not to cooperate, which is usually determined by either some positive incentive or a threat of some form of sanction. From this perspective, behavioural measures are the most reliable proxy for measuring trust, which is analysed as manifested behaviours, whereas subjective perceptions or stated intentions are considered as 'noisy' approximations.

However, the behavioural perspective has also been criticized for blurring the boundaries between trust and its outcomes (Dietz and Den Hartog, 2006). In fact, while trust may be one reason to cooperate, there could also be other reasons why cooperation could occur, such as the moral position that one ought to cooperate, coercion or fear.

Therefore, discerning which behaviours are trust-based and which occur for other reasons might still require a measurement of trust beyond the action itself.

The socio-psychological tradition

The third category comprises the work done by organisational- and socio-psychologists, and currently represents the prevailing view of trust within management research and organisational studies (Searle *et al*., 2011b). Within this tradition, scholars have studied trust in face-to-face, direct interpersonal context, by focusing on the interpersonal interaction between individuals. The parties involved in the relationship are typically referred to as 'trustor' and 'trustee'. Designation of the trustor answers the question 'Who trusts?' while designation of the trustee answers the question 'Who is trusted?' (Currall and Inkpen, 2006).

Furthermore, whereas the behavioural tradition focused on observable behaviours (and inferred expectations), assuming that it is rational thinking that leads to an action, the socio-psychological tradition "backs up" to consider the causes of that action, thus analysing the underlying psychological processes and dispositions that could shape or alter such behaviours (Jones and George, 1998; McAllister, 1995). Therefore, trust is not investigated as behaviour or as a choice, but as an underlying psychological condition that can cause, or be the result, of such actions. It is conceived as a psychological state characterized by several interrelated cognitive process and orientations, including an individual's beliefs, expectations, perceptions and attributions of another individual's personality, motives, intentions and capabilities (Mayer *et al*., 1995).

Within this tradition, authors have considered trust as a function of more or less rational decision-making processes rather than a personality's characteristic. They have extensively debated whether trust is exclusively the product of individuals' calculative-rational decisions, or if it is also emotion-based, thus allowing for the possibility that it may be the result of other factors in addition to (or instead of) strict rationality. As Korczynski (2000) explained, one of the key contested issues is the level of rationality ascribed to agents, i.e. what level of rational consideration underlies trust, as opposed to the extent to which emotions enter into the relationship between parties because of frequent, longer-term interactions that may lead to the formation of attachments, based upon reciprocated interpersonal care and concern.

The institutional tradition

The last category comprises the work done by organisational scholars who have adopted a more sociological approach to the study of trust. These authors have emphasised the fundamental role of situational factors in the production of trust, defining it as an institutional phenomenon tied to formal social structures (Zucker, 1986), or as a property of the social system in which individuals are embedded (Granovetter, 1985; Lewis & Wiegert, 1985). Trust is conceived as a propriety of collective units rather than isolated individuals, as general attitude or expectancy based on social institutions, social relations, or knowledge of others' norms (Korczynski, 2000). This approach has originated with the works of numerous sociologists (Luhmann, 1979, Barber, 1983; Granovetter, 1985; Zucker, 1986; Shapiro, 1987), who have highlighted the importance of trust for the functioning of organisations and institutions. Barber (1983), for example, has defined trust as a collection of "*socially*

learned and socially confirmed expectations that people have of each other, of the organisations and institutions in which they live, and of the natural and moral social orders that set the fundamental understanding of their lives" (p. 164-65).

Particularly relevant for this thesis is the work of the British industrial sociologist Alan Fox (1974), whose work on the employment relationship has been regarded as seminal among industrial relation scholars (Edwards, 2014; Ackers, 2011) but has been less influential among the majority of trust researchers in organisational studies (Siebert *et al*., 2015). In Fox's terms, trust is concerned with 'relationships which are structured and institutionalized in the form of roles and rules' (Fox, 1974: 68-69). He differentiated between 'high trust' employment relationships, in which management and employees accept an informal 'give and take' basis to their relationship, and 'low trust' relationships characterized by greater formalization and control. His key contribution lays in showing how intra-organisational trust is embedded in the institutional system and how trust dynamics cannot be accounted for by structural/institutional or micro-organisational factors separately. His work will be discussed in much more depth in section two.

2.1.4 Defining trust in organisational science

Influenced by different disciplinary approaches, the growth of the trust literature within organisational science has generated much debate and divergent opinions revolving around what trust is, what is not, and how trusting relationships might be created. As Bingley and Pearce (1998) described, organisational scholars have drawn from a broad range of social science disciplines in order to gain perspectives and develop models to

understand trust in the workplace, using the term in a variety of distinct and not always compatible ways.

This degree of diversity seems to have precluded for many years the possibility of obtaining a useful universal definition. As Kramer (1999) suggested, although organisational scientists have offered considerable attention to the problem of defining trust, a concise and universally accepted definition has remained elusive. At one end of the spectrum, there are often formulations that highlight the social and ethical facets of trust; on the other hand, there are conceptualizations that emphasise its strategic and calculative dimension.

Nevertheless, in recent years there has been an increasing convergence on the defining conceptual features of trust (Gillespie, 2012) thanks to the work done by several organisational psychologists. As Lewicki *et al*. (2006) and Möllering *et al*. (2004) noted, broad reviews of the dominant definitions of trust within the organisational literature have revealed a considerable coherence among organisational researchers on the central elements of trust and the conditions under which the problem of trust arises (Bigley & Pearce, 1998; Mayer *et al*., 1995; Rousseau *et al*., 1998). Indeed, following the seminal works done by Mayer *et al*. (1995) and Rousseau *et al*. (1998), organisational scholars started identifying those fundamental characteristics that could aid in shaping a common definition of trust. The former, after having revised the organisational literature on employees' trust, defined it as:

> '*The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the action of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party' (Mayer et al., 1995).*

Three years later, following a cross-disciplinary analysis of trust research and theory, Rousseau and colleagues further developed the definition of trust as:

> '*A psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another*' *(Rousseau et al, 1998).*

Since their appearance, these two definitions have received a fairly broad consent within the organisational literature. Indeed, according to McEvily and Tortoriello (2011), they have been cited respectively over 1300 and 650 times.

Both the definitions indicate few coherent themes or essential conditions that must exist for trust to arise. Firstly, the concept of trust needs to be tied or associated with the idea of *vulnerability,* or risk of adverse consequences (Hosmer, 1995; Rousseau *et al*., 1998; Lewis and Weigert, 1985). This entails a state of perceived vulnerability or risk that is derived from individuals' uncertainty regarding the motives, intentions, and prospective actions of others on whom they depend (Kramer, 1999). As Zand (1972) explained, trust occurs in situations where the drawbacks if the other abuses our trust are greater than the benefits we may gain if the other does not abuse it. The uncertainty regarding how the other will act is a key source of risk, which is necessary for trust to develop. Trust would not be needed if actions could be undertaken with complete certainty and no risk (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). In other words, risk creates the opportunity for trust to exist.

Secondly, another necessary condition is *interdependence*. This implies that the interests of one party cannot be achieved without reliance upon another. As Searle *et al*. (2011b) explained, trust only becomes an issue when an individual is dependent on

the actions of another party, being the supervisor, the work group, or the employer. Furthermore, according to the authors, as risk and interdependence are both necessary conditions for trust to emerge, variations in these factors over the course of a relationship between parties can alter both the level and potentially the form that trust can take.

Thirdly, trust entails a *confident belief* or *expectation* of the intentions or behaviours of the other party involved (Rousseau *et al.* 1998). It is a positive belief or expectation that the other party in the relationship will not take advantage of the vulnerability resulting from the acceptance of risks. Such confident belief often arises from an assessment of the other party's trustworthiness (Mayer *et al.*, 1995).

The combination of positive expectations and vulnerability within a dependent relationship seems to be pivotal for the development of trust. In line with the aforementioned definitions and core characteristics, much of the organisational literature has investigated trust in the workplace as a willingness to accept vulnerability within a relationship, under conditions of risk and interdependence.

There have also been several attempts to identify and analyse the basis on which such willingness can be produced (Creed & Miles, 1996; Lewicki & Bunker, 1995; Sheppard & Tuchinsky, 1996). Adler (2001) argued, for example, that the list of trust bases invoked by various authors is long and partially overlapping. Nevertheless, the concepts of 'ability', 'benevolence', 'integrity' introduced by Mayer and colleagues (1995) in their model of individual trustworthiness, together with the concept of 'predictability' (or 'reliability') (Cunningham and McGregor, 2000, Mishra, 1996), have very frequently appeared within the literature and could be considered as the most

salient components (or bases) of trust in the workplace. A brief definition of each is provided below:

Ability: the other party's competence or capability, in terms of skills and knowledge, to carry out his obligations.

Benevolence: benign motives, a personal degree of care and kindness toward the other party, and a genuine concern for the other party's welfare.

Integrity: the adherence to a set of principles or codes of behaviour acceptable to the other party, encompassing honesty, fair treatment and the avoidance of hypocrisy.

Predictability (or reliability): the consistency and regularity of behaviours of the other party.

As explained by Lewicki *et al*. (1998), these four components are likely to be interdependent and the precise combination would be idiosyncratic to the specific circumstances. Consequently, trust can be compartmentalised and aggregated such that an individual is able to accommodate contradictions and errors, thus he would trust or distrust different aspects of another party at the same time. Therefore, the formation of a trusting belief about another party, as well as the decision to trust him or not, requires a sophisticated processing of large amounts of often-contradictory information (Dietz and Den Hartog, 2006). It is very often too simplistic to ask whether an individual trusts or distrust another person, as one may trust in some respects and context but not in others. As Hardin (1993) explained, a person may trust another person only in certain domains and not in others, i.e. an employee might be confident in the competence of his/her supervisor, but be reluctant to share personal or work-related problems with

that person (Gillespie, 2003). Consequently, whenever we ask whether one person trusts or distrust another, it is essential to establish the referent facets of the relationship being invoked, which are necessary to make the judgment.

Furthermore, considering the most-quoted definitions of trust within the organisational literature, Dietz and Hartog (2006) also described three different possible forms of trust. The first form is a subjective belief about the other party trustworthiness and that the other party's likely actions will have a positive consequence for oneself (Cummings and Bromiley 1996; Robinson, 1996; Lewicki *et al*, 1998, Seligman, 1997). Theories that analyse trust as an assessment of the other party's trustworthiness focus on the individual specific characteristics upon which subjective evaluations of a trustee's motives and intention are made. However, these are very often assumed to be the sole source of evidence, without acknowledging that the development of trust might also be attributable to other factors influencing the relationship beyond the trustee's jurisdiction (Dietz and Den Hartog, 2006).

The second form of trust is the decision to actually trust the other party so that the belief in the others' trustworthiness can manifest itself. A person can consider another person to be trustworthy and therefore decide to expose themselves to the risk of potentially being harmed on the basis that such outcome is unlikely. As Huff and Kelley (2003) and McAllister (1995) explained, both the expectation of trustworthy behaviour and the intention to act based upon it need to be present in order to obtain a genuine state of trust. Such intention has been often defined within the literature as the "willingness to render oneself vulnerable" (Mayer *et al*., 1995; Rousseau *et al*. 1998).

A decision to trust only implies an intention to act but such decision needs to be followed through by trust-informed risk-taking behaviours in order to be demonstrated. Such risk-taking acts represent the third form of trust. According to Lewicki, Tomlinson, and Gillespie (2006), trust involves undertaking a course of risky actions based on the confident expectation and feelings that the other will honour the trust. It is through such trusting behaviours that one's "willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another party" (Mayer *et al*., 1995) can actually be demonstrated. Furthermore, Gillespie (2003) also divided trust as an action into two broad categories: 'reliance-related behaviours' – where the control over valuable resources or decisions are surrendered to a subordinate or the monitoring of the subordinate's actions is reduced - and 'disclosure' - where it is possible to observe the sharing of potentially incriminating or damaging information with the other party.

Nevertheless, amongst the most cited conceptualizations, trust tends to be generally separated from its associated behaviours and the question of whether the action of trusting should be incorporated into an overall model of trust is a point of contention within the literature. In fact, the action of trusting another person can be considered at best only a likely consequence of the decision to trust but it is by no means guaranteed. In reciprocal terms, scholars typically understand distrusts to be either the expectation that others will not act in one's best interests, or the expectation that capable and responsible behaviour from specific individuals will not be forthcoming. Trust and distrust are typically viewed as mutually exclusive and opposite conditions, or opposite ends of a single continuum. According to Lewicki *et al.* (1998), no systematic effort has been made to analyse the social context of trust relationships and to address the potential for simultaneous trust and distrust within organizational settings (Lewicki, *et*

al., 1998). Lewicki *et al.* (1998) argue instead that trust and distrust are distinct but potentially coexistent mechanisms. In other words, it is possible for parties to both trust and distrust one another, given different experiences within the various facets of complex interpersonal relationships. Consequently, to the extent that trust and distrust are separable and distinct constructs, it is imperative to explore and understand the nature, antecedents, and consequences of each.

2.1.5 Types of trust: from *Calculus-based* to *Identification-based* trust

As previously revealed, one of the key contested issues for authors belonging to the socio-psychological tradition is whether trust is exclusively the product of individuals' calculative decision-making processes, or whether it is also emotion based. Trust can take different forms in different relationships, from a calculated weighing of perceived gains and losses to an emotional response based on interpersonal attachment and identification. Indeed, the distinction between economic-exchange-based rational trust and community-exchange-based social (or emotional) trust has been at the core of the academic debate for many years, pushing empirical research in quite different directions (see for example, McAllister, 1995; Rousseau *et al*., 1998; Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006). Whereas the former has emphasised rational choices and cognitive processes as preconditions of trust, the latter has focused instead on relations and identification processes.

As Lewis and Weigert (1985) explained, variations in the relative importance of the cognitive base of trust, in comparison to its emotional base, allows distinguishing the concept of trust from other psychological states and processes such as for example faith, hope and prediction, with which it has sometimes been conflated. According to

Williams (2001), the degree to which one trusts another can vary along a continuum of intensity with different types of trust linked to different types of relationships. More shallow kind of relationships can be linked to what has been defined as 'calculative' or 'calculus-based' trust. This type of trust is characteristic of interactions based upon economic exchange, in which the decision to trust the other party hinges on the idea that it is in the other party's interest not to betray (Hardin, 2002). As Lewicki and Bunker (1996) explained, trust is an on-going, market-oriented, economic calculation. It is based on a pure cost-benefits calculation or utilitarian considerations, which enable one party to believe that the other party will be trustworthy because the costly sanctions in place for breaching the trust exceed any potential benefits, which could be gained from opportunistic behaviours (Rousseau, *et al.*, 1998). In other words, trust can be purely based on a calculation of the low possibilities of betrayal (Searle *et al.*, 2011b).

A variety of labels have been given to this form of trust, such as 'Calculative trust' (Williamson, 1993), 'Encapsulated interest trust' (Hardin, 1993) 'Deterrence-based trust' (Shapiro *et al.*, 1992), 'Semi-strong trust' (Barney and Hansen, 1995). Conversely, there have also been some criticisms as to whether this kind of trust should be considered as trust at all, asking whether sanctions or incentives foster or actually substitute the need for trust. A number of authors have in fact contended that the presence of sanctioning or incentive systems make irrelevant any trust related beliefs (Sitkin & Roth, 1993; Kramer, 1999).

Similar to calculative trust but based on a less shallow kind of relationship, it is 'knowledge-based trust'. This kind of trust develops over time and involves some calculations, or reasoned predictions, based upon an interaction history between the

parties and an exposure to the other's competencies and character (Lewicki and Bunker, 1996). In contrast to calculative trust, knowledge-based trust is firmly built on perceptions of the other party's trustworthiness. An employee might feel that he can trust another colleague because that person has acted competently in a similar situation in the past. In other words, trust relies on information rather than deterrence.

In opposition to the above conceptualizations of trust, several researchers have argued that such cognitive-over-rationalized conceptualizations provide a necessary but not sufficient understanding of the trust phenomena, as they do not sufficiently consider emotional and social influences on trust development. By reducing trust to a conscious cognitive state, they ignore the emotional nature of trust. According to these researchers (Kramer and Tyler, 1996; Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Tyler and Degoey, 1996), a proper conceptualization of trust needs to incorporate both cognitive processes and calculative orientations toward risk, as well as affective and motivational components. It needs to include more systematically the social and relational underpinnings of trust-related choices (Mayer *et al.*, 1995; McAlister, 1995; Kramer and Tyler, 1996). As Fine and Holyfield (1996) suggested, trust embodies aspects of the world of cultural meaning, emotional responses and social relations. As they put it, "one not only thinks trust, but [also] feels trust" *(p. 25 emphasis added).*

Based on deeper kind of relationships, there is 'relational-based' (or affective-based) trust, which derives from the quality of the relationship rather than from the observation of the other party's specific behaviours (Dietz and Den Hartog, 2006). This type of trust is more affective and social than rationally calculated, and takes into consideration emotions as well as reciprocated care and concern between the parties

(McAllister, 1995). As both parties interact, positive expectations of each other's trustworthiness can expand and a shared concern for each other's welfare can emerge. Finally, linked to an even deeper kind of relationships, there is 'identification-based' trust. As Lewicki and Bunker (1996) explained, this form of trust is based on a complete empathy with the other party's desires and intentions. As the parties fully understand each other's' needs, choices, preferences and share common values, they tend to create a strong emotional connection, which is developed to the point that each party can effectively act for the other, without the need of any surveillance or monitoring practices. Such identification enables one to think like the other, to feel like the other, and to respond like the other to the point that an individual can emphasise so strongly to incorporate part of the other's psyche into their own identity. In order to investigate this type of trust, scholars have employed for example 'social identity theory' (Kramer and Tyler, 1996) or the 'group-value models' (Tyler and Degoey, 1996), explaining how actors' identity-related needs and motives may influence trust-related cognition and choices. For example, Meyerson et al. (1996) suggested that a certain form of group-based trust can be linked with group membership and it develops as individuals identify with the goals espoused by a particular group or organisation. Conversely, other researchers have argued instead that identification-based trust can be so close to a blind form of trust, that it should be questioned whether it can be regarded as trust at all (Dukerich, Kramer, & Parks, 1998). In fact, in the context of very deep relationships, there could be a lack of felt vulnerability or perceived risk, with the trusting individual having complete confidence in the trustee. In such cases, a defining component of trust (i.e. vulnerability) would actually be missing.

2.1.6 Sources of trust in organisations

As previously explained, trust researchers have distinguished themselves from others by focusing on different units of analysis. An extensive debate exists within the literature on what encourages or inhibits the development of trust in organisations, with influencing factors that have been categorised in several different ways (Lane and Bachmann, 1998; Whitener *et al*., 1998; Payne and Clark, 2003). Lane and Bachmann (1998) for example have separated them into 'micro-level' (i.e. relationship-specific) and macro-level (i.e. external to the relationship) factors. Whitener *et al*. (1998) have instead distinguished between individual, relational and organisational factors; while Payne and Clark (2003) have divided them into dispositional, interpersonal and situational factors.

At the micro-level, a minority of scholars has focused on individual characteristics, particularly in terms of cultural values and internalized norms (Huff and Kelley, 2003), and on how these may determine a decision to trust (Kiffin-Petersen and Cordery, 2003). The majority of organisational scholars have instead focused on interpersonal-dyadic relations between organisational actors, especially in the form of superior-subordinate relationships (Whitener, 1997; Deluga, 1994). In such cases, the main sources of trust have been identified in the characteristics of the trustees, and more specifically in their personal traits and previous behaviours. As Dietz and Den Hartog (2006) described, the focus has very much been on the trustor's perceptions of the conduct and character of the trustee, with trustee-specific characteristics often assumed to be the sole source of evidence for trust within organisations.

At the macro-level, other relevant aspects of the organisational environment also offer significant explanations on the development of trust. Researchers have for example recognized how employees can develop trust toward generalized others such as a management team, a team of co-workers, or even an entire organisation. Employees have also been found to associate some of the organisation-wide characteristics with top management and use their perception as a basis for their trust in management (McCauley and Kuhnert, 1992). In this regard, Carnevale and Wechsler (1992) commented, for example, that employees tend to carefully monitor organisational processes to determine whether or not they should trust their organisation.

Other researchers have also investigated some of the macro-level determinants of trust in terms of 'trust in employer' (Robinson, 1996), 'organisational trustworthiness' (Hodson, 2004), or 'trust in management' (Scott, 1983). In all such cases, trust is not embedded in personal relations but it derives instead from the roles, rules and structured relations of the organisation. It has been found, for example, that the characteristics of the compensation system (Pearce *et al*., 1994), the fulfilment of psychological contracts (Robinson, 1996), participatory practices and communication processes (Nachmias, 1985), performance appraisal (Mayer and Davis, 1999), HR policies (Whitener, 1997), High Involvement Work Systems (Gould-Williams, 2003), and the offering of professional development programs (McCauley and Kuhnert, 1992) all have an influence on the development of employees' trust within organisations.

Other scholars have also adopted Mayer and colleagues (1995)'s model of individual trustworthiness (i.e. competence, benevolence, and integrity) in order to capture beliefs around the trustworthiness of the whole organisation (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007). For example, it has been argued that high job

security (Iles, Mabey, & Robertson, 1990) or family friendly policies (Grover and Crooker, 1995) may signal organisational benevolence and care for employees. Consequently, as Carnevale and Wechsler (1992) suggested, organisations must be mindful that how they communicate, structure work roles, and supervise are symbolic of how much faith, trust and confidence they have in employees, and employees will then reciprocate the trust relations communicated by management (Fox, 1974). Employees will respond with distrust toward management if the structures, roles, and climate of the organisation communicate a lack of trust in employees; conversely, employees will respond with high levels of trust if management is able to communicate a high level of trust to its employees.

Section 2

2.2.1 The trust gap: the need for a multi-level approach

Despite the increased awareness of the importance of employee trust to organisational performance, in recent years a number of surveys have conversely provided consistent evidence of a breakdown of trust within Western organisations (Edelman, 2009, 2012, 2015; BlessingWhite, 2008; Harris, Moriarty, & Wicks, 2014). Albrecht and Travaglione (2003, p. 76) have pointed out that the level of interest in intra-organisational trust has increased "against a backdrop of a general decline in the degree to which senior executives are perceived as trustworthy". Indeed, several surveys have found that fewer than half of all workers in both the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States trust what senior management is telling them, with many employees having no confidence in their company's leaders. Insensitive organisational practices and inappropriately high executive salaries have contributed to a generalized decline of trust in senior management.

Within the UK, according to a recent CIPD report (Hope-Hailey, 2012), the global financial crisis (GFC) and the resulting loss of confidence in the banking system have played a major role prompting a significant loss of trust. Other authors have instead pointed out that the recent crisis of trust is symptomatic of a deeper concern than the GFC and it is related more to the nature of employment in the twenty-first century. Many organisations have in fact experienced successive rounds of job cuts or threats of downsizing in recent years, with the consequence of eroding trust amongst their employees, who have increasingly felt more uncertain by the fear of losing their jobs. This lack of trust has also been the cause of many dysfunctional activities, producing a cynical and disaffected workforce, with many employees being poorly motivated and

lacking commitment to the organisation and its purposes. In this regard Edelman (2009, pp. 1) commented for example: "As business leaders, trust in us is at a historic low. We should be alarmed. We should use this as a wake-up call for reforms. And we must embark upon an urgent journey to restore this diminished trust in business".

A shortfall of trust in both public and private organisations has indeed been recognized by several scholars (Hardin, 2002; Seligman 1997). Their studies have concentrated, for example, on the unmet or violated expectations within public institutions, on private companies frauds such as those at Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, and Parmalat, or on the more general stream of downsizing and restructuring affecting Western organisations (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000). Public organisations have been particularly subjected to increased competitive market forces, progressively tighter financial regimes, and close monitoring of organisational performance (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000), which seems to have introduced a degree of institutionalized distrust within the public sector.

As Westwood and Clegg (2003, p. 340) commented, "it is hard to countenance a new rhetoric of trust in organisations within the same discursive (and material) space as structural unemployment, layoffs, the new social contract of individual responsibility for jobs, skills, and career, downsizing and other human resource and organisational design strategies that signal the precariousness of people's place in organisations". However, despite these acknowledgements, the current shortfall of trust has not been the subject of the same systematic scrutiny by organisational scholars, as it has been the case for the study of trust and its positive outcomes. As Lewicki *et al.* (1998) have recognized, organizational scholars have paid limited attention to the limits of trust,

and the function of distrust. The authors suggested that trust researchers should systematically address simultaneous trust/distrust conditions and recognize trust as multi-dimensional construct influenced by the social context.

Such shortage within the literature has not yet been sufficiently addressed. As Siebert *et al*. (2015) have explained, this is the consequence of the fact that studies of the employment relations have been dominated by organisational psychologists, who - in line with the psychological tradition of studying a phenomenon by abstracting it from the context if its manifestation - have focused on the micro-foundations of trust, without sufficiently capturing the influence of the organisational context in which trust relationships are embedded. The majority of studies of intra-organisational trust still belongs in fact to the socio-psychological tradition, where most works have focused on the interpersonal level (Searle *et al*., 2011b), in particular on superior-subordinate relationships (Whitener, 1997; Deluga, 1994), and have analysed the socio-psychological aspects of business relationships and managerial practices. Such analyses have investigated how intra-organisational trust is determined by the conduct and the character of the individuals involved (Dietz and Den Hartog, 2006) but they have neglected to consider how these individuals are also embedded in the wider structural and institutional context of the employment relationship.

Despite acknowledging the need to better studying the influence of the organisational context in the development of intra-organisational trust (Searle, *at al*., 2011b), most of the current conceptualizations of trust remain bound to the interpersonal domain. Indeed, the most widely accepted definition of trust within the literature (i.e. 'willingness to be vulnerable') had originally been developed in the socio-psychological literature, where it was used to measure trust in intimate relations

(Lewicki and Bunker, 1996; McAllister, 1995). Such definition assumes trust to be the same phenomena – i.e. a process of evaluation and information exchange - regardless of the specific empirical object and the specific contextual circumstances (Rousseau *et al*. 1998). However, it misses considering that trust is not dyadic within the sphere work as it is for intimate relationships, but it depends instead on specific contextual circumstances. As Siebert *et al*. (2015, p. 4) explained, "differences in who is trusted and by whom, and the nature of the sphere in which trust subsists – the referents and context of trust – can mean that we are talking about different sort of relationships".

In other words, a more comprehensive study of intra-organisational trust would require a systematic study of macro-level dynamics, which have not yet been adequately investigated due to the traditional focus on the micro-foundations of trust building within the literature. As Blunsdon and Reed (2003) suggested, trust cannot be studied at a macro-level as the simply aggregation of trust at the micro-level, or macro-level effects cannot be adequately acknowledged with the same theoretical tools employed to investigate trust at the micro level.

Given the complexity of trust, it would seem appropriate to operationalize it as a multi-dimensional construct and empirically assess the extent to which distinct dimensions exist and affect each other. However, the majority of researchers have conversely treated trust as a unidimensional construct (McEvily and Tortoriello, 2011), conceptualizing and measuring it in different ways and at different levels of analysis. They have tended to focus on one single level of analysis, without sufficiently considering how dynamics at different levels may instead simultaneously influence the development of trust.

It is the contention of this thesis that, although the focus on a single dimension of trust can be justified by a given research question and/or theoretical framework, a comprehensive conceptual analysis requires instead a recognition of the multi-faceted characters of trust. In order to move beyond the current theoretical and empirical approach, trust must be seen and investigated as a 'multi-dimensional social reality' (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). Indeed, a number of scholars within the literature have already suggested the need to adopt a multi-level approach to obtain a better understanding of the complexity of trust in organisations (House, Rousseau, & Thomas-Hunt, 1995). However, this still represents an uncharted area of research.

Despite the acknowledgment that trust constitutes a 'meso' concept (Rousseau, *at al.*, 1998), which integrates micro-level psychological processes and group dynamics with macro-level organisational and institutional forms, no attempts have been made to integrate these two levels together. This has led to treat trust as a flawless mechanism, which can be reproduced on the basis of interpersonal or organisational practices, without sufficiently acknowledging the influence of the organisational context.

2.2.2 The context-dependent nature of trust

As previously explained, the influence of the organisational context has not been the central focus of investigation for organisational scholars researching intra-organisational trust. For a more in-depth understanding, we should revisit the classic insights of the British industrial sociologist, Alan Fox (1974), whose work on organisational trust dynamics has been regarded as seminal among industrial relations scholars but has been surprisingly less influential among the majority of trust researchers in organisational studies (Siebert *at al.*, 2015).

Fox (1974) has been one of the first authors in industrial sociology to describe how trust can manifest itself in an institutionalised form, by being embodied in the rules, roles and structured relations of an organisation. According to the author, different types of coordination and control mechanisms could determine very specific levels of trust within an organisation, making trust a priority of the organisation itself rather than of the individuals and of the relationships within it. More specifically, Fox distinguished between 'high-discretion' and 'low-discretion' work-roles, referring to the level of discretion embedded in the types of work-role considered. Consequently, he defined *discretionary trust* as the level or degree of trust elicited in workers, as an outcome of the discretion they can exercise in their jobs. Occupants of high discretion roles would perceive themselves as recipient of high trust, feeling free and trusted to exercise discretion in their job; conversely, occupants of low discretion roles would perceive themselves as recipient of low trust, as the reduction of freedom in exercising discretion within their work role would be associated with a lower level of trust and a superior number of rules to obey.

Furthermore, Fox also argued that different discretion levels are accompanied by different degrees of obedience and honour to prescribed rules limiting the workers' discretion. He defined this as *prescriptive trust*, suggesting that roles which enjoy little discretionary trust are also likely to be characterised by little prescriptive trust, and therefore to be closely monitored and sanctioned in a manner rarely imposed to the occupants of high discretion roles. As Fox (1974, p. 84) puts it "a reduction in discretionary trust results in a decline in respect for the observance of the prescriptive elements in the relationship".

Besides the attempt to conceptualize trust as an institutional concept, Fox (1974) also acknowledged that such institutionalized trust can interrelate with the trust developed at the interpersonal level between specific individuals. He described, for example, how trust at an interpersonal level may affect the structuring of behaviours and interactions at the institutionalized level, so that a manager (or an organisational leader) may be able to develop a relationship of personal trust with occupants of low discretion roles, and by doing so mitigate the severities of low discretion dynamics, or even inhibit them altogether. Therefore, in light of Fox's analysis, we can envisage circumstances in which, within the same organisation, trust may simultaneously take an optimistic, high trust dynamic, as well as a pessimistic, low trust dynamic. Such coexisting dynamics cannot be accounted for by structural/institutional factors or micro-organisational factors separately (Siebert, *et al.*, 2015).

In acknowledging the influence of the organisational context on the development of trust, Fox mainly focused his analysis on the structure of work and work relations (i.e. the degree of discretion in the job) overlooking the influences of other aspects of the employment relationship. In this regard, Blunsdon and Reed (2003) suggested more recently that trust in organisations is determined by both the production system (i.e. the structure of work), as well as by features of the employment relations system, where issues of effort, compliance, conformity and motivation are addressed through specific employment policies and practices. The authors explained that, by determining the social and cultural context in which the production system occurs, the employment relation system addresses the problems that may result from tasks differentiation and conflicting interests and demands, facilitating workforce integration and cohesion.

Indeed, several researchers have already demonstrated the importance of the employment relationship and its influence on the development of trust. Studies carried out on the 'psychological contract' (Rousseau and Parks, 1993; Robinson, 1996; Rousseau, 1995; Guest and Conway, 2002; Conway & Briner, 2009) have, for example, demonstrated that employees' expectations develop incrementally in the employment relationship, becoming embedded in the psychological contract. Such expectations reflect employees' belief about the nature of the reciprocal exchange agreement between themselves and their employer (Rousseau, 1990; Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994; Robinson & Rousseau 1994). If expectations are unfulfilled and the psychological contract is violated, trust can fail to develop or even decline, ultimately leading to a perceived contract breach and a resultant loss of trust (Rousseau, 1989).

A further area of research that highlights the influence of the employment relationship on the development of trust includes the studies done on Human Resource Management (HRM)'s practices (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Searle and Skinner, 2011; Whitener, 1997). In this regard, Searle and Skinner (2011) examined how trust affects and is affected by HRM strategies and processes and explained how, despite trust does not feature in the orthodox HRM models as a distinct individual outcome (Guest, 1997), it surfaces in almost every areas of human resources, included performance evaluation and appraisal, training and development, compensation and promotion and job security.

The criticality of trust in several HR activities and their outcomes has indeed engendered discussions among practicing managers and organisational scholars

(Whitener, 1997). Social Exchange Theory has, for example, been adopted to explain how HR activities can increase employees' trust in their supervisor, work group, and organisation when they are seeing as statements of intent signalling the trustworthiness of the organisation (Searle *et al*, 2011a) and its management intentions (Skinner, Saunders, & Duckett, 2004). Similarly, HR activities have also been analysed as statements of intent signaling the extent to which an organisation trusts its employees (Guzzo and Noonan, 1994; Whitener, 1997). Furthermore, the effective design and implementation of HR activities have also been considered as fundamental for the development of trust (Perrone, Zaheer, & McEvily, 2003), especially to clarify to employees what is required to progress within the organisation, as well as what they are going to receive in return for investing their efforts (Tzafrir, 2005).

One area that has received particular attention is the distinct bundles of HR policies and practices termed 'High Involvement Work Systems' (HIWS) (Searle, 2013; Young and Daniel, 2003). HIWS support the development of specific HR practices to improve communication and foster participation and empowerment, in order to encourage employees to invest both tangibly and emotionally in their employer (Vandenberg *et al*., 1999). Several HR practices are typically included in HIWSs such as employees' participation programs, information sharing, training and development, performance management, and job security (Huselid, 1995; Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005). The combination of internal organisational practices - such as teamwork, forms of task participation, skill development, employee appraisal and employee voice mechanisms - together with collaborative (partnership-based) relations with trade unions, seems to elicit a 'high trust' organisational culture (Legge, 1995), characterised by a high level of employees' commitment and the mobilisation of greater discretionary efforts from

employees. Appelbaum *et al*. (2001) demonstrated, for example, that manufacturing employees' experiences of such systems can positively influence the development of trust, besides producing increased commitment, higher satisfaction, and reduced stress levels. Equally, Gould-Williams (2003) also recognized that such practices could predict employees' trust toward colleagues, managers, and toward the organisation within the public sector.

Trust research that links to human resource management practices has helped to better understand the influence of the employment relationship on the development of trust. However, it is also typically underpinned by a unitarist ideology (Siebert, *et al*., 2015), which emphasises consensus around common goals and harmony of interests, but it neglects the plurality of interests and power asymmetries within the employment relationship. Mather (2011) has criticized discourses on trust and HRM for leaning toward a normative analysis of the workplace, which ignores the reality of the employment relationship. According to the author, HRM discourses promoting high-trust and harmonious employees' relations have a tendency to read out the complexity of the employment relationship by not engaging with the structural and economic basis of the dealing between an employer and its employees. In other words, such discourses do not take into consideration the contested nature of the employment relationship, the asymmetrical power balance between employers and employees, and the associated dialectics of control and resistance.

Mather (2011) suggested that the hierarchical power structure within any organizations and the structural antagonism between employer and employees imply distinct levels

of risk for the actors involved. This means that trust within organisations may actually be very fragile, easily broken and premised on shifting power relations.

Unfortunately, besides acknowledging that trust plays a central role within the employment relationship of contemporary work organisations (see Blyton and Turnbull, 2004), no much attention has been given within the industrial relation literature to the role of trust within the employment relationship. It is the contention of this thesis that such focus can offer trust researchers the possibility to better understand the influence of the organisational context on the development of trust, as well as to better explain the current shortfall of trust in many Western organisations.

2.2.3 Trust and the HRM function

Human Resource Management (HRM) is among the most influential areas of trust development in organisations (Whitener, 1997) and, as Sparrow and Marchington (1998) suggested, trust-building might be the most fundamental base of knowledge for HR professionals. An important challenge for human resource managers and practitioners lies in the creation of trusting workplace relationships, especially where existing levels of trust are low (Zeffane and Connell, 2003).

The HRM function operationalizes the organisation's strategy regarding its human resources and has a pivotal role in maintaining policies and processes within organisations. As Searle (2013) described, HR represents the main liaison between the organisation's management and its employees, and it is therefore often tasked with finding satisfactory solutions to meet the demands and needs of both parties. Within each organisation, HR professionals and senior managers need to establish together which HR strategies and policies to deploy. These represent a statement of intent

toward employees (Skinner *et al*., 2004), indicative of the 'personified organisation's commitment to them' (Whitener, 2001).

Over the last two decades, HRM scholarship and professional activities have also been characterized by an effort to shift from a functional, personnel administration approach to a strategic human resource management approach (Kochan, 2004). The development of the HR 'business partner' model has been at the forefront of a drive to improve the credibility and status of the HRM profession, underpinning the move from an employee-focused agenda to one of business and strategy (Hallier and Summers, 2011). We have been assisting at a shift in the professional identity and role of HR, which sought to partner with line and senior managers to develop and deliver human resource policies that supported the firm's competitive advantage. The general trend has been to devolve day-to-day operational responsibility to line manager (Caldwell, 2003) in order to free up HR to cover a more strategic role. HR practitioners typically provide managers with HRM policies and then support the managers' implementation (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2008), shifting from a traditional and bureaucratic 'policing' role to one of 'trusted advisor' and 'partner' (Wright, 2008). Additionally, accompanying the devolvement of HR responsibilities to line management, there has also been a growth in 'preceduralisation' in order to ensure a consistency of approach in the managers' interpretation and applications of HR policies and the avoidance of costly litigation.

Unfortunately, such structural changes seem to have distanced HR from the workforce (Francis and Keegan, 2006), with a consequent lack of opportunities for HR to play the role of 'employee champion' (Ulrich, 1998). In the pursuit of a more strategic role

for the function, HR's responsibility as an employee champion has likely been overlooked or undervalued, despite a rhetoric that acknowledges employee well-being as a key ingredient in encouraging employee commitment to organisational goals (Harris, 2007). HR practitioners (HRPs) have found themselves in the difficult situation of championing employees, while simultaneously endeavouring to be part of the management team (Reilly and Williams, 2003). Such role incongruence seems to have caused a crisis of trust for HRPs, as Kochan (2007, p. 599) described: "The human resource management profession faces a crisis of trust and a loss of legitimacy in the eyes of its major stakeholders. The two-decade effort to develop a new 'strategic human resource management' (HR) role in organisations has failed to realize its promised potential of greater status, influence, and achievement".

Indeed, trust poses an acute challenge for HR professionals (Dietz *et al*., 2011). The function has been seeing as overly preoccupied with bureaucracy and administering the rule book (Harris, 2002a) by focusing on procedures to the detriment of care of the individual employee (Harris, 2002b). The recent growth of internal intranet systems, providing access to HR policies, procedures and personnel records on a self-service basis, have also reduced the number of requests to the HR function, consequently limiting the opportunities for personal contact, face-to-face interactions, and the possibility of building up relationships with the workforce (Harris, 2007).

Several challenges seem also to exist in the HRPs-managers relationship. When line managers are required to deliver HRM policies, they have reported feeling abandoned (Harris, 2007) or insufficiently supported by HRPs (Hope-Hailey et al., 2005), particularly when the delivery of HRM tasks is perceived to distract managers from core tasks (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003). Bond and Wise (2003) also suggested

that HRPs perceive that managers are often unwilling to execute HRM-related tasks, or lack skills and knowledge when they do. Additionally, Harrington and Rayner (2011) suggested that, by absolving their decision making responsibility to managers, HRPs may dent their credibility in the eyes of line managers as they retreat from risk and vulnerability and fail to take any leadership role.

Furthermore, as Searle (2013) explained, though normatively committed to trust-building models of employment relations, HR practitioners might often paradoxically be involved in designing and implementing trust-reducing practices such as downsizing (*Allen et al*., 2001; Spreitzer and Mishra, 1997), perpetual restructuring, externalization of labour, and the growth of outsourcing (Thompson, 2003). They very often sit uneasily between managers and employees (Caldwell, 2003), charged by the organisation with finding satisfactory solutions to meet the demands of both parties, while also protecting its interests. In navigating these potentially contradictory roles, HR professionals can face ethical, operational, intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts and dilemmas that must be resolved (Wright and Snell, 2005). Managing such contradictions to maintain positive relationships is an organisational imperative in which trust emerges as a particularly relevant issue for the HR function.

Selecting the appropriate HR policy response could have knock-on effects for the trust between the employer and employee, as well as for the employer's and employees' trust in the HR department (Caldwell, 2003; Francis and Keegan, 2005), especially when commercial imperatives take priority over employee welfare or fairness concerns. For example, Harrington *et al*. (2012) showed these tensions in the context of bullying and harassment policy, revealing how actions designed to protect the

organisations may reduce both employees' and line managers' trust in the HR. The authors demonstrated that the overriding alignment with management had significant implication for trust as employees were unlikely to perceive that HR would act in their best interests.

A large survey undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD, 2003) also confirmed that such transition to, or the intention to move to, a more strategic role, was as evident among senior HR professionals in the public as in the private sector. However, Harris (2007) argued that in the UK public sector, the demands placed on HR specialists have been particularly intense and their role has changed far more radically than their counterparts in the private sector. The HR function has been required to promote a higher level of employee commitment while having to deal with a sector offering less job security, resource constraints, extensive restructuring, and a growing level of employment regulations.

The HRM profession seems to face a crisis of trust (Kochan, 2004) as many Western organisations. Indeed, there are already some indications of a structural isolation and disappearance of HR from the shop floor (Francis and Keegan, 2006), with recent trends toward outsourcing and HR-shared service centres suggesting its own marginalization (Thompson, 2011). This reflects a fractured and dysfunctional situation for HR with trust breaches emerging as a crucial factor.

Thompson (2003) sees the increased breaches of trust within Western organisations as the inevitable consequences of the 'disconnected capitalism' of modern ages, where the growing emphasis on shareholder value metrics, ongoing organisational restructuring and downsizing, and the extended use of outsourcing has increasingly

moved the burden of risk onto employees and away from organisations. Therefore, trust may be challenged through an externally created psychological contract breach and this positions HR to the fore in performing a complex role in the development, implementation, and management of policies that may significantly erode trust in organisations (Searle, 2013).

HR practitioners, given their special professional responsibility to balance the needs of the firms with the needs, aspirations, and interests of the workforce, are therefore in a unique position to comment on trust dynamics in the employment relationships, from both 'sides', as well as from their own viewpoint. However, little attention has been paid within the literature to organisational actors other than managers, and their role within organisations in the development and sustaining of trust (Searle, 2013). No studies have yet investigated, for example, to what extent the HR function is trusted by other organisational members, or the role of the HR function in the development and maintenance of trust relationships within organisations.

As Searle and Skinner (2011) suggested, it is clear that more research is required to differentiate between the impact of HRM policy content on trust and the impact of those who enact them. Indeed, recent works have already shown the potential value of differentiating between distinct agents (Harrington and Rayner, 2011), and the need to look more in details at the impact of different functions on employees' trust; however, this still represents an open challenge and a promising area for new research.

2.2.4 Research Objectives

The majority of intra-organisational trust researchers have developed an over-optimistic vision on the possibilities of trust development within Western organisations. This seems to clash with the outcome of recent survey and employee engagement measures, which have been recorded a trust deficit with levels of trust at a historic low. Much of the current literature tends to consider such declining level of trust as a mere deficit in people management practices, failing to acknowledge the existence of more deep-seated issues within the employment relationship. This is because much of the current trust literature has been focusing on the interpersonal level (Searle *et al*., 2011b) and the micro-foundations of trust development, analysing how trust is determined by the conduct and character of the individuals involved. Unfortunately, such analyses have often neglected the wider structural and institutional context of the employment relationship, abstracting trust relationships from the organisational context in which they are embedded (Dietz and Den Hartog, 2006).

Following Fox (1974)'s recommendation, this thesis makes the case that the concept of trust cannot be fully investigated exclusively at either the interpersonal or organisational level because it thoroughly permeates both. As Rousseau *et al*. (1998) suggested, trust needs to be treated as a 'meso' concept, which integrates micro-level psychological processes together with macro-level organisational arrangements. Unfortunately, despite scholars' recognition that trust does operate at multiple levels, few attempts have been made within the literature to capture the essence of how micro- and macro- levels forces simultaneously influence the development of trust.

A good example of a definition which takes into account both interpersonal and

organisational levels is offered by Grey and Garsten (2001). The authors define trust as a 'precarious social accomplishment enacted through the interplay of social or discursive structures, including those of work organisations and individual subjects' (Grey and Garsten, 2001, p. 230). Following this definition, the main objective of the thesis is to better clarify how trust is both socially and subjectively constructed within organisations, therefore proposing a multi-level research framework that investigates the mechanisms influencing the development of trust at both an interpersonal and organisational levels. In order to pursue such an objective, the research attempts to take a more sociological and critical turn (Siebert *et al.*, 2015) and better acknowledge the role of the employment relationship in the development of trust, by answering the following research question: *"What are the main factors influencing the development of intra-organisational trust at an interpersonal and organisational levels?"*

Furthermore, trust research that links to human resource management (HRM) practices is typically underpinned by a unitarist ideology (Siebert *et al.*, 2015), which emphasises consensus around common goals and harmony of interests, therefore suggesting inherently high trust dynamics. However, this approach tends to neglect the organisational context and the plurality of interests and power asymmetries within the employment relationship. Conversely, as Mather (2011) suggested, given the structural antagonism between employer and employees, trust within organisations may instead be very fragile, easily broken, and premised on shifting power relations.

Managing employees-employer conflicting interests, while maintaining positive trust relationships, is a crucial issue for the HR function. HR practitioners - given their professional responsibility to balance the needs of the firms with the needs, aspirations,

and interests of the workforce - are indeed in a unique position to comment on trust dynamics in the employment relationship. In fact, though normatively committed to trust-building models of employment relations, HR practitioners can often sit uneasily between opposing managers and employees' interests (Caldwell, 2003), charged by the organisation with finding satisfactory solutions to meet the demands of both parties (Searle, 2013).

Trust dilemmas might also have proliferated in recent years, due to the introduction of the HR business partnering model and the continuous disrupting changes affecting Western organisations, which have pressured HR practitioners to enforce trust-reducing practices such as downsizing, perpetual restructuring, externalization of labour, and outsourcing. These changes have positioned HR professionals to the fore in performing a complex role in the development, implementation, and management of policies that may significantly erode trust in organisations (Searle, 2013). However, little research attention has been paid within the trust literature to the role of the HR function in the development of trust. Consequently, this leads to the second research question of the thesis, namely *"What role does the Human Resource function play in the development of intra-organisational trust, and to what extent is it perceived positively or negatively by organisational members?"*

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 A critical realist approach for analysing trust

In order to investigate what are the main factors influencing the development of trust at both an interpersonal and organisational levels, it is required a qualitative, contextually rich analysis, which allows analysing trust more holistically as a multi-dimensional construct. For this reason, the ontological and epistemological foundations of the thesis are presented in *realist* terms. Firstly, the chapter outlines some of the key features of critical realism as an explanatory framework; secondly, it will then consider some of the implications on the way trust relations can be analysed within this framework.

Although trust research should be conducted on the basis of philosophical premises, there is a widespread tendency among trust scholars to avoid sustained examination and questioning of their own assumptions (Isaeva *et al*., 2015). However, as Iseava at al. (2015) explained, epistemological assumptions are extremely important to shape both research agendas, questions, methods and data analysis, and untimely the knowledge produced. Arguably, these are particularly relevant in the study of trust given its multidisciplinary and multidimensional nature (Lyon, Möllering, Saunders, 2015).

The majority of organisational scholars researching trust tend (often implicitly) to operate within a positivistic framework (Isaeva, et al., 2015), following the current dominant philosophy within the field of management research (Üsdiken, 2010). Positivism advocates scientific, objective knowledge that is based on observable,

measurable facts, attempting to produce law-like generalizations, casual explanations, as well as predicting future behaviors and events (Donaldson, 2003). Positivist research has undoubtedly contributed to our understanding of trust; however, it has also generated a number of limitations within the literature.

Isaeva *et al.* (2015) noted, for example, that the highest cited articles in the field of trust appear tacitly based on etic premises allowing for virtually no 'context-sensitivity' (Bachmann, 2010) in their concepts and in their frameworks. Furthermore, the positivism' ontological and epistemological framing have also produced a strong bias toward the adoption of quantitative methodology. The focus on measurable facts has in fact led to the production of a large number of instruments that are unable to ensure a close match between the proposed trust definitions and the respective measures. Indeed, there is a degree of dissatisfaction with the existing set of measures, and a number of "gaps" between the present conceptualization of trust and the different operationalizations found in the literature (McEvily and Tortoriello, 2011). According to Gillespie (2003), for example, many studies employ measures of trust that are inconsistent with their chosen definition, i.e. while defining trust in terms of 'confident expectations' and a 'willingness to be vulnerable' to others, they then proceed to measures only expectations, typically in the forms of beliefs about the other party's trustworthiness. Similarly, Dietz and Den Hartog (2006) also argued that, despite the different forms of trust within the literature, most measures have only focused on the belief of trustworthiness. Yet it has conversely been found that an intention to trust may actually be a stronger predictor of future behaviour than solely an assessment of another's trustworthiness (Gillespie, 2003).

A further main limitation regards the vast adoption of self-reported survey research and psychometric measurements within the literature, which have been designed to capture one or more dimensions of trust (Searle, *et al*. 2011b; Gillespie, 2012). On the one hand, the popularity of these methods can be understood by looking at their three major strengths: 1. given the main conceptualization of trust as a psychological state, confidential survey questions are well suited to capture individuals' perceptions and intentions; 2. pre-existing trust instruments can be used across studies, therefore enabling the replication of results; 3. the construct validity of psychometric instruments can be assessed through rigorous, transparent and well-accepted methods, thus giving the researcher the right amount of confidence that the obtained measures tap the intended construct.

However, on the other hand, important reviews of the adopted trust measurements within the literature have simultaneously revealed a number of limitations with such methods (Dietz and Den Hartog, 2006; McEvily and Tortoriello, 2011). McEvily and Tortoriello (2011) explained, for example, that psychometric measurements of multi-items surveys too often miss capturing the rich meanings that may be latent behind a simple numeric indicator on a Likert 5-points scale. In other words, a rating of 3 or 4 on a 5-point scale cannot capture the complexity of components that go into a judgment of trust, and particularly of the dynamics and changes of trust over time. Furthermore, such method also tends to restrict the range of responses to those predefined by the researcher.

Consequently, the ontological and epistemological foundations of this research are presented in *realist* terms, attempting to challenge the positivist's boundary

assumptions of the paradigm within which most of the organisational trust researchers are still nested today. In an effort to get away from measuring predefined variables and get closer to the respondents' idiosyncratic experiences and interpretation (Möllering, 2001), such epistemological vantage point allows the research to bring new insights into the structural causes and antecedents of trust.

Critical Realism (CR) posits a reality external to its knower, whilst recognizing at the same time that knowledge of it is quite problematic. Ontology in critical realism takes priority over epistemology and realists posit a stratified reality composed by 'real' underlying mechanisms that may (or may not) be activated. This produces manifest ('actual') outcomes, some of which are empirically observable (Danermark *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, according to critical realists, the reality that scientists study is actually larger than the domain of the empirical. Social scientists should attempt to enquire actors' ideas of reality, which critical realism defines as "transitive objects" of science, with the ultimate aim of investigating deeper objects, which should account for casual relationships, named "intransitive objects".

Realists believe that people are knowledgeable about the reasons for their conduct; however, they can never carry total awareness of the complete set of structural conditions that prompt an action. They do not see all the consequences of their own actions and they often emphasise the primacy of their own reasoning. In other words, structure-agency dualisms are ongoing whether or not actors are aware of their own influence, or the influence and conditions of the structures that surround them. Therefore, the key task for the researcher is to connect analytical agendas with the actors' own experiences and reflexivity, thus developing an understanding of the

subjects' reasons within a wider model of their causes and consequences (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

Realism, both ontologically and methodologically, gives significant explanatory weight to enduring generative mechanisms and social structures. One of the main prerequisites of conforming to CR's ontology is the acceptance that many differently stratified and antecedent causal powers exist and that these interact as they affect the pattern of events. This builds on the CR's premise of 'ontological depth', which highlights the multi-layered character of social reality and the need to address the different ways in which 'social events are interwoven between [these] various layers' (Pawson, 1996: 301). Critical realists pursue casual accounts in a contextually sensitive manner, without "law-seeking" nor "relativism" (Sayer, 2000). This allows investigating different levels of casual power and not overemphasizing the effects of either 'structure' or 'agency'. On the one hand, critical realism recognizes that intransitive social structures have independent causal powers that cannot be reduced to the identities and subjectivities of the actors who constitute them; on the other, actors are considered as "mechanisms" with inherent powers that experience external realities through their own interpretative schema (Archer, 2003). By doing so, it is possible to isolate causal mechanisms, carefully contextualizing respondents' accounts.

The reality is seen as stratified and it comprises emergent powers and mechanisms belonging to different strata. The mechanisms belong to separate hierarchically arranged strata of reality, where each stratum is composed of mechanisms from underlying strata. At the same time, this composition results in the emergence of qualitatively new objects, having their own powers and mechanisms, which cannot be

reduced to more basic strata (Danermark *et al*., 2002). The higher a stratum is, the more mechanisms and possibilities for combinations between mechanisms there are. Social reality is seen as a multi-layered open system of interrelated entities that interact over time, and social science researchers have to work in an open system, where a range of generative mechanisms operates in complex interactions with one another.

Many mechanisms may be concurrently active, and they may just as well reinforce as neutralize each other's manifestation. As Reed (2001) suggested, human agents are seen as located within, and both constrained and empowered by, a plurality of competing and contradictory social structures, which often place inconsistent and incoherent demands on them. In practice, it is unfortunately not possible for the researcher to just isolate some of them in order to manipulate a situation, with the purpose of studying what happens (Danermark *at al*., 2002). For this reason, 'scientific laws' and casual conditions have to be analysed as *tendencies*, attempting to identify what developmental tendencies are displayed by given structures or mechanisms and how these will work themselves through in particular situations (Reed, 2001).

As Thompson and Vincent (2010) have suggested, the powers of differently layered entities interact and form the mechanisms that explain observed regularities. However, where mechanisms are particularly complex, researchers tend to concentrate and specialise on the powers and susceptibilities of particular types of entities. In other words, the specific purpose of a research study tends to often determine what the mechanisms a researcher chooses to concentrate upon are. In the light of this, disagreements between the different trust traditions described in the literature chapter can be considered as the effect of a lack of appreciation that each trust level has its

own specific mechanisms and emergent powers. This also explains the general tendency within the literature to often come up with single-factor explanations, or the numerous attempts to explain a social phenomenon such as trust by referring to psychological mechanisms. Conversely, we first need to accept that trust consists of multiple strata, each of which has its own emergent powers. For example, as Marchington and Vincent (2004) have suggested, it is expected that the broader institutional arrangement might be observed to affect aggregate level of trust at an organisational level, but this might not prevent trust-based niches developing in ostensibly distrusting environment and vice versa. Consequently, the empirical methods have to evolve with the level of complexity and sophistication achieved in such a conceptualization of trust.

3.2 Research design: a comparative case study approach

Realists typically adopt a methodological pluralism appropriating both qualitative and quantitative methods for particular endeavors, thus avoiding the false dichotomy that sometimes appears between such approaches (Bryman, 2006). Realists prefer to talk about *extensive* and *intensive* research design instead. The former mainly focuses on the frequency and commonality of a particular phenomenon; whereas the latter uncovers via detailed contextualization how and why particular mechanisms tend to produce certain outcomes.

In order to develop multi-layer explanations that are able to uncover the underlying mechanisms influencing the development of trust within the employment relationship, comparative case-studies have been utilized as the main intensive research design. The requirement to study mechanisms in context in order to provide satisfactory

explanations had made detailed qualitative and comparative research the preferred methodological approach for this thesis. As Möllering (2006) suggested, trust as a highly idiosyncratic phenomenon encompasses the specific knowledge, attributions and ultimately irreducible faith of the actors involved. Therefore, actors' experience of trust needs to be understood in rich details and with sensitive methods. Clearly, this is more difficult to achieve by means of highly standardized instruments, such as the quantitative surveys typically used within the trust literature.

One on hand, the utilization of the case-study methodology has allowed the researcher to engage immediately with the social process, retaining "the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-live events" (Yin, 2009: 4). On the other, the comparative design has also been particularly useful to investigate how different configurations of mechanisms and contexts interact, thus providing greater confidence to the researcher on how posited mechanisms operate, as well as the range of variations they may display (Ackroyd, 2010).

As Burawoy (1998) suggested, when conducting case-studies research, it is important to treat this meaningful focal context as a point of departure but not of conclusion. In other words, workplace's context and experiences should not be viewed in isolation from external pressures. On the contrary, it is fundamental to understand that the workplace is embedded in a wider set of relations and it is influenced by structural forces, constituting its wider political-economic context. Therefore, to avoid the "contextual" myopia that is evident in some of the current trust research, trust relationships need to be better contextualized within the broader organisational, sectoral, and political-economic context in which they are situated.

There are also other reasons to commend the use of comparative case-studies. As Yin (2009) explained, comparison allows replicating findings and therefore makes explanations drawn from a single-case more robust. Social phenomena are often dependent on particular contingencies, therefore the use of more than one case lessens the chance of misattribution of causality leading to more robust knowledge.

According to Yin (2009), an effective comparative design follows from a careful selection of cases, which should be chosen because they are theoretically significant. Selecting appropriate sites for a comparative study is crucial, yet it can be difficult to understand contexts prior to entering them, without very detailed knowledge of their dynamics. As Ackroyd (2009, p. 540) explained, "most comparative case studies do not meet, and cannot be expected to meet, the criteria for experimental research designs"; all that is required is that "there are some elements - features in the generative mechanism - that are in essence the same". Abstracted findings from specific circumstances can then be used for comparison toward the creation of theory; as Yin (2009) explained, the goal is to construct a general explanation that fits each comparative case despite the contingencies of context.

For this specific study, two cases have been selected through a combination of theoretical requirements and opportunism. It has been decided to carry out a private versus public sector comparison, selecting two organisations based in Scotland. The choice of a public versus private comparative study aimed at identifying what it is within each respective context that is crucial to promoting or hindering trust.

The private sector has remained so far the dominant context for the studies of trust and its benefits (Gould-Williams, 2003). However, employers in the private sector have

also been occupied to increasingly satisfying demands for profit maximization, control over labour costs and short-term shareholder value, which seem to have caused lower trust levels in many organisations (Appelbaum *et al*., 2013; Budd and Bhave, 2008; Saunders *et al.*, 2014). Conversely, specific research about the role of trust in the public sector still remains quite scarce (Choudhury, 2008; Klijn, Edelenbos, and Steijn, 2010), besides recent discourses about the new public management model, which have brought some attention to trust (Choudhury, 2008; Oomsels and Bouckaert, 2012).

The rise of New Public Management (NPM) in several Western countries has in fact introduced market-type mechanisms in the public sector, where the employment relationship has been subjected to major challenges caused by organisational restructuring, downsizing, and an increasing pressure to provide more efficient and effective services (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000). Public-sector organisations have been subjected to progressively tighter financial regimes, increased competitive market forces and close monitoring of organisational performance via audits and control mechanisms (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000; Boyne, 1998). These, according to Dubnick (2005), might have introduced a degree of institutionalized distrust into the public sector.

By carrying out a private versus public sector comparison, the author expected to be able to gain a better understanding of how intra-organisational trust develops, and identifying unique or mutual mechanisms for the two sectors. The two selected organisations were specifically chosen for the following reasons:

(1) Both the organizations went through substantial internal restructuring in recent years to gain increased efficiency and enhanced productivity, which was expected to influence the development of trust;

(2) Given their size (i.e. between 200-500 employees), both the organizations were expected to possess a hierarchical structure with several levels of managerial responsibility and an established HR department;

(3) Both of their HR departments had adopted an 'HR Business Partner Model';

(4) Both the organizations had adopted 'high-involvement' working practices aimed at pursuing higher degree of employee's participation and involvement, hence potentially determining higher levels of trust;

(5) Both the organizations were accessible by the researcher as being based in Scotland and allowed interview access to their managers and HR practitioners.

In order to access the required data, the researcher had to negotiate access with the organisations' respective gatekeepers. At this purpose, two face-to-face meetings had been set up with the HR Director of the private company and the Senior HR Business Partner of the public organisation. To maintain anonymity, the two organisations will be hereinafter respectively referred to as "SpiritCo" and "NatureOrg".

Organisation 1: "SpiritCo"

SpiritCo is mid-sized manufacturing company, working in the spirit industry, with a workforce of approximately two hundred employees. It has been owned by an American multinational group since 1998 but only during the past 5 years the multinational has started exerting a substantial influence over the company's operations. SpirtiCo has in fact been requested to achieve higher standards and to

become more efficient, by reducing costs and keep increasing its sales revenues. It has been encouraged to adopt High Performance Team models, a Global Performance Management System (GPS), and to systematically run internal surveys with employees. During the past 12 to 18 months, the company has also been prompted to promote more team building activities and more training courses for staffs, to introduce lean manufacturing techniques to better involve production operators in the production lines, and to instill a specific code of conduct with 4 different core values (i.e. trust, care, passion and excellence), indicating which types of behaviors and mindset the company expects from its workforce. Such initiatives have been introduced in order to enhance transparency between departments, to create a more open and honest corporate culture, and to increasingly engage employees. Furthermore, the company's HR business partners have increasingly taken a more strategic role by working directly with the company's directors on their people strategy.

Organisation 2: "NatureOrg"

NatureOrg is a government organisation working in the public sector founded in 1991. The organisation has approximately 700 employees divided throughout Scotland across 40 different offices. It is divided in 7 different units and has a rigid hierarchical structure with eight different grades, from 'grade A' for general administrators to 'grade H', which corresponds to the directors' level. During the past 3 to 5 years, the organisation has been going through a period of significant change as its budget has been declining by approximately 25%, as a consequence of the Scottish Government's cuts within the public sector. In order to become more efficient, the organisation has increasingly been driven as a private company, by putting in place more structured

business planning processes and systems, and by offering a voluntary severance package to reduce its workforce. The organization's environment has also been affected by increased workloads, higher pressures and stricter deadlines, as well as by a stronger influence from European legislation.

The lack of resources has prompted the organisation to put a greater emphasis on training courses and management diploma to improve the professionalism of its managers. The HR department has also adopted a strategic business partnership model to help the organisation to strategically achieving its objectives. HR aims to be more flexible, to pragmatically engaging with the business, and to empowering managers in decision-making processes. HR staff have also introduced a self-service system, which allows employees to store and independently access personal data.

3.3 Data collection: semi-structured interviews

As Burawoy (1998) explained, when adopting a case-study methodology, the specific research design tends to be emergent rather than fixed. Relevant information is not readily predictable (Yin, 2009) and there is an inbuilt flexibility to follow leads as they arise. In contrast to the positivistic emphasis on rigid procedures, realists emphasise the conceptualization of what data represent with an emphasis upon overall design and theorization rather than specific methods. Interviewing has been the primary method used in this thesis, as it could offer the researcher a direct access to the interviewee's point of views in terms of their attitudes and experiences.

An extensive literature exists on the organisation, process and analysis of interviews (Oppenheim, 2000). However, there are also significant disagreements regarding the most effective way of conducting interviews. Such disagreements are often linked to

different approaches in social science research and distinctive philosophical underpinning. Positivists have, for example, argued that, in order to elicit unbiased and replicable responses, a uniform structure and standardized questions should be used, while the dialogical process of interviewing should be tightly controlled. Furthermore, in order to develop law-like generalizations about social phenomena, positivists tend to primarily focus on structured surveys and quantitative analysis, aggregating responses in terms of statistical distributions (Goldthorpe, 2000).

In contrast, interpretativists consider interviews more an interactive method, a process of human interactions where the meaning, explanations, and emotions articulated by interviewees are taken seriously by the researcher. They emphasise the mutual construction of meaning within interviews and they have a strong tendency to deny the existence of any social reality other than the one that exists in and through the interactive process (Edwards *et al.*, 2014). In other words, subjective understanding involves the play of varied narratives, which can coexist but they are not necessarily assessed against an external and objective social reality.

Critical realism (CR) has instead a distinctive approach for designing, conducting, and analysing interviews. In contrast with interpretativists, for realists interviews provide a route for accessing the attitudes and emotions of informants but also for gaining simultaneously an understanding of pre-existing social relations and structures, which constitute a complex and multi-layered social reality (Edwards *et al*., 2014). Interviews do not simply generate narrative accounts, which give access to respondents' thoughts, meanings and experience, but they also provide an adequate basis for analysing the interplay of social context and generative mechanisms. Therefore, by embracing a 'non-relativist' approach, critical realists seek to appreciate the interpretations of their

informants but, at the same time, they also attempt to analyse the constraints and resources within which those informants act in their social context. They transcend purely empirical observations of social phenomena by illuminating the complex and stratified character of social reality.

Furthermore, in opposition to the positivist model in which interviewers should be neutral and simply extract information from interviews, critical realism also emphasises the conception of "*active interviewing*". According to critical realists, social research interviews constitute an active dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee and not simply a passive recording activities. As Holstein and Gubrium (2004) explained, the interviewer and the interviewee interact and collaborate in the construction of meanings and narratives. However, in order to enhance the depth and complexity of the accounts being developed, their interchange needs to be investigated with the adoption of an appropriate analytical framework, which is able to guide questions, frame answers, and direct further discussions. On the one hand, as Holstein and Gubrium (2004) explained, the active interviewer should not dictate interpretations by being confined to a predetermined agenda, but should instead pursue the interview agenda in a flexible manner according to the interviewees' responses. On the other hand, the respondents also remain active agents who, in the process of offering facts and details of experience for response, constructively add to, take away from, and transform them.

Additionally, treating the interview as an active process allows the interviewer to retain some control, or 'conceptual focusing' (Pawson, 1996), over the course of the interview, as well as to explore alternate perspectives as diverse and contradictory as they might be. The researcher needs to see beyond the horizons of specific interviews,

i.e. not merely taking research findings at face value but making sure that alternative interpretations are subjected to critical scrutiny. For example, he can decide to probe questions in order to gain further explanations, to persist in asking questions to clarify respondents' claims, to compare and assess the information gathered from different interviews and identify inconsistency, or more bluntly to even directly challenge misleading comments or apparent untruths. Critical realists do not treat interviews as a series of equivalent narratives but they contextualize and assess them in terms of their comparative adequacy or completeness in order to test and develop explanatory theories. As Pawson (1996) explained, interviews should be explicitly 'theory driven', i.e. the interviewer should remain the expert on the issues being investigated, while the interviewee should be there to "confirm or falsity and, above all, refine that theory" (p. 299).

In order to answer the first research question, namely what are the main factors influencing the development of intra-organisational trust at an interpersonal and organisational level, the interviews have firstly focused on the respondents' opinion on the importance of trust, and on the current level of trust within their respective organisation. Respondents were then asked to comment on whether they believed level of trust were falling or rising, and which factors they did consider as the most important for facilitating the development of trust within the organisation. By enquiring about possible rises or falls in the level of trust, the author has followed Möllering (2006)'s suggestion that manifestations of trust at any single time can only be understood against the background and history of relationships, and in the light of present and future issues that the actors involved are aware of. This allows to adopt a process

perspective (Van de Ven and Poole, 2005), which can identify both trust-building processes and concrete manifestations of trust.

Respondents were then asked to comment on their respective level of trust toward their line manager, their colleagues and their senior managers, and to explain which factors had respectively determined the development of trust toward them. They were then more specifically probe on whether they could identify any external or contextual factors influencing the development of trust relationships with them. These two last questions aimed to elicit responses that could highlight trust mechanisms operating at different hierarchical levels of the organisation, as well as to identify whether there were any external factors, outwith their control, influencing these relationships.

Finally, to answer the second research question, namely what is the role of the Human Resource function in the development of intra-organisational trust and how it is perceived by organisational members, respondents were asked to comment on how HR staff can influence the development of trust within their respective organization, and to describe how they perceive their HR department and whether they trust their HR colleagues (for the full list of interview' questions, please refer to Appendix 1).

3.4 Selection of key informants and participants

Following Bryman (2004) suggestion, once in the workplace the selection of the interviewees has been done purposefully on the basis of relevance to the research rather than a random or representative sample. Interviews were focused on gaining informants' viewpoints on the development of trust relationships within the two organisations and they also had a cumulative character. Earlier interviews helped to identify features that needed further investigation, while latter interviews were

informed by insights gained from earlier findings. This allowed the researcher to elicit comments on views expressed by other respondents while identifying and exploring contrasting findings. Sometimes earlier analysis had to be significantly revised in the light of latter findings, while the co-existence of contrasting accounts could itself become a focus of explanation. The challenge for the researcher was to empathize with the respondents and at the same time to assess whether their accounts were honest in the sense of truthful, to the best of their knowledge, and not deliberately distorted or misleading. For this reason, in focusing on dyadic trust relationship, the researcher has interviewed both sides of the dyad when possible, as a mean of taking in multiple perspectives that would allow reflection on the idiosyncrasy of trust experiences.

The complete list of respondents had to be negotiated with the organisations' respective gatekeepers in terms of numbers of interviewees and the duration of each interview. In total, face-to-face interviews have been conducted with 42 individuals (21 respondents for each organisation) within a timeframe of two months, including employees, line managers, senior managers, and HR practitioners (see Appendix 2 for complete list of respondents). All interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, lasting between 30 and 90 minutes according to the availability of the participants.

The types of respondents varied between the two cases but ultimately a similar level of understanding was gathered for both. It has been requested to both the organisations' gatekeepers to include an equal number of respondents from every departments, and to select interviewees with diverse job tenure in order to obtain an historical perspective on the development of trust within the two organisations. It has also been requested to include among the respondents, staff members who might have manifested a very high or very low level of trust. By attempting to include varied and

extreme cases in terms of level of trust, the researcher assumed that this type of respondents could supply more relevant information, due to their more sensitive trust- or distrust- propensity toward others.

Interviews were loosely structured to investigate respondents' understanding of how their trust relationships develop with other members of the organisation, included colleagues, direct supervisors (or line managers), senior managers, and members of the HR department. The style of the interviews was conversational, returning to topics that had not been fully explored. Additionally, the researcher attempted to draw as much contextual information as possible in order to account for the circumstances surrounding these relationships.

As Pawson and Tilley (1997) suggested, in order to dig deeper into the interviewees' responses, their answers have been often paraphrased in more generalized terms in order to give respondents an opportunity to challenge or substantiate their statements with an endorsement, possible qualifications/exceptions, or even further examples. Some interviewees, particularly newcomers, knew little about the longer evolution of trust levels within their organization, or about the wider patterning of employee responses; whereas others could speak about it in a more informative manner, reporting the experience of fellow workers or claiming to speak for a wider constituency.

Furthermore, the interviews were sequenced in ways that helped ground the researcher in the contextual reality of his fieldwork sites. Knowing about empirical and actual events of the two workplaces meant that the researcher could probe more deeply into key management and HR's accounts. Respondents usually knew a great deal about the salience of particular mechanisms in their settings, but not necessarily context-

mechanism-outcome configurations, which the author had instead to unravel through a conceptual refinement process.

The interviews with the HR staff have also been conducted slightly different to those of other respondents to provide different angles on the phenomena of interest and to respect different forms of knowledgeability. In this case, interviewees were considered as 'key informants' having a more privileged access to attitudes, motives, and reasons of the other staff members. For this reason, HR staff were informed of the conceptual problematic of the research to allow them to appreciate the distinctive trust layers the author was seeking to investigate, and possibly to further refine the author's explanations. At the same time, the author was also very aware of the fact that they might have provided polished edited accounts of their views and activities; therefore, he was concerned to do justice to the accounts of all his respondents by subjecting the HR staff's descriptions to critical scrutiny.

Given the sensitive nature of trust relationships and the fact that respondents were in continuing relationships with the other members of staff they were informing the researcher on, a confidentiality agreement has also been signed at the beginning of each interview, stating that the researcher would retain the data and provide no information which could identify any individual employee. Data collection was considered completed once new data no longer significantly altered existing conceptualizations (Bryman, 2004) and substantial evidence was collected to indicate conceptual saturation.

3.5 Data analysis

All interviews' data have been recorded, transcribed verbatim and then thematically analysed into codes and sub-codes that related to specific sources of trust. The codes emerged from the data but were also shaped to a degree by the topics proposed in interviews, which built from the literature review and the multi-level analytical framework adopted to analyses the development of intra-organisational trust in the two selected organisations. The analysis involved reconciling respondents' interpretation and the context in which they were embedded. This meant to recognize and analyse the most recurring mechanisms influencing the development of trust at the interpersonal level, as well as identify other organisational and contextual factors widely influencing the development of trust relationships within the two organizations. The findings on the HR function have also been thematically analysed in order to investigate the diverse ways HR staff were able to influence the development of trust within their respective organization, as well as how they tended to be perceived by their other colleagues. The findings are declared as accurate depictions of the contexts and phenomena studied, respectful of the limitations of the data and access obtained.

3.6 Generalization and limitations of the study

As Sayer (2000) has explained, the search for 'generalization' often implies a limited assessment of how extensive a certain phenomenon is without offering sufficient explanations of what produces it. According to critical realism, the process of generalization should not be confined to the empirical domain and exclude the domain of the deep structures of reality. As Bhaskar (1978) described, scientific generalization should largely refer to transfactual conditions that lie in the hidden essence of things.

From a realist perspective, explanations can be generalized from a single case when generative mechanisms can be found to be operative in other locations, having causal powers that will be contingently expressed. Results are generalized in analytical rather than statistical/empirical terms (Yin, 2009).

In other words, it is possible to generalize in two different senses, i.e. in the sense of a generally occurring empirical phenomenon, or in the sense of fundamental/constituent properties and structures. The empirical extrapolation based on *induction* is a process that draws universally applicable conclusions from the observation of a limited number of events or phenomena, without leaving the empirical level. On the other hand, knowledge about constituent proprieties, or transfactual conditions, is obtained by a process of retroductive inference, which moves from surface to depth, from the domain of the empirical to the domain of structures and mechanisms.

To describe the process behind this last mode of inference, we should refer to the concept of 'abduction'. The foundation of abduction is the ability to form associations. Beside comprehensive knowledge of established alternative theories, models and frames of interpretation, abduction requires a creative reasoning process enabling the researcher to discern relations and connections not evident or obvious and to formulate new ideas about the interconnections of phenomena. Abduction differs from induction in that we start from the rule describing a general pattern. In social science research, the rule is a conceptual framework or a theory, which we apply to be able to understand and interpret a concrete phenomenon in a different way. Social science analysis is essentially a matter of using theories and frames of interpretation to gain a deeper knowledge of social meanings, structures, and mechanisms. Following the abduction process, we build up knowledge that cannot be reduced to empirical facts and thus

cannot be tested in line with the same logic as the testing of empirical predictions. We identify something which is universal not as an empirical category but in the sense of 'constituent', expressed by another type of universal concept that is the *abstract* concept.

In other words, abduction means to move from a conception of something to a different, possibly more developed or deeper conception of it. This happens through placing and interpreting the original ideas about a phenomenon in the frame of a new set of ideas. Social scientists do not generally discover new unknown events, but not directly observable connections and relations by which we can understand and explain already known occurrences in a novel way. A fundamental difference between deduction and abduction is that deduction proves that something must be in a certain way, while abduction shows how something might be. An interpretation is considered as plausible given that the frame of interpretation is considered as plausible. Abductive conclusions in social science are seldom of the nature that we can ultimately decide whether they are true or false.

As Elger (2010) suggested, the two selected case studies have been examined holistically, in isolation initially to ensure that the pursuit of a comparison did not dilute the understanding of each specific case. Emergent findings have then been explored and the main aspects of variation have been identified and analysed across the two cases. Despite the contingencies of their context, adopting a comparative case-study design aimed to construct a general explanation of the development of intra-organisational trust that could fit each comparative case (Yin, 2009). As Burawoy (1998: 19) explained: 'the purpose of comparison is to causally connect the cases.

Instead of reducing the case to instances of a general law, we make each case work in its connection to other cases.'

Ultimately, the explanations derived from this study are fallible and open to revision. As Lyon *et al*. (2015, p.1) commented, the richness of the trust research field 'constantly reminds us how no single method can provide the perfect understanding of such a multifaceted phenomenon'. New studies might find, for example, further nuances and conditions that this thesis was not able to uncover, particularly in terms of inter-links between the investigated levels of trust. The author also acknowledges that by focusing on the interpersonal and organisational level, the research has neglected the dispositional level, namely how personal dispositions influence the development of trust, as well as how trust relationships might be influenced by specific team and/or group dynamics.

Other limitations of the research were due to problems of access. The findings should be considered accurate depictions of the context and phenomena studied; however, at the same time, it is also important to recognize their limitation in terms of restrictive access to a limited number of respondents in each of the two organisations. Additionally, the author acknowledges that the respondents' selection to participate in the research had to be negotiated with the gatekeepers of the two organisations.

Furthermore, the author also needs to acknowledge the reflexivity of his work. The respondents' interpretations have to be considered in the light of the interactions with the author, who needs to be able to step back and appreciate critically his subjective involvement in generating and analysing interpretations. This points is of crucial relevance in trust research, as a respondent's willingness to describe his trust relationship with another actor – to whom the researcher may also talk – depends not

only on the trust in that specific relationship but also on the respondents' trust in the researcher, who for example may or may not maintain confidentiality (Möllering, 2006). In order to minimize such a risk, as already mentioned, a confidentiality agreement had been signed by both the author and all the participants at the beginning of each interview. Furthermore, as Möllering (2006) suggested, due to the impossibility of carrying out longitudinal studies (given the time limits imposed by the doctoral study), a process perspective has instead been adopted by attempting to investigate the process of trust development without having the researcher observing it directly. The discussed cases and examples have been often retrospectively analysed and this could create a further potential bias. The next two chapters present the findings of the research and relate them to the existing literature, before moving on to the closing comments in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Data Findings

Introduction

Trust seems to be fundamental for guaranteeing the proper functioning of both the analysed organisations. Respondents highlighted in fact the importance of trust to produce excellent quality work and to achieve objectives by successfully working independently and as a team. On an interpersonal level, most of the respondents considered trust as a fundamental mechanism for the development of effective working relationships with their colleagues. They acknowledged that the development of trust permits to rely on others when needed, to look after each other's interests, to enhance motivation, and to obtain more constructive and positive interactions wherein information can be shared and confidentiality is guaranteed.

Simultaneously, besides contributing toward more effective interpersonal relationships, respondents also recognized that trust functions at an organisational level, as operational and psychological mechanism contributing to the successful running of the organisations. They described how trust facilitates a more successful delegation of tasks, more effective decision-making processes, and higher levels of motivation and morale among staff members, who become more engaged and work toward the same common goal.

Despite the large consensus on the importance of trust, respondents manifested instead very dissimilar opinions and fundamental disagreement when questioned about their respective level of trust. The findings suggested that this is due to numerous factors influencing the development of trust at either a personal, interpersonal, or an

organisational level. A list of these mechanisms can be reviewed in the table 1 below:

Table 1

Personal level (Job role)	**Employee**: delivering results/acquiring new responsibilities; **Line Manger**: providing support, autonomy, consistency, integrity, mentoring and development opportunity; **Senior Manager**: job security, organizational stability and politics.
Interpersonal level	Close personal relationships, confidentiality, integrity, honesty respect, fairness, effective communication, transparency, autonomy, involvement in decision making processes.
Organizational level	**Management practices:** teamworking & cross-functional team, core values & GPS, partnership agreement; **Work environment**: increased business pressures and workload, higher levels of stress, declining budget; **Organizational systems:** grants system, monitoring systems for internet usage, desk-sharing and desk-clearing, flexi-time system.

On a personal level, trust levels seem to vary according to the personality and personal perceptions of the respondents, as well as according to the characteristic of their specific job role. Different mechanisms influence in fact the development of trust relationships with lower level employees, line (or middle) managers, and senior managers. The development of trust with employees seems mainly determined by their willingness and capacity of successfully delivering results and consequently acquiring increased responsibilities in their job. Line managers (or middle managers) tend instead to develop trust by remaining available to their team members, by providing support and autonomy, by treating their team members equally and consistently, and by providing mentoring and development opportunities. Differently, the development of trust with senior managers seems instead to be mainly determined by organizational mechanisms such as job security, organizational stability, and organizational politics. The specific job role held by staff members also influence the type of relationships

develop with their colleagues and consequently affect the development of trust. The findings indicate that, in order to develop trust relationships, staff members need to be able to identify with the person they are interacting with and to adjust their behaviour accordingly. Furthermore, respondents confirmed that the development of trust is also influenced by certain characteristics of the relationships that staff members build with each other. Close personal relationships, effective communication (particularly when a deadline cannot be respected or a commitment cannot be fulfilled), involvement in decision-making processes, confidentiality, honesty, integrity, respect and autonomy have been all identified as important factors influencing the development of trust.

Finally, respondents from both the organizations also identified several mechanisms influencing the development of trust at an organizational level. The need of SpiritCo to become more efficient and deliver high-standard products recently lead to the introduction of a series of management practices, which have positively influenced the development of trust. Similarly, respondents from NatureOrg highlighted several organizational practices, which have positively influenced the development of trust by enhancing the level of transparency, collaboration, and professionalism within the organization. Conversely, increased business pressures and higher levels of stress have instead negatively affected the development of trust at SpiritCO; while NatureOrg's declining budget and increasing business pressures have caused uncertainty and instability among its staff members, consequently undermining the development of trust relationships. Additionally, NatureOrg's incessant pursuit of efficiency has also solicited the introduction of a series of organizational systems, which have negatively impacted on the development of trust by causing staff's friction and resistance.

The chapter will first outline the perceived importance of trust for the staff members

of both SpiritCo and NatureOrg, and it will then continue presenting the specific mechanisms influencing the development of trust at the personal, interpersonal, and organizational levels. Finally, it will present the data on the role played by the respective Human Resource functions in the development of trust, and it will report on how HR staff tends to be perceived by other organisational members.

4.1 The importance of trust in the employment relationship

4.1.1 SpiritCo

Mangers of SpiritCo stressed the importance of trust to obtain the engagement of their own team members. As the Senior Production Manager described, this is particularly important given the organisation's high demanding and constantly changing work environment:

> *"For me to engage my team, there has to be a degree of trust. We are doing new things and changing all year, we have embraced lean manufacturing, we are embracing reduced changeovers, we are embracing a lot of things, more flexibility, different hours of working, and to get good performance from all of that there has to be a degree of trust." (Senior Production Manager)*

Trust seems to allow the company's managers to relying on their team members to effectively completing their work. It seems to be particularly important for those managers who cannot rely on a continuous contact with their colleagues. This is, for example, the case of the Environment Health and Safety (EHS) Manager, as he explained in the following comment:

"Trust is very important. You have got to trust people around you, because it comes down to your own safety at work as well. I work in Environment, Health and Safety and I need to trust other managers or employees to go away and do what they agreed to do...for me it's very important to be successful that people do what they say they are going to do. So I need a high level of trust." (EHS Manager)

Not only managers did recognize the importance of trust. Almost all interviewed employees of SpiritCo emphasised the importance of having solid trust relationships with both their line managers and their colleagues. They emphasised, for example, how trust does build the foundations to be able to relying on others for support, as well as for protecting confidential information whenever necessary. This was well described, for example, by the Production Operator A in the following comment:

"Trust is very important because I trust my bosses to fight for me and do good for us and they trust us to put a good quality product and run the machine well, they trust us to go on with our job. With the fellow people in here, I trust them to do a good job and I trust them to keep some things confidential. And they should trust me that I should be doing my job right, and if everybody is doing their jobs right then hopefully we don't give to the management anything to worry about." (Production Operator A)

Trust seems also to have a fundamental coordinating role. In the following comments, the two interviewed company's directors focused their attention on the importance of trust as a coordination mechanism, which allows delivering what is required for the successful functioning of the organisation:

"I think trust is extremely important in terms of delivering for the organisation, because if you can't trust your colleagues to deliver piece of work on time, or develop a core piece of work, then you can't work separately and then come together to deliver, so trust enables you to have relationships which operate smoother." (Procurement Director)

"I think trust is extremely important within the company because if you don't have it then the company doesn't work. It can't function because for most things, if you look internally within an organisation, you don't build things on commercial agreements, as you would do with external parties. So the organisation has to be built on trust, that if I agree something with another person it would actually be done. And if you don't have that, it makes it virtually impossible to work within any organisation." (Technical Director)

Furthermore, trust does not only guarantee an effective coordination of activities and tasks, but it functions also as a psychological mechanism for unifying and directing the work of each members of staff toward the same common goal. By doing so, it does also provide a meaning to staff's work, as described by the Warehouse Team Leader:

"I think trust is very important. You have to trust whether is management to say this is what we are doing, this is the direction we are going. And you also have to trust the people working with you to do the right thing, to make sure we all go in the right direction, promoting endeavour, increasing sales, and encouraging more money to be put into the company. I think it's really important for any kind of business to have a kind of trust level. You

have got to trust, without trust you haven't really got a lot." (Warehouse

Team Leader)

Very similarly, the Production Operator E and the Global Archive Manager also highlighted the psychological functioning of trust. In the following comments, they both argued that trust is of fundamental importance to allow them to operate effectively with their team, and to meaningfully work together toward the same common goal:

"Trust is very important. You have got to have a lot of trust in your fellow workers because you have got to work together as a team...I do trust mostly everybody because I think you have got to have trust in the people you are working with and in what management is telling you. Because if you can't trust who you work with every day, there is no point in working. You know, you have got to have trust in what people are telling you." (Production Operator E)

"I think trust is absolutely critical, it is one of the most important cultural values that a company has. It is important to trust people within the company to do your job well. Trust is always one of those things that come up when the company is setting the kind of way it wants to be, the way wants people to operate. I think trust is very important obviously because it's people's life, isn't it? If you can't trust people, you can't do anything really, can you? Everybody needs to work for the same common goal." (Global Archive Manager)

4.1.2 NatureOrg

As for SpiritCo, the interviewed staff members of NatureOrg equally confirmed the fundamental importance of trust within their organisation at both an interpersonal and organisational level. The Operations Officer A and the Efficient Government Officer emphasised, for example, the importance of trust to ensure reliance and confidentiality when dealing with colleagues. Additionally, the latter also highlighted how trust has recently become increasingly important given the higher degree of flexibility required within the organisation:

> *"I think trust is very important. You need to know that if you are asking for advice on something that somebody is giving you the correct information…and also if you are going to speak to a manager, or you speak to one of your colleague, if it is confidential you would expect that they keep it so." (Operations Officer A)*

> *"I believe trust is very important. The way we are now in public service working is as flexible as possible, we are cross-units working. At any point in time, you could be working with somebody in another part of the organisation and you need to rely on things being done, and you need to rely on people being open and honest with their expectations and what they can actually do." (Efficient Government Officer)*

Similarly, the Advice Information Officer and the Recreation and Access Officer described the importance of trust in order to develop solid working relationships, as well as to allow staff members to both work independently and rely on colleagues when required:

"I think trust is very important, I think you have a better working relationships if you have trust in people…without trust we couldn't actually do probably a lot of our jobs. I think we need to have that trust so that we can work independently when needed, and also when we ask others to do bits of work, we have got that knowledge that they will actually do it."
(Advice Information Officer)

"I think trust is hugely important for people doing their job. I think they do better if they are trusted and if they can just get on with it, and I think if people trust their managers and their colleagues then they feel in a better position to raise any issues or to discuss things, ideas, suggestions and make improvements. You can do that if there is a relationship of trust."
(Recreation and Access Officer)

The Directorate Support Manager and the HR Business Partner recognized instead that the specific importance of trust might vary according to the types of relationship considered. In the following comments, they separated, for example, the importance of trust toward senior management for successfully running the organisation, from the importance of trust toward line managers and colleagues to be able to successfully working and collaborating with them:

"I think trust's importance varies depending on level within the organisation. As you get to certain level in the organisation, your reliance on how senior managers are running the organisation, the strategic decisions that have been made, becomes more important. If you are lower down in the organisation, the trust dynamics is far more important between

you and your immediate line manager, or your immediate colleagues in

that team. It becomes less relevant what is going on in the kind of bigger

picture." (Directorate Support Manager)

"I think trust is quite important but we have a wide variety of employees

within the organisation: some technical specialists, some scientific, some

corporate services, and some management. And I think there has to be

different levels of trust, it has a different importance. We have to trust our

management team to direct and give us directions on where the

organisation is going; and then obviously there has to be trust between

different units within the organisation to work together, to effectively

deliver what we need to deliver." (HR Business Partner)

As it was the case for SpiritCo, trust also operates at NatureOrg as a coordination

mechanism, which allows the successful functioning of the organisation. In this regard,

the Environmental Assessment Adviser and the External Funding Officer emphasised

the coordinating role of trust in the following comments:

"I think trust engenders good quality work, I think if you can trust your

employees or your staff, or in fact you trust your bosses, it engenders good

working conditions, it engenders good quality work, good outputs, good

outcome. So I think it is vital." (Environmental Assessment Adviser)

"*There is no organisation without trust. Well, I think certainly if you don't*

have some level of trust in an organisation, things can go very wrong, very

quickly…I think, if you don't have any level of trust at all, then nothing is

going to happen and you would lose your credibility." (External Funding

Officer)

The coordinating function of trust seems to operate through operational and psychological mechanisms. This was, for example, well described by the Operation Officer C in the following comment, where he emphasised how trust is required to get things done, as well as to keep up the morale of the organisation:

"I think trust is fundamental in any organisation. I think there are two

ways it is really important, jobs can't get done if you can't trust colleagues

to do theirs as well; but also, if you can't trust your colleagues to do their

work then morale brakes down." (Operation Officer C)

From an operational point of view, the Continuous Improvement Manager commented on how trust can act as 'organisational glue', favouring the correct sharing of information and impeding the formation of organisational silos:

"*I suspect that trust acts as a glue if you like to make an organisation*

functions as efficiently as possible. Because if you don't trust the people

you work with then the team dynamics, or the dynamics of the organisation,

are going to be undermined and people won't share information, and you

will ended up with little sort of silos teams working in isolation…We are a

knowledge-based organisation and a lot of what we do is evidence driven,

so it's very important for us to share information, it's important that data

is made available so that people can base decisions on it, and that depends

on us working well together and trusting each other." (Continuous

Improvement Manager)

While the Unit Area Administrator and the Project Manager described instead the importance of trust as necessary mechanism to facilitate the effective delegation of tasks, as well as to obtain efficient decision-making processes:

"I think trust is very important, there has to be a mutual trust I think in order to delegate tasks. There is quite a lot of delegation throughout the company to different offices and different teams for financial responsibility. So we are being given the trust to run the offices in the proper manner and in accordance with guidance and policies." (Unit Area Administrator)

*"I think trust helps us to get things done and it usually evident that things don't get done when there is less trust. Things slow down, decisions are not taken so quickly, people always asked for more evidence to back up a particular claim, and sometimes they don't believe the evidence that is provided, because they may not trust where this comes from." (*Project Manager)

From a psychological point of view, the Program Manager and the Learning and Development Officer highlighted the importance of trust in order to develop a strong degree of integrity and further motivate employees to achieve their objectives:

"I think it's important for management collectively to build trust with the people who work for the organisation. There needs to be a strong degree of integrity within individuals, so that the people trust management to a degree that they are doing the right things and doing things right." (Program Manager)

"I think trust is key, it is crucial to motivate employees and to achieve our objectives. Trust is crucial within the organisation: employees need to feel that they can trust the company as their employer, and equally we as an employer we need to know that we can trust our employees to do what we are asking them to do. So it is absolutely crucial." (Learning and Development Officer)

Similarly, the Operation Officer B and the Trade Union Convenor also recognized the importance of trust, for both management and employees, to look after each other's interests and to respect each other's roles:

"I think without trust a company cannot function because employees have got to be able to trust their line manager and to trust the management team to look out for the best interest of all employees. But then management team has got to be able to trust their staff as well...You know everything has got to be based on trust and if you don't have that, it is like in any relationship, if you don't have trust then it just falls apart." (Operation Officer B)

"Trust is the core to make this organisation works to its maximum. I think it is crucial because we can't function without employees, no organisation can function without employees, and those employees have to feel they are valued in this organisation. Trust has to work two ways: employees have to feel that they have to be trusted in this organisation and valued to work effectively; and likewise management have to recognize that they have to show trust too." (Trade Union Convenor)

4.2 Trust mechanisms at the personal level

4.2.1 SpiritCo

Several respondents confirmed the existence of a number of factors influencing the development of trust on a personal level. Indeed, as the company's Environment Health and Safety (EHS) Advisor commented, "*we become very personal when we start looking at things like trust*". In the following comment, the EHS Advisor emphasised, for example, how different personal perceptions can significantly influence the way staff members perceive their colleagues, and therefore how they are going to attempt to build trust relationships with them:

> "*It depends on the individual, people are all different and they are going to perceive trust differently. People are different in how they would analyse things and what does trust mean to them…people are different and your own perception is going to make you look at different things.*" *(EHS Advisor)*

In terms of personal differences, there seems to be a recurring factor influencing the development of trust relationships within SpiritCo, specifically the job role covered by the respondents within the company. The Manufacturing Development Manager recognized, for example, the need to take into consideration the job role, besides an individual's personality, when trying to investigate his respective level of trust:

> "*I think there would always be variations in the level of trust because people perceive trust in different ways. People expect trust to look differently, to feel differently. So even if you have a totally consistent approach, because you have individual characters, there is no way you are*

going to get a consistent gauge across. I think trust depends on the role and personality of people. I think it is 50 percent personality and 50 percent role." (Manufacturing Development Manager)

Similarly, the Procurement Director described in the following comment how different job roles or positions within the company may entail different levels of trust, due to their respective degree of responsibilities and the different attitudes of the staff members covering those roles:

"I think your position within the organisation influences what you believe in, or what you are prepared to believe in. The guys on the shop floor has a different looking life to me, because they just come in every day, they want to be paid to maximum and they want to go home. They are not developing, they are not looking at how they could extend their influence in the organisation. They are not bothered, so you would find there less trust in the organisation I would suggest. They are not looking to build trust, they are not looking to develop. They are looking just to come in, do a day job and go home. I may sound quite derogative but actually that sounds reality. Therefore, your position within the company influences whether you have to develop trust at all and how you would develop it." (Procurement Director)

The process of trust building seems to be significantly different when employees, line managers, or senior managers are involved. For employees without any managerial responsibilities, the development of trust relationships seems to be mainly determined by their capacity of delivering results in their work, and consequently acquiring

increased responsibilities in their jobs. This was well explained in the following comments by both the Technical Director and the Events Coordinator:

"Every single time you build trust in an organisation by delivering what you have said you are going to deliver. You then build up a track record and then what they would do if they trust you is giving you more responsibility. If they don't trust you and you haven't managed to build up that relationship, you will not get more responsibilities and you may get less responsibilities instead." (Technical Director)

"I think because I am fairly new in the business, I had to earn the respect and earn the trust of others by delivering what you say you will deliver. I would like to think that I am trusted now. To build trust you need to deliver, trust is the ability to handle situations in the right ways, in the right time frame, and with the right outcomes." (Events Coordinator)

A good example of the importance of delivering results was also provided by one of the production operators, who has recently been promoted as team leader. In the following comment, she described how she has managed to develop trust by delivering results and by seeking increasing responsibilities in her job:

"I am always willing to learn new things and I think that's why they see me as a good operator, I am open and honest. I think they see me for who I am and I have their trust…you gain trust by taking the responsibility and taking ownership for what you have got to do. Because there are some people that are here just to pick up their pay at the end of the month. For me it's about what I can learn, it's the knowledge that I gain, it's the trust

that you build up there." (Production Team Leader)

Conversely, the Material Controller described how contractual employees, such as 'agency drivers', may instead be less inclined to build trust relationships through delivering results and acquiring further responsibilities. Their precarious work conditions seem in fact to undermine the possibility for them to be trustworthy, as they might risk of losing their jobs:

> *"An agency driver of 50 years old is probably not interested in developing*
>
> *trust, perhaps he just wants to come to his work, do his job and go home*
>
> *and not care…if for example, an agency driver does something wrong,*
>
> *probably we would just phone the agency and tell them not to send him*
>
> *back here. Because of that, it's very likely that he would not be honest if he*
>
> *breaks or crashes into something. Because it's more likely that he would*
>
> *be told not to come back. Whereas, with a full-time person, you would try*
>
> *to coach him to not doing it again. That's where the difference in honesty*
>
> *and trust comes into it." (Materials Controller)*

The process of trust development with line managers seems instead to be characterized by other types of mechanisms. The Manufacturing Development Manager described, for example, how a manager's position may have an influence on the development of trust by entailing a unique set of expectations from its subordinates:

> *"You expect a line manager to be able to deliver certain things and to*
>
> *resolve certain situations. I think it is very difficult for managers because*
>
> *they are always viewed on a slightly different expectation from how you*
>
> *would view trust at peer level. Because you always expect him to be able*

to do more, there is always an expectation for them to do more, to resolve situations, to tackle difficult problems, to deal with performance issues, and it is something that you really put fate in that process, you put fate in that structure. And if it doesn't happen, it can sometimes damage the trust relationship." (Manufacturing Development Manager)

The following comments from two of the interviewed production operators illustrated instead the importance for managers of building trust relationships on 'integrity', as well as the importance of allowing a certain degree of 'autonomy' to their subordinates:

"Trust should always be there to be reinforced and encouraged…I really appreciated my boss telling me that he had issues with my work because for me that increased the integrity that I felt for him and we can work together to try to rebuild the trust." (Production Operator B)

"I think for an operator, you don't want your boss on your back all the time, you want him to trust you that you can do your job and do it to high standard. My idea of trust comes from there, if they trust me to do my job without having to coming to check every 10 minutes. I know that my boss has trust in me, that if he puts me in a machine I am going to do my best, and that's all I can ask from him." (Production Operator A)

Equally, the Procurement Director highlighted the importance of integrity and he also warned against the risk of confusing this with a friendship-type of relationship:

"With people that report to you, you have to watch the relationship, your relationship has to be built on integrity, not on friendship. As a manager, you have to build the relationship on integrity, honesty and fairness

because at times you might have to have difficult conversations. I think if

you do that, you build the trust." (Procurement Director)

Furthermore, the Material Controller also commented that, given the higher hierarchical position, line managers are not required to put the same degree of effort in developing trust relationships, as it is the case for their own subordinates:

"Whenever I ask something to my line manager then obviously I have to

trust that he would do it, because if he doesn't then my job is impacted. If

he wants me to do something, I will always do it as quickly as possible and

he would then trust me. I would always just be as helpful as possible.

Whenever he asks a question, I would always try making sure I can help

him. But trust needs to work both ways, whenever I ask him to do something

that he needs to do for me… sometimes it's not, it's always only one way.

He will always ask me and I will always deliver; whereas whenever I ask

him, it is not always done, but he is the boss. (Materials Controller)

Differently, the process of trust relationships with senior managers seems instead to be influenced by other mechanisms, primarily associated with the central role held by senior managers within the company. The Production Line Manager and the Warehouse Team Leader described, for example, how senior managers are mainly trusted due to their capacity of effectively running the company:

"*I think you have to trust [senior managers]. Ultimately they are the people*

who pay your wages, so I have to trust the company making the right

businesses, moving in the right direction and keep growing the company. I

can't impact on them so I have to have trust in what they are doing."

(Production Line Manager)

"Everybody has got their parts to play and as much as you don't see senior managers on a day to day basis, you have got that level of trust that they are actually doing what is best for the business. Because that's what gives you the kind of confidence that you are actually here for a purpose. So, there has got to be that level of trust, no matter how much interactions you are having with that level of management" (Warehouse Team Leader)

Similarly, several production operators acknowledged how senior managers have guaranteed a certain degree of job security within the company. As explained in the following comments, such security determines the level of trust that staff members tend to develop toward their senior managers:

"They are depending on us to do our job and we are depending on them to get us orders. So I think there has got to be a bit of trust there, we have got to think that they are doing a good job. They must be doing a good job because if they are not doing a good job, our jobs can all be in jeopardy. So we have got to trust them that they are doing their job. You have got to trust that they are doing the best that they can for the company and for you. For ourselves, we have got to think that way." (Production operator E)

"They are the ones who make all the decision so I guess you have to trust them. They are running the company so you are putting your trust in them to do a good job running the company. And they are putting their trust in you to put good products out of the door...they have kept me in the job for 15 years and I think they will keep me in the job for a lot longer, I have

always had to trust them that I would always have a job." (Production operator C)

"I do trust them to be trying doing their best, I trust them to be trying to do as good as they can, that's all I can ask, and that's hopefully all they can ask of us, to come in and do the best that we can. To stay in the job I would hope that they are doing the right things, I think the organisation is pretty safe. Everybody is always going to have a job here." (Production operator A)

Conversely, other respondents manifested instead a significant lack of trust toward senior managers due to their central role within the company. The Environment Health and Safety (EHS) Manager and one of the plant engineers suggested, for example, that senior managers tend to be untrustworthy as they sit at the top of the organisation:

"I think I would trust them to do their jobs efficiently, but I wouldn't trust them to have an open and honest discussion with me. Because if you say the wrong thing you will leave to regret it, but that is just the big bad world. With the people at the top, it is always tell them what they want to hear. I think they would be trustworthy on their job, but I would be wary of having conversation with them." (EHS Manager)

"Probably I would not trust them. Because I think that's the way you become when you get to that stage, when you get to that kind of level. I don't think you can afford to be honest and trustworthy, you have got to do bad things. I feel at that level we are not open and honest enough. I don't think things transmit down here very well, you are told what they want you

to hear. You cannot trust them purely and simply because of where they are, what they have got to do. I feel when you get to that position, you can't really be a trustful person because you have got to do some really nasty things. You are at the top of the tree, the decisions are yours and some of them have got to be bad." (Plant Engineer)

The Material Team Leader suggested instead that a lack of trust between senior managers can also have negative cascading effects on lower-level relationships across the company:

"Different powers do pay different influences on the levels of trust that I would have for people. I am probably more cautious when dealing with senior management, because if senior management don't trust each other, or I don't think they trust each other, so why they would trust me or why I would trust them. Trust is something that at a professional level starts at the top of the organisation and if you see at the top of that organisation a lack of trust, then it filters all the way down into the organisation." (Material Team Leader)

Such lack of trust was also directly confirmed by three of the interviewed senior managers, i.e. the Manufacturing Development Manager, the Technical Director, and the Procurement Director. The former two described, in the following comments, how the development of trust can be negatively impacted by a series of political games played by senior managers to pursue personal agendas:

"With my colleagues, the senior management team, there is a degree of trust but there is also a degree of wariness because my perception and

some other perceptions is that there is a lot of politics that get played within the company. So trust is there to an extent but there is wariness there as well. Today the organisation is more political, some people have agendas more on a personal level then on a business level and I think that ultimately does affect levels of trust. I would say that probably in the past there would have been more people with the organisation truly at heart but now it has changed slightly. There are probably more people that are concerned about the impact on them personally, rather than on the company as a whole" (Manufacturing Development Manager)

"I would say the trust is not that high. I feel that if I share too much information, some people would probably use that against me, which is not necessarily a way of engineering or engendering trust in me. You need to be careful about what you say to other people. I think we are quite a political organisation, very political to be honest. And I think a political organisation would not necessarily engender trust or support a good culture of trust. I think hierarchy wise, you probably trust less the higher up the hierarchy. I feel conformable talking about various things internally here, discussing things completely openly. But I fell much less comfortable talking to people outside, who are probably far more senior than myself." (Technical Director)

Similarly, the Procurement Director distinguished between trust relationships that he has developed with his office's peers, and more political type of relations that he has developed with other senior managers based at the company's headquarters:

"Within the company in here, I think trust is quite high and I think the advantage that we have is that we are a relatively small team, we have clear goals, we have clear objectives so there is no particular nasty side, the overall impression is that actually people do trust each other. However, if I then consider other areas of the business, I think it would differ. I work a lot in our headquarters…and I think the trust there varies by teams. Some of the teams are very political and this actually would lead me to believe that they distrust each other. I believe the more political you get the less trust is involved. And I think politics brakes down trust unfortunately…It's about how close you are to the politics of the situation and I guess, without being naïve, the higher up you go in the organisation, more politics and therefore probably less trust." (Procurement Director)

4.2.2. NatureOrg

As for SpiritCo, the specific job role covered by staff members within NatureOrg seems to significantly influence the development of trust. The Operation Officer D and the Corporate Planning Analyst distinguished, for example, in the following comments between employees, who develop trust by producing good quality work and by constantly delivering results, and managers, who mainly develop trust by taking care of the needs of their team members:

"I expect everyone to do their job well and to think how to do it even better. So for my colleagues, that is quite straightforward, to producing good consistent work and sharing it around the team. But for manager, it is about being a good manager. For my manager and my unit manager, I expect

them to manage well and that means not just to deal with what comes in but to be proactive, to have the need of the team foremost in their mind." (Operation Officer D)

"My productivity is high and if there are people within the team that perhaps do not have the same commitment then that is where you start to get an issue of being able to trust the individuals to provide you with quality materials you are looking for. In general, I trust each of the individual that report to me to provide to me the material and the quality that I require…On the other hand, with my own line manager, I trust him to make decisions that are best for the overall unit. Because I understand that he is having to balance competing priorities and tasks on the business, and I don't see all of them." (Corporate Planning Analyst)

Focusing specifically on the role of the line manager, the Operation Officer A and the Continuous Improvement Manager highlighted the availability and support of their own line managers as the main factors determining the development of trust relationships with them:

"I feel that I could go to her with any problems or any concerns, or any work related issues, you know it doesn't matter whether it's personal or work, always would stand up for you, talk you through things. I completely trust my line manager." (Operation Officer A)

"When I needed he was always there, he has always been willing to take time and has always been accessible. So I would say there has always been a good trust relationship." (Continuous Improvement Manager)

Equally, the Environmental Assessment Advisor described the approachability and support of his own line manager as the main factors positively influencing the development of trust toward him:

> *"I am very comfortable with approaching my line manager, I feel that he would respect my opinions and he would listen to any concerns I have, and I am quite confident that he would act if I needed assistance in any part of my job. I feel he would support me, he would back you, he would give you that support, so I would trust my line manager." (Environmental Assessment Advisor)*

The Directorate Support Manager highlighted instead the importance for line managers of providing transparent and honest communication and of focusing on the development of their own team members:

> *"A lot of it is about knowing and understanding the capacity and the capabilities of your staff, giving them appropriate things, stretching them where you can, so they kind of trust that you are looking at kind of developing them. It's about knowing and understanding each other and knowing what people want to do and are capable of doing. It's also about having that open and honest communication and being comfortable with positive constructive criticisms." (Directorate Support Manager)*

One of the organisation's program managers and the Continuous Improvement Manager also commented on the fact that line managers need to be consistent and fair toward their own team members. They need to be very careful about what they can promise to their teams, as they may have to deal with some conflicting priorities:

"I think you have to have an understanding of what an individual can commit to, or can deliver. As a manager, you can't promise something that is not in your gift to deliver. So I think people sometimes have to be quite careful about that because in the interpersonal relationships within the office, there is a quite high level of trust…I think there is trust within the interpersonal relationships but you have to qualify that…to be honest about what the organisation necessarily can commit to in each of these conversations. The most important factor of trust with any organisation is actually being able to say what you can do and delivering it. If you say to somebody I am going to do this and you don't do it, that is going to undermine trust.' (Program Manager)

"I have always tried to be fair, consistent and sometimes there is tension…as a manager you will try to deliver on several levels, you try to deliver what is best for the organisation and also taking into account what is good for the employees. So you have to balance all these different issues and I think sometimes that can be quite difficult and might create issues with trust." (Continuous Improvement Manager)

Furthermore, the Unit Area Administrator also stressed the importance for a manager of treating equally all his subordinates despite the different hierarchical positions, as well as the importance of allowing to them a certain degree of autonomy in their job:

"There is very good trust between both of us. I feel I could tell him if I wasn't happy with something or I thought he should do something differently. Although my grade is a lot lower than his grade, I still feel like

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an equal. I feel that what I say is valued as much as anyone else…so yeah

he trusts me to run this office really without too much interactions, he trusts

that I will ask him if there is a problem" (Unit Area Administrator)

A different range of factors determine instead the development of trust toward senior managers. Few staff members claimed of trusting senior managers due to their ability of effectively running the organisation, as well as their capacity of safeguarding jobs. In this regard, the Administration Officer and the Information Systems Team Leader commented for example:

"We have to trust our senior managers that they are prioritizing in the right

way…I suppose all comes from senior level and you would assume that

they know where they want the organisation to go and what they wanted to

do, and we couldn't really change that a huge amount, not at the grade that

I am at…I trust them just really to make the decisions I suppose that are

good for the organisation...I have no reasons really not to trust them."
(Administration Officer)

"I think I would trust them to do the right things because they have got

the whole picture, I think they have the interest of the organisation and the

staff…at the forefront of their mind but they don't have an easy job…I trust

them that I am going to have a job this time next year, whereas if I was in

industry I don't know if I would trust to believe that. If I was in the banking

*industry, I might not have a job this time next year." (*Information Systems

Team Leader*)*

Conversely, a large group of respondents manifested instead a certain lack of trust

toward senior managers due to several other factors. In the following comment, the External Funding Officer distinguished, for example, between a high level of trust in senior managers' expertise and a low level of trust in their management style:

> *"Staffs have to have a level of trust in management, because they have to. Whether they in their heart feel that they trust management is another issue. But certainly there is a high level of trust between colleagues, so in that respect there is no issues. The same with senior management, in terms of their level of expertise in their subject, there is no issue. Whether people trust their style of management, that's a different issue altogether."* *(External Funding Officer)*

The Operation Officers D and C doubted instead of senior managers' transparency and of their willingness to truly represent the views of their staffs:

> *"I trust senior managers less today. I am much more cynical and critical when they do communicate. I think what is actually going on here that they are not telling us."* *(Operation Officer D)*

> *"Trust is probably slightly lower than it was few years ago. The organisation has slightly lower morale and more uncertainty than 3-5 years ago, that's quite noticeable. I think there is less trust in senior managers representing the views of staffs."* *(Operation Officer C)*

Similarly, the External Funding Officer and the Efficient Government Officer raised serious concerns on senior managers' communication style, and on their lack of involvement with junior members of staff:

"Oh, trust is a lot worse…we have got to improve communication…what you are getting is snippet of information without the detail behind; and that is when, if you like, misinformation starts to spread around the building. If people don't understand the message then it's going to get misinterpreted…A lot of it is about communication I think, if they were honest and open about the issues and why we have to do things in a certain way, then people would feel ok. On the opposite, the less they communicate, the more distrust there will be. I think that some of the issue is that staffs don't feel that the senior managers are in touch with the reality of the staffs if you like." (External Funding Officer)

"I don't think there is that level of trust. I know somebody who I was speaking to this morning, a more mature lady, and she feels that no matter what she says, senior management would just do what they decide to do...we roughly have about 30% of people reading the notices that come out and I see this more than a lack of interest as a lack of trust. Because if they are not going to spend time seeing what the organisation wants to say to them, they are probably thinking – well, they will just get on and do it anyway, there is no point me involving myself in this." (Efficient Government Officer)

The Recreation & Access Officer also commented on the negative way senior managers tend to make use of the information they do receive from their staff:

"With senior managers we don't always know exactly what they are thinking and we don't always know exactly what they are trying to get to.

So it's not always completely clear when we do put information up to managers, we don't really have the whole picture. I mean I think they would trust us to give them the right information and we would trust them to use them as they see fit, but as they see fit might not be exactly what we were thinking. (Recreation & Access Officer)

The Directorate Support Manager manifested instead his concerns on the behaviors of senior managers and on how they tend to not display organisational values:

"Sometimes individual members of the management team might not best display the values and behaviors that they expect the rest of the organisation in their dealings with other members of staff. And I think that can sometimes cause tension. So you get people using their ranking in the organisation to make unnecessary demand, or to speak to people in ways that wouldn't be acceptable if anybody else did it, and I think that's probably the major issue with trust." (Directorate Support Manager)

While the Operation Officer B and the Unit Area Administrator alleged senior managers of pursuing personal agendas, being too remote, and not sufficiently trusting their staff in decision-making processes:

"I think ten, fifteen, twenty years ago there was no trust issues. I think today there are too many people that have got their own agenda and it is not the people you work with on a daily basis. I think the trust issue stems with the management team...I don't think they respect the staff enough, they don't appreciate the knowledge and the expertise that their staffs have, and they don't trust them enough to make decisions without being escalated up

to them…I think there is a general consensus that you can't really trust the decisions that the management team are making for the staff, on behalf of the staff. I would say that there is not a great deal of trust in the management team because they are so remote and a lot of the decisions that they have made they don't have the best interest of staff at heart. They have put policies and procedures in place that are contrary to the best interest of the staff. " (Operation Officer B)

"I think the general feeling is that staffs don't trust management. It could be that people don't know enough what is going on, they don't understand the reasons why things happen or decisions are made…we had staff survey in the past and the results were purely against management. And one of the complaint is that people don't see their managers, they are not aware of what is going on at the higher level." (Unit Area Administrator)

Similarly, the External Funding Officer and the Environmental Assessment Advisor also described a certain lack of trust toward senior managers, because of their pursuit of political agendas and their lack of sufficient opposition to the requests coming from the Scottish government:

"There is a lot of people here that haven't had a pay raise for 4 years now…and most people would blame management for not standing up to the requests of the Scottish Government…so there is an issue there, I suppose it comes with the fact that you blame somebody, and in the eyes of the people it's the management team sucking up to the Scottish Government." (External Funding Officer)

"As soon as you get to sort of senior management level, that's when the distrust comes in…the senior management group seems to be wanted to do exactly what the government wants them to do rather than sort of standing up more…and say this is what we think we should do and sort of having a sort of compromise. It doesn't seem to happen…I think they have a political agenda, which we don't have, and I am not sure that always the direction they want to take our organisation is the same as where I would want the organisation to go, or some of the staff would want the organisation to go. So there isn't that same level of trust that we are all wanting the same outcome." (Environmental Assessment Adviser)

Equally, the HR Business Partner also manifested her lack of trust toward certain senior managers, recognizing that some of them do tend to pursue a personal agenda:

"There are certain senior managers that I would trust and some that I wouldn't trust at all. Whereby some senior managers are very open and straightforward, others I think they have their own agenda sometimes to play and to take forward." (HR Business Partner)

4.3 Trust mechanisms at the interpersonal level

4.3.1 SpiritCo

The job role occupied by staff members at SpiritCo influences the development of trust by facilitating the creation of specific types of relationships. In the following comment, the Production Operator E differentiated, for example, between the relations that staff members form on the shop-floor with colleagues they constantly interact with, and

weaker type of relationships that are formed with other colleagues working in the office's environment:

> "*I think there is always a sort of them and us, people working on the floor and people working in offices. If you go to the offices, I think there is trust among the office staff because they work closely together. But we don't see these people all the time, we don't really see a lot of them therefore the trust in the shop floor will always be stronger than the trust you have got with anybody higher up, because we are working together and interacting every day.*" (Production Operator E)

Similarly, the Procurement Director also differentiated between close personal relationships in the office, which allow for one-to-one facial communication, and more distant and remote type of relations, requiring instead a more factual-based mode of communication:

> "*I think it's easier to build a trusting relationship here than it is to build it with a distance between people. It is easier to build trust on a one to one basis. In building trust and building relationship there are a lot of pieces of information and evidences: there is hard evidence, there is email communication, there is phone call communication, but you need to take into account facial one-to-one communication as well. With a relationship that has 2500 miles between us, it tends to be based on delivering what is required, it's harder communication, more direct, more factual and work based.*" (Procurement Director)

The Event Coordinator and the Production Operator C described instead the influence

that a specific job role might have on the development of trust relationships with senior managers. In the following comment, the former described, for example, how her previous role as personal assistant has allowed her to develop a certain degree of trust toward senior managers:

> *"I used to work in an assistant role for some of the senior managers when their assistant went off and I had a good relationships with them, so I probably just trust them from that early experience on a personal level. I never had an interaction with them giving me a reason not to trust them, I never had any issues." (Events Coordinator)*

Equally, the Production Operator C described how he has developed trust toward senior managers by having the opportunity to interact with them, and by knowing them on a personal level for several years:

> *"I have known a lot of senior management for a long time, so yeah I would say I trust them. I probably trust senior management more than maybe somebody that has only work here for two or three years. They don't know the senior management team. There is no a senior manager in here that would walk by me and say 'who is that guy?' I know everyone. So yeah, I have probably built a better level of trust over the years by getting to know them and speaking to them." (Production Operator C)*

Conversely, as demonstrated by the following comment from the Production Operator D, when a job role does not allow sufficient interactions with senior managers, it can detrimentally affect the development of trust relationships with them:

> *"I don't really have much direct dealing with senior managers, we don't*

see a lot of them on the shop floor…some of them I would trust but I don't

know them well enough and I have not had enough conversations with them

to say that I would trust them all heartedly. We don't see them, we don't see

enough of them." (Production Operator D)

This has also been confirmed by the Technical Director, who acknowledged how employees that do not have regular and direct interactions with him might develop a certain lack of trust toward him, as they do receive some contradictory messages:

"I don't think that the employees working for me would have the same level

of trust in me or I in them as probably the direct reports that would report

to me. I am probably quite comfortable if one of the end of line operators

doesn't trust me because probably from their perspective, they probably

see some contradictory things from me, some things that don't make really

sense in their mind. I don't think there is the same level of trust that would

be here. I think perhaps, quite a few operators would not necessarily trust

me, as they would probably expect a bit more and they aren't probably

getting it." (Technical Director)

Besides the influence of the job role, several staff members also recognized how other specific characteristics of their relationships with colleagues might have a fundamental influence on the development of trust. The Production Line Manager and the Production Team Leader highlighted, for example, the importance of 'confidentiality' with both their peers and their own line managers:

"With my team, in order to have trust it's important that anything that one

tells me on the shop floor is done in confidence and remains in confidence.

They will tell me things maybe about their personal life, things that they may have impacted them, upsetting them, changing their behaviours or their performance even. And if they make me aware of something then they know I would count for that, I would take that into consideration. And also it gives me the opportunity to go back and touch base and see how things are…the same is with my manager, if somebody got told stuff in this room then it stays in this room and you do it through your own discretion. There are certain things you would never say out of this room." (Production Line Manager)

"The people I work with in my line, I trust them to keep certain things confidential. I have trust in them that if I have got a problem, they won't go and tell somebody else about it...I have also got a lot of trust with my direct line manager as I can go to him in confidence, he trusts me and I trust him. If I say something to him, I know that I am going to trust him that nothing else won't go any further." (Production Team Leader)

In the following comments, the Environment Health and Safety (EHS) Manager and the Manufacturing Development Manager emphasised the importance of 'honesty' and 'integrity' when dealing with their colleagues:

"To get trust you need honesty. I think you need to be honest and you need that commitment to do what you have said, you need to fulfil your commitments so when you make a promise you need to fulfil that. And if you don't fulfil it then you don't get trust. I think you need to stick to your words. If you promise somebody something, you have to deliver it. And if

you can't deliver then you should be honest and tell them this is behind, so they should still trust you because you have been honest and upfront with them." (EHS Manager)

"It's about conducting yourself with integrity and keeping your words, being open and honest with people. It develops over a period of time. I think honesty is an important part to gain trust. You can't promise them the earth and then not deliver, but likewise you cannot say anything, you have to give them some hope. And if it's bad news, it's bad news, but you have got to manage that situation. If you don't, then you don't have trust." (Manufacturing Development Manager)

The Senior Production Manager and the Warehouse Team Leader highlighted instead the importance of providing 'respect', 'openness' and 'fairness':

"I think to have trust you have to have respect for one another and to have respect you got to earn that by just being fair and treat everybody the same. I think it's about being extremely straight, tell each other how things are going, and where we have got an issue then we talk about it as openly as we can, and we then agree a set of actions." (Senior Production Manager)

"It's about providing support and encouragement. And is more than just a work. Because some of the people that work for me would come to me with personal problems, and asked you how you could help, how you could support. I do listen the things that people come and want to talk me about, we have got the mutual respect for each other and I won't ask anybody down there to do something that I couldn't do myself. But as long as you

have got mutual respect for each other, then trust is there." (Warehouse

Team Leader)

Furthermore, the Production Operator B provided a good example of how a lack of honesty, integrity and respect could affect the development of trust. In the following comment, he described the recent introduction of the company's night shift and how this has been handled by senior management:

"I don't really trust the senior managers because they don't really seem to

tell you the full story...I just think when they get you to sign for things, they

don't tell you the full story on why you have to sign...I don't really trust

them. For example, with the night shift, they kind of change the rules all

the times. Now we work at half past nine on Sunday evening without been

paid overtime, which was never done before. It used to be a really great

company to work for but the business has changed...As the years progress,

production has probably went up, the standards were better, but I just don't

think it's a nice company anymore, they have kept taking things away from

you." (Production Operator B)

4.3.2 NatureOrg

As for SpiritCo, the development of trust in NatureOrg is also determined by the characteristics of the relationships that staff members build with each other. Many respondents highlighted the importance of communication and of developing effective interpersonal relationships. In this regard, one of the organisation's project managers commented for example:

"For me personal relationships and trust go hands in hands. If I know somebody a little bit then I am more likely to trust them than if I don't really know them. If my only interaction with them has been when they have failed to do something, I am less likely to trust them. But as I get to know somebody, I would trust them more." (Project Manager)

Similarly, the Operation Officer A highlighted the importance of communication, especially in those situations where decisions need to be taken or deadlines have to be respected:

"People carry out the actions that they said they were going to and following through, or at least explaining the reasons behind why they are doing something. That develops trust. If you explain actions regardless of whether they agree with you or not, I think that builds trust…trust is built up through people delivering what they said they will, or say that they can't rather than just letting things slip. That for me is a big part of it, there are people that I trust less to deliver because they consistently miss deadlines, or they consistently misunderstand what they have to do, or they just ignore all the guidance and make it ten times harder for themselves." (Operation Officer A)

While the Senior HR Business Partner acknowledged that trust can develop at intervals according to the specific level of communication required to carrying out different projects:

"I guess at different time it's different because it depends on what you are working on. When you are working on challenging projects, you are going

to work much closely and having to give some time to give guidance, to hold their hands, so I guess the trust relationship gets stronger there. It is not a constant. At times, you have got an employee who is working for you who needs a bit of mentoring and guidance, then you need to strengthen that relationship because they need to sort of re-engage with you and remember that they can trust you." (Senior HR Business Partner)

The Corporate Planning Analyst emphasised instead the importance of adopting different approaches when dealing with subordinates or line managers, acknowledging that a lack of trust from the latter could affect the relationship with the former:

"You need to try to put yourself in the shoes of those that report directly to you, understand how they would receive information and amend your approach. But you do also put yourself into the shoes of your line manager and you maybe approach it slightly differently in that you provide a range of options, and acknowledging that you don't see everything that your line manager wants. And you do that to maintain that trust, because if the individual doesn't have any trust in you or questions that relationship, that directly impacts on how you handle your own staff." (Corporate Planning Analyst)

Open communication and close personal relationships are also particularly important for the development of trust with senior managers. In the following comments, the Advice Information Officer and the Efficient Government Officer commented, for example, that the improved communication style of the current company's directors has facilitated the development of trust toward them:

"It used to be terrible, there was very low communication at all from senior staff and I think that has changed quite considerable, in that we have far better directors now. Our previous directors were not necessarily as communicative but I think it is a different culture within the organisation now and that builds trust." (Advice Information Officer)

"When it comes to senior management, I think we have now got an open communication, I think our directors are very forward thinking. I would say 10-15 years ago, public sector senior directors wouldn't know the name of their staff, whereas now they do and the directors will speak to you in the lift, will talk to you in the atrium and know your name. And I think that creates trust with the ground level staff, definitely." (Efficient Government Officer)

Similarly, the Program Manager and the Continuous Improvement Manager also highlighted the importance of developing personal contacts with senior managers in order to build trust relationships with them:

"It has probably got better, because I have got closer to them to be honest, I suppose. Because when I started, I was in a role where I didn't have much interactions with senior management at all for maybe few years, and then it kind of gradually started to build up from then on as I moved around in different posts. And then from about 2000 onwards, I find myself in roles where for various reasons I was probably routinely coming into contact with senior management. So I would build trust up over that time." (Program Manager)

"I have trust in our management team because I have worked with them. I've always had good working relationships with senior managers and I think the fact that I have quite a unique position, because some staffs say that some of our directors aren't visible enough. But, because of the role I was in, I never had any perceptions that they weren't visible because I was working with them…so I was probably in a better position to understand what was being done and why they decided what they did. But there is certainly a broader view in the organisation that some senior managers are not as visible as people would like." (Continuous Improvement Manager)

Additionally, the Environmental Assessment Advisor also described how the close geographical location of senior managers has allowed her to engage more frequently with them and therefore more easily developing trust relationships:

"I suspect we are probably luckier here because most of the senior managers are based here so you do have a chance to engage with them, just by passing in the corridor for example. So I guess if you know that person on a sort of social way, you are more likely to trust them and to want to understand their position, where they are coming from." (Environmental Assessment Advisor)

Conversely, as the following comment from the Information Systems Team Leader illustrates, a lack of sufficient communication and transparency from senior managers can significantly hinder the development of trust toward them:

"I don't trust my boss, I have very little to do with him. He doesn't interact

with the team, everything he says it is passed down and sometimes I like to debate things. I like to be able to have my say on things and he is never there to do that. And it always has to go to my line manager to pass it back rather than him come to us…and if you have a chance to give him a query, you never get a straight answer. Say for example - how long will it be before the next round of redundancy? - He would never ever give me a straight answer." (Information Systems Team Leader)

This was also confirmed by the Operation Officers D and B, who emphasised how the lack of sufficient interpersonal relationships and direct interactions with senior managers does represent a significant issue, given the recent changes and the increased government's pressures affecting the organisation:

"We are in a period of change, there are a lot of new pressures that come down to middle managers from senior managers. The government tells senior managers that they want the company to change in a certain way and senior managers pass the message down to my manager…with my immediate line manager, it probably hasn't affected the level of trust because I feel we are close enough to the daily work and we are working together; whereas at the opposite extreme, it has affected the level of trust that I had with senior management because of my opinion about the way that changes have been implemented, and most importantly been communicated…that external pressure makes the manager's job more difficult, and the further removed they are from the front line staff, the harder it is for them to maintain that trust." (Operation Officer D)

"We never see our management team whereas before they were visible, they came to speak to staff, they would ask their opinion, their views. So the decisions that they were making, you felt that you had that trust that they were taking the decisions in the best interest of staff. Now, it seems they are taking the decisions based on the best interest of the direction of the Scottish Government. To me they are not nurturing, not protecting, they are not trusting their staff. I think what we have is very much a top heavy organisation, and staffs don't feel open enough to speak to the management team…you can't trust people that you don't know, you can't trust people that you don't meet, you can't trust people that you can't have an open and frank conversation with." (Operation Officer B)

Furthermore, respondents also highlighted the importance of guaranteeing both 'confidentiality' and 'autonomy' for the development of trust relationships. The Information Systems Team Leader commented, for example, that he does trust his line manager as he has always kept shared information as confidential:

"We are really good, I can tell him anything…you know if I have got problems with one of the staff members, I can trust him to go no further, and I know he would give me the right feedback, what I need to know or do. I really trust him." (Information Systems Team Leader)

Conversely, the Operation Officer B manifested a lack of trust toward her respective unit manager, accusing him of pursuing personal agendas and not holding confidential information:

"I would trust him as far as I could through him. He has his own agenda

and there are instances where he has not worked in the best interest of the staff...there is not much I would tell my unit manager because I wouldn't trust him to hold it as confidential. My team and my line manager would keep things confidential if I tell them something, I don't have that same confidence in my Unit Manager." (Operation Officer B)

The Unit Area Administrator emphasised instead the importance of providing 'autonomy' to her team, and of being able to carry out her job without standing over colleagues' shoulders. This seems to be particularly important given the recent shortage of staffs within her team:

"I trust my team to getting on with their job, I trust that they will carry out the job without me standing over their shoulders...they know they can ask me if they need any help...I trust that they are going to do the job that they are supposed to do. So yeah, there is a lot of trust. Particularly, we used to have a lot more admin staff and we had a big voluntary redundancy last year. I lost 5 of my team members, so we had to really pull resources together to cover the work of the people who had left." (Unit Area Administrator)

Similarly, the Operation Officer D considered the fact of not being constantly overseen as the main factor influencing the trust relationship that he has developed with his own line manager. While the Advice Information Officer also commented that his current director has managed to develop a good level of trust with her team by allowing more autonomy than her predecessor:

"I am giving a lot of leeway. My work is not overseen on a daily basis, the way I organize and prioritize my work is not checked by him daily, so there is a high level of trust I guess." (Operation Officer D)

"My old director had a different style of working, I think he was more an old fashion style, he was more a kind of doing as I say, and had no problems with just telling people to do things and basically getting folks to do his work. Whereas the current director is completely different, she has got trust with everybody. There is not this controlling kind of way of working as for the previous one, she is very good for that." (Advice Information Officer)

Likewise, the Administrator Officer and the HR Business Partner also emphasised the importance of autonomy and of working with their own initiatives. As explained in the following comments, this seems to be essential for them given the fact that their line managers are respectively working remotely and working part-time:

"I am remotely managed...I have got the trust, she knows that I am going to do the work I am given and I can work with my initiative. I don't need somebody checking on me all the time, so if you got trust with somebody that's the key, to leave them to get on with their work…whereas I have been in a section in the past where they were always checking up…if there is a good relationship, you shouldn't have to do that, just go on and do the work." (Administrator Officer)

"My current line manager is the Senior HR Business Partner. She is a really good line manager in terms of trust and very open in terms of communication. She lets me get on with my work, I think she has trust in

my delivery without sitting down and having regular one-to-one sort of

catch up. The other issue is that she works part-time as well. I think that

you need to have a certain level of trust there as well to flag things when

necessary. While I trust her in terms of directions and letting me know

what's happening at the right time." (HR Business Partner)

4.3 Trust mechanisms at the organisational level

4.4.1 SpiritCo

Respondents of SpiritCo identified organisational mechanisms influencing both positively and negatively the development of trust within their company. In the following comments, the Warehouse Team Leader and the HR Business Partner described, for example, how trust levels may be dependent on the company's morale and the related training offers, on the degree of communication provided by senior management, as well as on the changes affecting the company's culture:

"I think trust levels go through kind of ups and downs according to what

happens in the business. What would happen is that you have pick, training

in different time of the year where morale would be sky high, and then there

would be other times when morale would be down. So if morale is down

then things like trust go a wee bit, because we may not be getting as much

communication from the upper management as before." (Warehouse Team

Leader)

"I think trust levels vary as the company develops. As the organisation is

growing, trust I would say goes up and down because you then start going

through cultural changes. Way back in 1998, when were a unit of 30 people, we were like a very small family so you had a huge amount of trust because we were all interdependent on each other to deliver the objective of the organisation. But as the organisation has grown, trust can sometimes become very thin because you have got so many different factions operating and you have got people with different views and opinions coming into the organisation. The culture has changed significantly as the organisation has moved towards tougher goals, reduced costs, becoming more efficient but still deliver high standard. For changing all that, it's the culture that needs to change and trust is part of that culture foundation. It goes up and down." (HR Business Partner)

The Manufacturing Development Manager commented that trust levels tend to fluctuate according to the different departments and the hierarchical levels of the company, suggesting that lower levels of trust may be found at the higher ladder of the organisational hierarchy:

"I think trust varies a lot…it is different at different level within the organisation and it is different within different departments…sometimes there are conflicting business objective between departments, there are politics going on within the organisation, or maybe simpler things as friendship or lengths of relationships, where trust has been built up over a period of time. There are maybe other levels where trust is lower, it just depends…I think probably the higher up the organisation, the trust is probably tighter." (Manufacturing Development Manager)

Other staff members focused instead on specific organisational practices positively influencing the development of trust. The Production Line Manager and the Production Team Lead suggested, for example, that the running of management courses, as well as the implementation of several management practices, have positively contributed to enhance trust throughout the company:

> *"I think trust is rising because we have done few management courses and at these management courses one of the thing that comes out on a regular basis is that there were trust issues within the factory. And I have seen some of those barriers been broken down and these have changed a bit some of the behaviours of the individuals in here." (Production Line Manager)*

> *"We have been doing 5S, Continuous Improvement, Lean Manufacturing. All that involves every person being completely involved with each stage of the production line they are working on. So everyone is more involved now and that has built us together as a team. Everyone is involved in the business now, we all take responsibilities for what we do, and all that build trust up with each other and with the colleagues we are working with." (Production Team Lead)*

Similarly, the Production Operator A described how the introduction of the new Global Performance Management System (GPS) has positively impacted the development of trust by favouring a higher degree of transparency:

> *"There are a lot of new things that have influenced trust in here over the past few years. The introduction of the Global Performance System for example has been a major change. I can now log into the system and see*

the top guys' objectives. I could go on and find out what my boss' objectives are for the year and anybody can get in and see what my objectives are. It's more open that way, that's good for trust, there is nothing hidden that way." (Production Operator A)

The Global Archive Manager and the Project Accountant recognized instead the importance of teamworking and described how having common objectives can favour the development of trust:

"I think we have built up that level of trust within the company with the employees and also higher management because we have all come together as one team now. So everyone supports each other and you try to build up that trust. There is a lot of trust within the company, we can all trust each other and that builds up that relationship." (Global Archive Manager)

"Trust levels are very good, working as a team we trust each other to know what we are doing. We do put a lot of trust in each other, there is a lot of trust between managers and the workers, there is very much a feeling of we are all in this together. So if I am trying to achieve something or get something done, it is not because I want to, it's because it will help the business and the management team. So that feeling of we are all in it together, we are all working for the same thing, I think it leads to trust." (Project Accountant)

Equally, the Procurement Director recognized the importance of teamworking. He described how, besides establishing common goals, teamworking also simultaneously favours the development of trust by preventing the pursuit of personal agendas:

> *"To operate efficiently we actually rely on trusting each other and helping each other, so there is a quite high level of trust within that team. It is also very good in terms of preventing people from pursuing their own agenda. People with their own agenda become less trusted by colleagues, however if you have a common goal that binds you together then you build trust because nobody is perceived as following their own agenda."* *(Procurement Director).*

While the Environment Health and Safety (EHS) Advisor highlighted a specific form of teamworking, describing how the use of cross-functional teams has allowed to strengthen trust relationships across departments:

> *"I think cross functional teams are really good, because they allow everyone to meet up at the same time every day at half past 9 for about 10 min. We have all the business functions coming along and we help each other with small problems. That helps to build up trust. Basically it touches on everything it happened the previous day and if there is any actions we need to take...it's an open and honest meeting and I think that helps developing and building trust inter-departmentally and break down the silos which have historically been there between different departments."* *(EHS Advisor)*

Besides teamworking, the Project Accountant and the Production Line Manager also

recognized the importance of clear communication practices in order to develop trust. In the following comments, they highlighted the importance of effectively sharing information and of clearly defining staffs' roles and responsibilities:

"I think the level of trust in here is good because most people have genuinely worked with each other for a long time, so they know what other people will do and what they won't do…I think it comes down to having clearly defined roles and responsibilities from the top to the bottom. And if they are understood not only by the people themselves but also by the people they are working with, then you have the basis for trust. If you don't have that structure in place, you don't have the basis upon which to trust each other." (Project Accountant)

"I think if you can communicate more often, quicker, faster that can help to build trust. If you sit and think and don't act then people will start to make up their stories, interpret the information you are giving them in a different way and start thinking that you are not telling them the truth. Trust is built on communication, it is something that has to be built, it has to be put forward." (Production Line Manager)

Similarly, the Warehouse Team Leader also emphasised the importance of adopting efficacious communication practices to enhance trust through proper information sharing across the company:

"We are trying to improve the communication tools within the work, doing different things for it. That then gives a level of trust because people from the top are cascading information that is not as readily available for your

immediate line manager through whatever means...information needs to be easily available for people, as much information can be shared, it stops rumours and the wee negative kind of angle for people...so we have got kind of tools there in place now to share communication and information and everything that is going to impact the business as quickly as we can."
(Warehouse Team Leader)

Among the mentioned communication practices, the Events Coordinator highlighted the company's monthly briefs, which has enhanced trust by allowing better information sharing and a better involvement of staff members in decision-making processes:

"We do now have a monthly brief and in it the company tries to share as much information as possible. So whatever is happening in the business it is then filtered down to the rest of employees...so I think they have interactions with the company and through that I think it comes trust…if you actively involved people in any decision making process, that naturally builds up trust because you have had your input. On the other hand, if you don't know things then you are always going to doubt and doubts do not promote trust, because as soon as you doubt then you start to question trust." (Events Coordinator)

The Production Operator A and the Environment Health and Safety (EHS) Manager focused instead on the beneficial impact of the company's core values:

"[The company] has got its own set of values that came out maybe about 12-18 months ago, that's the way they want you to act, the way they want

you to behave, the way you should feel towards people, the company and
everything else. I know it sounds a bit cheesy, but when you are working
it's actually quite a good thing. We should be open and honest, we should
be able to trust." (Production Operator A)

"I think the trust level in the company is quite high, the company has done
a lot of promotion of their core values, we try to portray a kind of open and
honest culture, honesty and trust are part of our values. So trust is
definitely being talked about more and it's more important now than it was.
The company has also done a lot of surveys with the employees to find out
how they find communication and trust to be. There is a lot of work being
done at that level to try to engage the workforce, more communication to
be more open, and that again should help to increase trust." (EHS
Manager)

On the same line, the Production Operator C and the Production Line Manager
explained how the company's values have recently been adopted to encourage certain
kind of behaviours, and they have also been tied to the company's Performance
Management System (GPS):

"I think trust has improved over the years, we are trusted more now...over
the last two years that they have brought the values into place, the 4 values
are trust, passion, care and excellence…they give you something to work
toward as they are part of your assessment every year, they give you a
focus." (Production Operator C)

"Trust is part of our values. We are measured on values and trust is one of

them. I will be as open and honest as I can be with everyone I deal with. We all have got objectives to meet and the values are part of your objectives. If you live and breathe the company's values you would be doing ok…I sell the values to my people. For instance, when we have done the GPS, I told them to pick two of the values and give me an example of when they show these values. However, unless you ultimately buy into the values yourself, you can't sell them to your people." (Production Line Manager)

Similarly, the Global Archive Manager and the Production Operator D also emphasised the effectiveness of trust as an organisational value, as well as its connection to the company's performance management system:

"Having trust as one of our values probably makes you more aware. Because for example at this time of the year, we do our performance management system and in that you are supposed to look at all the values and say whether you think you are performing well against the values, and your boss needs to comment on that." (Global Archive Manager)

"They are trying getting everybody working in the same way, everybody with the same mindset...people are reminded of the values quite often, they are everywhere and trust is always the first one…they have also tight in everybody's bonus and their performance review to the values, you are asked to demonstrate the values and explain how you demonstrate them."
(Production Operator D)

On the contrary, several respondents manifested instead their scepticism on the utility

of trust as an organisational value. In the following comments, the Procurement Director and the Project Accountant recognized, for example, that trust is not sufficiently enforced to make any real difference:

"With values you have to watch, I think a lot of company just threw out we have the following values. I think we really got to demonstrate that one. As a company, you genuinely do want these values instilled in people and I think where values as a set of factors or tools quite often fall down is that they are just written, nothing is followed up. So if you take for example our performance system, we have values in there but it isn't really a particularly integrated part. I don't get bonuses to display the values. So I do not think it is a phenomenal great tool, I don't think it is really useful to build trust as the use of business objectives, team working and high-performance teams. These are far more powerful tools than a set of values." (Procurement Director)

"It seems that the company is trying to promote trust as something new, but it should have always been there, people should always trust everyone to try to push the company forward. But I think it is more a focus now. However, I think values like trust can play a role only if they are regularly enforced. Is trust enforced regularly enough to make a difference compare to other company that wouldn't enforce that? My suspicion is that it is not enforced enough to make any real difference." (Project Accountant)

The HR Business Partner also recognized that several production operators are very sceptical on the adoption of the organisational values from senior managers.

Consequently, as she explained in the following comment, production operators could decide of not adopting the values either:

"As an organisation we have our values and trust is one of those values…they are widespread across the whole organisation. And you are expected to live under those values and act and show those values. Now, you could ask to a production operator if are those values lived. Do you see those values? And they would say no, because I don't see it happening at the top and once I see walking the talking at the top, I'll act like that as well. But every individual always thinks that he or she is living those values but the difference is how, the level of your interpretation, and that's a personal thing. It's very hard to measure." (HR Business Partner)

Further reservations on the organisational values were also expressed by the Plant Engineer and by the Production Operator B in the following comments:

"I think the values are great but I don't think they are heard, I don't think people adhere to them. The values are part of your GPS, which is your salary for next year and things like that, but I don't think that people put them in practice as they should...I believe it would be great if everybody had their working life around that, but it just doesn't happen, no unfortunately". (Plant Engineer)

"You don't need to ask me that. There is no trust and honesty in here. I don't think there is trust because they are lying. They brought the values up not a long ago and I just laugh about it. It makes look good for them, for senior managers. When people see that, they think oh it's a trustworthy

company, as if we are all a big happy family, when I don't think we are…I think everybody kind of trusted each other much more in the past, but then there has been a lot of back-stabbing and lying and these core values have come out instead." (Production Operator B)

Besides the criticisms on the functioning of trust as an organisational value, several respondents also identified other mechanisms negatively influencing the development of trust. The Material Team Leader and the Plant Engineer described, for example, a low level of trust due to the mounting business pressures and the increasing levels of stress affecting the workforce:

"I have been working for the company since 2009 and at the moment I think trust is probably at the lowest level I have seen. Partly due to business pressures, there are a lot of business pressures at the moment. I have seen trust levels dropping in certain areas in the last two years...in a lot of cases you are taking people's word for things, and sometimes people would tell you what you want to hear as opposed to the reality of the situation. But for any organisations to survive there must be more than 50% trust within the organisation, I don't think in any organisation you would ever have 100% trust." (Material Team Leader)

"I think it's very important that you have trust within your company and your workmates but I don't think we have it in a lot of areas, I really don't. I am 30 years with the firm and I feel that it is worse now than ever has been. It's just the people we have, we have brought a lot of people in from other firms and I just don't think that they are the right people…people are

really stressed now, we have a lot of absenteeism because of this stress, we

are so busy. I feel this puts an awful lot of pressures on a lot of people and

it causes problems, there is no doubt about that." (Plant Engineer)

Issues related to higher business pressures, increased workloads and mounting stress levels were also recognized by several other respondents. The Project Accountant argued, for example, that workload pressures have negatively impacted trust levels throughout the company by making it more difficult for staff members to keep their promises and commitments to their colleagues:

"It's hard for people to achieve their commitments due to workload

pressures. For sure this has an impact on trust, because people are so busy.

If somebody makes a commitment then there is often a question mark about

whether it will be done, because there are always other priorities coming

along and resources are quite tight. And if somebody said that they will do

something and they don't do it, then it does put a question mark on trust."

(Project Accountant)

Similarly, the Material Team Leader and the Production Operator A described how staff members have been under a lot of commercial pressures, which in turn have negatively affected the development of trust relationships:

"Everyone is busy, a lot of people are under a lot of pressure and a lot of

stress, and these are the times when people start to forget core things such

as trust. When someone has a stressful period, that is when they can break

and that's when things like trust can drop." (Material Team Leader)

"I think we are getting a lot of pressures from above with figures and

targets and things like that. And if things are running fine, everybody is happy. It's when things aren't going so great, where maybe conditions may not be the greatest, where new things, new machine, new procedure can influence as you have a lot of pressures and trust can break...orders are going up and we have got a lot more targets, there is a lot more pressure on you." (Production Operator A)

While the Production Operator B and the Manufacturing Development Manager described how the increased business pressures have created a more stressful environment, which has raised fears and has engendered a blaming culture:

"Trust is falling. There are a lot more arguments and confrontations. Everybody used to come in here and have a smile on their faces, everybody was more relaxed. But now you work as a team and...if you are smiling they want to know why you are smiling. In the past, I think people trusted each other a lot more than now... too many targets to meet, they pressure you to meet your targets and trying to get everybody to take control of everything and work hard. Fair enough, but it's too much pressure." (Production Operator B)

"There is more pressure on the business. There is more focus on KPIs, on cost and on achieving strategic objectives. There is more focus on delivering projects on time and I think that can sometimes drive a wee bit of fear within the organisation. You know, fear of failure, fear of making mistakes, and that can sometimes have an impact on trust. Where there is fear, you can then tend to generate a blaming culture and this tends to be

detrimental to trust." (Manufacturing Development Manager)

In the following comment, the Material Controller provided a good example of how the increased business pressures could lead to the development of a blaming culture, undermining the relationship between managers and their own team members:

"If the line manager is getting pressure from his own line manager because his team is not performing well, then the line manager might put too much pressure on the team and that might affect the relationship with the manager and may cause conflicts. For example, a manager may get pressure from his own manager to cut costs but still deliver the same amount of work. His drivers would have therefore to do more and more, which means they will drive faster and faster, and then an accident happens and the driver is the one who gets a warning. Why were you driving so fast? Because he is doing the job of two people but nobody really cares until the accident happens, but then the driver is the one who eventually gets the warning. This can influence the relationship with your own line manager." (Material Controller)

A second example was provided instead by the Events Coordinator, who emphasised how the increased workload may have led to the adoption of new organisational systems, which in turn have negatively impacted on the development of trust:

"The workload is a lot bigger than it used to be. When your workload gets bigger, some people can't deliver, they are too busy so things do fall and then trust falls with them...also, when you bring a new system in, the trust level may drop because some people can't work or it brings up different

kind of barriers. It increases everyone's workload hugely and you can't get

as many things done as before…so the trust levels went down because of

it, because people were not getting parts of their job done due to the new

systems." (Events Coordinator)

The HR Business Partner provided a third example, describing how the increased workload has produced instability and has forced the introduction of the night-shift for production operators:

"As the volume of work increases, some production operators were

required to do a night shift. If you were to ask them how that was handled,

they would say that they would probably have a lack of trust in the

organisation...I would say that it's about 60-65% of trust level at the

moment because there have been so many changes like the night shift and

the company continues to change. The change cycle is constant, you may

have a period of stability for 4-5 weeks and then everything changes again.

And I think that maybe has an impact on the trust level because there is so

much changes and everything operates at such a fast pace. I think that has

an impact on the trust level, as there isn't enough time for employees to

step back and absorb it, and to have a degree of stability." (HR Business

Partner)

Indeed, as the Production Operator E confirmed, the introduction of the night-shift has caused a certain lack of trust amongst production operators:

"Because there have been so many big changes with the company, I think

there has been a decrease of trust. Last year we had put a night shift

on…and now they want a night shift on again…that's causing a wee bit of

bother because if they don't get volunteers, they just gonna say, you are

going on night shift. It used to be a 3 months' notice or a month's notice,

but they don't have to do that now because they have changed our contracts

and now we have got no say in the matter. If they don't get the scale of

volunteers they want, they can just come down in a week's time and tell you

that you are going night shift. I think that puts distrust in a few folks' mind."
(Production Operator E)

4.4.2 NatureOrg

As for SpiritCo, respondents of NatureOrg also identified several factors influencing the development of trust at an organisational level. Among the factors positively influencing the development of trust, the Continuous Improvement Manager highlighted, for example, the consensual decision-making processes characterizing the organisation:

"I would say that trust in the organisation is quite high, we are a very

consensual organisation, so a lot of the things we do are based quite often

on people having discussed and agreed the directions that we are going in.

We have a quite highly educated workforce, so I think people are prepared

to questions and analyse things. And I think that this has led to a

management style that needs to take people's opinions into account, so

there is a lot of discussions and considerations before a decision is

reached." (Continuous Improvement Manager)

Similarly, the Advice Information Officer and the HR Business Partner also recognized

the positive influence of the high degree of openness characterizing the organisation and the beneficial effects of the recently stipulated partnership agreement:

"I think trust got higher, it got better over the years because I think there has been more openness from everybody within the organisation. There is less secrecy involved with certain projects and things, so that builds trust. More openness from senior managers to the lower level, the better the organisation would be." (Advice Information Officer)

"I think the trust that we have got generally between employees is pretty good, we work closely with the trade union and that involves a lot of trust...we have definitely moved toward more partnership working and the union has an important part to play. There has been a level of openness and trust built with the union, where I think potentially previously that wasn't the case...it is very important to us that we maintain a good level of trust, no matter what we are doing, trying to be open and honest." (HR Business Partner)

The interviewed Project Manager argued that more structured organisational processes have improved professionalism, which in turn has enhanced the level of trust within the organisation. While the Directorate Support Manager focused instead on the role of communication systems, such as computers and video conferencing, and on how these have positively impacted on the development of trust:

"You know we have a business planning process which is much more structured, we have a sort of corporate planning processes which relates to the business planning process, and we have a recruitment process and

also a performance review process, which is much more structured and related to the businesses plan. And I think all of those things have improved professionalism of management within the organisation, and I think they have actually improved the level of trust." (Project Manager)

"In the past we didn't have computers and we had a lot more meetings, but now because we have got video conferences we can communicate a lot better. I suppose, that has got to give you trust because you know what is going on...I think overall the trust is pretty good, I think sometimes people don't necessarily understand why decisions are taken, and I think sometimes communication could be further improved and that would further improve trust, but I think overall is pretty good, not perfect but pretty good." (Directorate Support Manager)

Alongside the mentioned organisational features, the Trade Union Convenor and the Efficient Government Officer also described how the challenging budget conditions, as well as the higher business pressures facing the organisation in recent years, have further increased the level of trust by pushing employees and management to collaborate more closely with each other:

"I have been in this organisation now for 8 years and I think trust is improving, it's getting better every year and it's quite high now, I think it is over 80% trust now. We have a reducing budget and we have more need for this organisation to rely on its employees to going the extra mile. So there is a lot of good will that has to be gardened by the management, so they have to show trust to get those employees to do that much more for

them. The company can't afford not to trust their employees because we wouldn't function efficiently if they didn't, especially in the current financial climate." (Trade Union Convenor)

"I would say trust is getting better. We are working with a reduced staff so we have to have that attitude that we all have to get on with it and nobody can work autonomously anymore...as far as I am aware, the surveys that the organisation has done haven't got any worse in the last couple of years, in fact I do believe that the last 12 months have been actually better." (Efficient Government Officer)

Likewise, several other respondents also recognized the tougher business conditions faced by the organisation in recent year. However, they expressed very different opinions on how these have affected the development of trust. In the following comments, the Operation Officer D and the Recreation & Access Officer acknowledged, for example, a quite high level of trust within the organisation:

"There is a strong culture, we trust each other to try to do our best, to work hard, sometimes to even more than our best. The culture that exists within the organisation does depend and benefit from a good level of trust. I see [the organisation] as a positive place to work even though things have got tougher in recent years." (Operation Officer D)

"I think the policies are tighter now, it's just different policies and slightly different procedures, maybe a bit tighter. But I think it has always been a quite trusting organisation, there has always been a lot of respect between colleagues, manager respecting staff and staff respecting managers. It has

always been quite trusting." (Recreation & Access Officer)

Similarly, the Senior HR Business Partner recognized the existence of a certain degree of uncertainty and a shortage of resources, which have affected the development of trust. However, at the same time, she also highlighted that these have not caused significant mistrust in the workforce, as demonstrated by the lack of support to industrial actions and by the organisation's low turnover rate:

"There are degrees of trust because I think all of our employees realize that we are a good employer, that the company is a good place to work. But I think at the moment there is also a degree of uncertainty amongst staff because money is tight, resources are being squeezed, we are asking them to do more with less, and possibly the organisation isn't communicating that very well. I think more so now than ever, there is a degree where employees are possibly less trusting than before…employees are expressing concerns and are a bit unsure as to what the future holds…we know that we have got increasing level of stress but we also know that we don't have a huge level of support when there are industrial actions…if we thought that there was a huge degree of mistrust in the organisation, one would expect that when the trade unions call industrial actions, they would be getting large level of support, whereas they are not getting it…[and] we don't have a huge turnover of staff, we don't lose staff, our turnover stats are pretty low. So if they were real issues with trust, one would expect to lose staffs but that's not the case." (Senior HR Business Partner)

Differently, another group of respondents described instead how the increased business pressures, the organisation's declining budget, and the related degree of uncertainty have significantly undermined the development and maintenance of trust relationships. In this regard, the Corporate Planning Analyst commented, for example:

"I would say that we are struggling now to move on, I think the pressures are coming down in terms of the budget and are pushing down our ability to establish working relationship and trust. That is a real pressure that has begun to be difficult, I think that's going to be a challenge for us…the declining budget put pressure on relationships which take time then to maintain and you have to maintain some sort of level of trust to make things happening. The real challenge for us is that we are going through a process of significant change now, we have less money and we need to do things differently. And change needs trust, if you don't have trust you would not affect change in the organisation. I see this as the biggest challenge at the moment, how can we maintain and build trust and at the same time affect change in a resource-constrained environment." (Corporate Planning Analyst)

Similarly, the External Funding Officer and the Directorate Support Manager also confirmed that tighter resources and over-worked conditions have negatively impacted the development of trust toward their colleagues and toward the whole organisation:

"All of us are doing more work than we were doing before, we had to take on more. But because time and resources are so much tighter, you have to rely on people doing stuff when they say they are going to do it, and when

that doesn't happen that's when the trust brakes down." (External Funding Officer)

"I think in some areas of the organisation people feel that cuts have gone too far and that as a result they are under-resourced and over-worked and they can't do what they are there to do. I think people are finding acceptable that we need to do things in a more efficient way, but they start resenting and losing their trust when it directly impacts on the quality of their job...and it impacts on what they believe they should be doing." (Directorate Support Manager)

On the same line, the Unit Area Administrator also recognized the negative impacts of the new organisational approach, characterized by increased business pressures and tighter deadlines. Together with the Program Manager, they described the detrimental effects caused by the lack of career and promotion opportunities for staff members:

"I think the company itself is very much more driven as a business now, whereas originally it was much more relaxed, more informal. You know, there would be some structure there but it wasn't the same pressure and deadlines, and the impact of European legislation wasn't as strong. So now it's very tight and obviously every year there is more cutbacks and less staff, less money for projects. So you know we are getting squeezed but we have to do the same or more work. That affects trust within the organisation...I think the fact that the recruitment freeze is on, it means that careers are affected, there aren't so many career opportunities for staff, so that rocks the trust as well in that people are in posts and maybe

feel trapped, because they know there is no way to step up the ladder."
(Unit Area Administrator)

"Effectively any promotions opportunities for people at lower grades have been largely closed off for the next 5 to 10 years. And that clearly has had probably a quite big impact on morale and trust." (Program Manager)

Furthermore, the Operation Officers C and D, as well as the Information Systems Team Leader, all described how recent changes and the related threats of possible redundancies situations have produced more nervousness, negative feelings, and a consequent fall of the levels of trust within the organisation:

"Trust has been a very controversial area. People are a bit more nervous now because there are sometimes redundancies I suppose. There are a lot less staff than it used to be…during any time of change in an organisation, it would be very surprising if trust levels didn't decrease a bit. People fell uncertain and a bit threaten, and they worry about what has been proposed, what has been changed." (Operation Officer C)

"It is a time of change, uncertainty, particularly there is the threat of further redundancies. So this uncertainty makes a lot of people a bit more defensive about their jobs and just generally a little bit more nervous. What does that do to trust? Not a great deal with those people you deal with directly, because I have a good relationships with them. It's more just a general negative pervasive feeling in the organisation." (Operation Officer D)

"There has been so much change within the organisation, two years ago

we all thought that our jobs were secured, and I would trust my line manager to fight for my job. But now, I don't think I can trust him to do it because of the government pressures." (Information Systems Team Leader)

Similarly, the Efficient Government Officer and the Advice Information Officer also recognized the existence of a certain degree of cynicism among staff members, as a consequence of the continuous changes characterizing the organisation:

"I think people are generally tired of changes and change interventions. They have been through 15 years of change and then the organisation says we are going to change again, but they just do not really engage with that at all. You get the feeling sometimes that staff believe it's change for change sake…there is sometimes an underlying feeling that if someone goes to do a review of a unit or section or a process, they are going to cut jobs. I hear that all the time from people. There is always this underlying feeling that, if you make a process more efficient, we are going to lose one full-time equivalent post…so I think organisationally there is a distrust of efficiency." (Efficient Government Officer)

"When it was initially put forward this change and the need to be a more efficient organisation, it was very open and clear why we were doing it and how we were doing it. However, there probably is some distrust now because you can't always be more efficient, you can't create more efficiency out of nothing. And I agree that there is maybe always time for a lot of improvement but there is just a constant unfettered drive of efficient, efficient, efficient. I just take it with the pincers now… great another

efficiency drive!" (Advice Information Officer)

Additionally, the HR Business Partner recognized that the organisation's incessant pursuit of efficiency, as well as the related implementation of change management policies, have created a certain lack of trust amongst staff members. In this regard, she also acknowledged that the introduction of complicated organisational systems has caused frictions, which have negatively impacted on the development of trust:

> *"I think change management is a big key in developing trust…these schemes if you like have certainly had a negative impact on trust, because of all the suspicious element and the fear about how this is going to impact on me and my job, especially when you have got restrictions on resources…when you set systems that are difficult for staff to use, or they don't quite understand them, or the processes for using them are too long or complicated, that can impact on trust because…that can cause a wee bit of friction, therefore people do what they can to avoid using them, which then causes issues." (HR Business Partner)*

Numerous respondents confirmed in fact the existence of organisational systems that have negatively impacted on the development of trust. In the following comment, the Unit Area Administrator described, for example, staffs' concerns related to the recently introduced grants system:

> *"I think the systems are the biggest things that rock trust between people and between units. The grants system we have got at the moment is extremely poor, it has a lot of inefficiencies, which have been recognized…for the past year, the grants system has been absolutely*

shocking and that has caused a lot of trust issues with the grants team. So
everybody in the grants team is labelled in the same way, it's all their fault,
when they probably hate the system as well…it seems that systems are a
high factor in trust." (Unit Area Administrator)

The Operation Officer B described instead the detrimental effects of the monitoring system for internet usage, as well as the negative effects caused by the recently introduced clear-desk policy:

> *"We have got dedicated IT staff that monitor internet use because you are*
> *only supposed to send up to 5 personal emails per day. So we have got a*
> *security officer that monitor different things and we are now supposed to*
> *follow a clear-desk policy as well. Somebody is supposed to come round*
> *and check to make sure that you don't have any files on your desk or*
> *paperwork…we never had all these things before and people didn't abuse*
> *the trust that they were given by the organisation. But I think now*
> *everybody is very much on the alert when they come into work."*
> *(Operation Officer B)*

Similarly, the Environmental Assessment Advisor described the detrimental effects caused by the introduction of the monitoring system for desk-sharing; while the Operation Officer A focused her attention on the inappropriate application of the 'flexi-time' system:

> *"When they were trying to introduce desk-sharing, they did introduce this*
> *monitoring thing where it recorded how long you were at your desk and*
> *that upset enough a lot of people because they were thinking that it meant*

they were checking how much people were working. But I don't think they were, they were looking for efficiency rather than looking for people not doing their job properly, or be unfairly taking advantages of the organisation." (Environmental Assessment Advisor)

"There are certain rules and regulations that we all have to follow. When people are carrying that out and following the rules that's fine, everybody is fine. But it's when somebody seems to be blatantly going against the rules that you then don't trust anymore and you just become suspicious. I suppose the flexi-time system is the sort of example, that is possibly the one thing in this office that has the most distrust." (Operation Officer A)

Besides the mentioned systems, the Program Manager and the Unit Area Administrator also described the negative effects caused by the hierarchical process of decision-making within the organisation:

"I think the organisation says that it values and trusts its people but then the organisation is quite risks averse. If you have an idea, something you want to do, are you trusted to do that? No, it has to go through a kind of hierarchical chain of approval, which would kill the idea and create a sense of distrust for getting things done." (Program Manager)

"I think the problem is that the decisions are obviously made at senior level because they have to be, and then those decisions are delegating down to the next level and delegating to the next level. And by the time it gets to the staff that is going to impact on, they maybe only hear it from the next line management and so the blame in a sense goes to that person, and I think

that can knock the trust a wee bit." (Unit Area Administrator)

Furthermore, the Program Manager highlighted how organisational systems can also significantly undermine the development of trust by affecting individual behaviors and interpersonal relationships:

"There is trust between individuals and between teams, but then I think there are issues around trust that are emergent features of the kind of systems and processes that we operate in the organisation and that are not necessarily within our control, but they affect the things that we do and the way we do things. And I think it is actually a lot of the time those systems and processes that erode trust within the organisation. I think probably people place too much emphasis on the way individuals behave, as opposed to the way they behave as a result of the way the organisation is structured and geared. And I think that is much more important than often the individuals and their behaviours...most of the time these system work against the rhetoric that managers say that they want to foster in people, valuing them and trusting them and so on, actually sucking out the trust that we are trying to build." (Program Manager)

4.5 Trust and the Human Resource function

Trust seems to be fundamental for the HR departments of both the organisations. The interviewed HR Business Partners confirmed the importance for HR staff of developing trust relationships to represent the views of both their employer and the employees. In order to develop trust, HR staff members attempt to develop personal relationships with their colleagues, hold confidential information, and provide support to employees when they are facing problems at work. However, numerous respondents also expressed a significant lack of trust toward their HR colleagues, identifying several factors negatively influencing the development of trust toward the HR staff, such as their lack of support and interaction with employees, their involvement in cases of disciplinary hearings and redundancy situations, their lack of confidentiality and competence, the existence of conflicting priorities, and the pursuit of personal agenda. A list of these mechanisms can be reviewed in the table 2 below:

<u>**Table 2**</u>

Factors positively influencing trust in HR	Factors negatively influencing trust in HR
Confidentiality / Discretion	Breaches of confidence
General availability / Personal relations	Lack of interaction/ Depersonalized relations
Professionalism and support	Lack of competence and flexibility
Represent the views of both employer and employees	Conflicting priorities / Primary duties and responsibilities toward the employer

The findings also confirmed that HR staff do play an important role in the development of trust across both the organisations, although they cannot be held responsible for it.

Respondents emphasised instead the importance of closer personal relationships between employees and line managers, and the actions and the degree of openness of senior managers. Others expressed instead more scepticism on the capacity of their HR department to promote trust across the respective organisation, due to HR staff's dealings with disciplinary hearings and redundancies situations, their incompetence and inconsistency and their lack of sufficient flexibility.

4.5.1 SpiritCo

According to the company's HR Business Partner, trust has a fundamental role for the HR department. HR's staffs need to be able to implement initiatives and programs at a strategic level on behalf of the employer; while, at the same time, they also need to operate at an employee-relations level, pursuing the most appropriate and most fair approach to handle employees' concerns. As the HR Business Partner described in the following comment, it is fundamental for the HR staff to gain trust on both sides:

> *"From an HR perspective, trust is vital. You have to have trust because as an HR professional, you walk a very thin line between two sides. You have the interest of the organisation to represent and you also have the interest of the employees. So you are trying to balance both, therefore you have to have a trusting relationship with employees that operate at different levels...the leadership of the organisation expects you to act and represent the organisation in the correct manner, while the employees also expect you to act and represent them in the right manner. So trust is vital on both sides." (HR Business Partner)*

Several other respondents also confirmed the fundamental importance of trust for the

efficacious functioning of the HR department. The office's Technical Administrator argued, for example, that the HR staff has a very delicate role, as they often need to handle confidential information. As she commented, *"you have got to know that if you go to speak to them you can trust them, that what you say is not going any further, that they keep it for them." (Technical Administrator)*

Similarly, the Production Operators A and B, as well as the company's Events Coordinator, also highlighted the importance of trust for the HR staff. As they explained in the following comments, the HR department represents the place to go when help is needed, as well as the very first contact point for any employee facing issues at work:

> "Trust for *HR is very important as they are the first stop point for a lot of people if you have problems. A lot of people go to the HR before going to their boss because they want to find out what the reasons and regulations are before they go to see their boss, in case they try to tell them something different." (Production Operator A).*

> *"If I am having an argument with my boss and I am not happy with my boss, I can go to speak with HR about it. They are one of the departments where trust should be 100%. I think that's the one place where there should be absolute trust, that's where a lot of people are going if they have got any problems. That's where everything goes through, where your pay goes through, where your time off goes through, everything. They are probably one of the most important departments in here, they keep everything ticking over. They should probably be the department that should be having the most trust I think because everything goes through HR." (Production*

Operator B)

"If you have issues at work, you probably trust them to look after your personal well-being in terms of money, your contract, all that sort of things, your maternity leave...so I think HR is 100% about trust. Everything goes through HR, doesn't it? So trust is hugely important."
(Events Coordinator)

However, despite a widespread recognition of the importance of trust for the HR department, respondents did not share the same common opinion when questioned about their respective level of trust toward their HR colleagues. On the one hand, some respondents manifested a certain degree of trust toward them given their level of confidentiality, professionalism, and general availability. The Production Operator C, for example, although recognizing a degree of scepticism from some of his peers, manifested his trust toward the HR colleagues due to the benefits they have provided to him over the course of the years:

"Their job is human resources, their job is to look after the employees and stuff like that. People would say, never trust an HR person or stuff like that, but these are the people who put on stuff in place for you, like 15 years ago we never had private medical cover or anything like that. They put things like that in place over the years. I have now got a private medical cover for me and my family, but 12-15 years ago I would never have had that."
(Production Operator C)

Similarly, the Production Team Leader highlighted the help that she has received from the HR staff, in relation to some personal problems she had to deal with; while the

Warehouse Team Leader emphasised the trust that his team has developed toward the HR staff, praising them for their professionalism, discretion, and general availability:

"I have got a lot of trust in HR. It was last year when I was off unwell and I was quite ill...they were calling me and asking me how I was each day, send me a big bouquet of flowers and they just honestly treated me really well... I do trust them because there were few personal issues that I have had personally, that I have to talk with them about, and they have been nothing but really really good with me." (Production Team Leader)

"Everything is kind of conducting in a very proper manner, confidential manner. My team knows that they can go and chap the door whenever they've got a problem. They come to me first and then we would sit down and then we would speak with the HR Partner who is designated to us. Among the guys who report to me, I don't think we have got a big kind of problem with the way HR go about their business. I don't think they feel any kind of hell feeling toward the HR. They know they are a support function, just the same as the rest of us." (Warehouse Team Leader)

However, at the same time, the Warehouse Team Leader also recognized how the challenging nature of the HR's job might have an impact on the perception of HR from some of his colleagues:

"HR people are employing to do a job just the same as anybody else. As much you would like them to be supportive all the time, in times of trouble sometimes it is just not realistic to think that it's going to happen. There are some points when could be bad news and these are the guys, who

maybe just unfortunately, are in the position they have got to deliver that bad news, and they may probably get some bad press from that...but you can't hold HR accountable because these are things that are out with their control...sometimes it is not a nice place, but it's a job, somebody has got to do it." (Warehouse Team Leader)

Indeed, a substantial number of other respondents recognized several issues limiting the possibility of developing trust relationships with the HR staff. The Events Coordinator acknowledged, for example, that some of her colleagues might have experienced some negative situations with HR that negatively affected their level of trust toward them:

"I think people would have very different views. People who have had bad experiences like redundancy probably do not trust the HR. When you lose your job, you lose trust, don't you? But my experience is I trust them, I have got to. You've got to trust unless they give you a reason not to." (Events Coordinator)

Similarly, the Production Operator C expressed his personal trust toward HR but simultaneously recognized a lack of trust from some of his colleagues:

"I think it all just depends on your dealings with them. There will be people who have maybe been to HR and felt that they haven't really helped them. Personally, when I needed their help they had helped me, but for somebody else might not have been the same. They may have tried something but there was nothing they could be helped with, or somebody else might have been in trouble a few times and maybe they haven't felt HR backed them

up.” (Production Operator C)

The Production Team Leader and the Global Archive Manager also described how certain members of staff might have experienced some negative episodes, which have negatively impacted on their level of trust toward the HR staff:

> *"With certain people maybe something has happened to them to make them quite negative. An example would be if someone was off and then continue to be off, and the HR call them up and say we are not happy with your performance, so straight away they don't trust the HR because they are getting pulled up for being off...I think there are people out there that it's hard if you are dealing with them because once they have been getting a wee slap on the hand, then straight away there is no trust there for them."* *(Production Team Leader)*

> *"If you have been in a process where you have been made redundant or disciplined, you are going to be a lot less trusting, I guess. And that's what obviously HR are directly involved with, in those procedures. If you ever have to go through a difficult patching with HR, I imagine that maybe creates a different dynamic."* *(Global Archive Manager)*.

On the same line, the Material Team Leader recognized that those members of staff, who have experienced disciplinary hearings or redundancy situations, tend to develop a lack of trust toward the HR. As he explained in the following comment, this seems to be the case particularly for those employees working on the shop-floor:

> *"I think it's a very clean cut. Most people that trust the HR they have nothing to fear. But you probably get less trust in HR at the shop-floor*

level, and the higher the level probably the more trust you get. Because it's a different type of dealing that we have with HR, as opposed to people on the shop floor. Because for the people out on the shop floor, that is where you would normally get disciplinary hearings. It's a mentality thing as well, I think you will probably find a split in terms of trust from out there, as opposed to people in the office. Probably you will find more trust toward the HR in the office environment than you would find out there on the shop floor." (Material Team Leader)

Very similarly, the Environment Health and Safety (EHS) Advisor and the Production Operator D explained that when a member of staff does something wrong, it usually becomes an HR's problem. In turn, this creates an issue in terms of how HR is being perceived by other members of staff:

""I trust them as far I can through them, which wouldn't even be very far in some cases…I am very wary of the HR team, not of all but some of them yeah. They are seen as the police. If they get involved, it normally means discipline, it normally means written warning, it potentially means dismissal. So that's why HR has a big issue with how they are perceived within the organisation. When HR comes in a meeting, you are normally thinking one of two things: I am in trouble or I am going to get sacked. But that's what they do, that's their function, that's what people see." (EHS Advisor)

"In here you always associate HR with disciplinary and stuff like that. It comes across negative; it is just hard to think of it in positive terms when

the disciplinary side is associated with HR. My wife works in HR as well

in another company, that's all she does, she travels around Scotland doing

disciplinaries and grievances." (Production Operator D)

A further group of respondents expressed a lack of trust toward HR identifying several other causes. The Manufacturing Development Manager described, for example, his low level of trust toward the HR staff due to their numerous breaches of confidence:

"It is probably fairly poor, and it's probably fairly poor based on

experience and also what the general opinion is within the business. There

have been breaches of confidence, there have been poor decisions made,

there has been a lack of confidentiality that I have experienced first-hand,

but I also know a number of other people that at various levels have that

as well. I would say that probably trust is pretty poor with HR...if there was

a scoring of departments, I would imagine they would score fairly low."

(Manufacturing Development Manager)

The Plant Engineer and the Environment Health and Safety (EHS) Manager emphasised instead their lack of trust toward the HR staff because of their function:

"Oh no, no no no. I think it's the nature of the job. They have to do nasty

things. They hire and fire, absenteeism, it's just a really nasty job I think.

Although I have had no problems at all with the HR, I find the girls in there

absolutely superb, but it's the nature of the job. I am fine in here, I don't

have any problems in here, but I know a lot of people that do." (Plant

Engineer)

"The HR people have a job function to do. If you are going to a HR person

and trying to saying to them, I wanna talk to you privately, and then you tell them that you have got an employee who has done something wrong. Does that HR person really switch off? Do they truly say, it's a private conversation? It's difficult, it's hard for somebody to truly switch off and then walk away and say I am going to forget that you have an employee who has done something really wrong. You have a moral dilemma, it's a very difficult relationship, there are too many strains there." (EHS Manager)

Similarly, the Production Operator E also described his lack of trust toward the HR staff because of their primary duties and responsibilities toward the company:

"I couldn't say I have got 100 percent trust in them. No. They manipulate things to suit them I think. If there was an incident and you didn't follow the proper procedure 100 percent, they would use that against you, saying that you didn't do everything step by step, that was your fault. If you had an accident and it was your fault, they wouldn't help you. They would try to defend the business...I think they have got to defend the company first, that's their job. They are there to represent and defend the company for anything like that, and then we would be second." (Production Operator E)

Indeed, the HR Business Partner recognized herself that the HR's primary responsibilities toward the company might have detrimental effects on the perception of the HR department from other staff members:

"I think probably 8 times out of 10 you are delivering on behalf of the

company, you are working at quite high level...HR has developed and
evolved over the years and now you've got an HR Business Partner who is
sitting with the directors of the organisation looking at the objective for the
years, and on how does that impact our people strategy. What support
mechanisms as HR we could put in place to help the organisation to meet
its objectives. So I think because you operate at that level, employees look
at you from a different perspective as well." (HR Business Partner)

Additionally, she also recognized that the strategic role covered by the HR department could undermine the level of employees' trust toward the HR team members, which tend to be considered as the "police" of the organisation:

"Ideologically, I would hope that the trust is 100 percent, but I think
because we operate at so many different levels within the
organisation...someone once quoted to me - HR is just the police of the
organisation, that's how I see the HR -...I think if you continue to operate
at strategic level then employees view you as perhaps being the police force
of the organisation, and then that trust level would probably fall well below
50 percent." (HR Business Partner)

Respondents also manifested different opinions when questioned about the influence of HR on the development of trust throughout the company. In the following comment, the HR Business Partner explained, for example, that HR can positively influence the development of trust by simultaneously operating at multiple levels:

"When it comes to driving initiatives, HR is very much involved...we
operate at different levels, we can operate at strategic level and you have

programs like High Performance Team, the Global Performance Management System, the Reward and Recognition programs. So you have got different programs coming in from an organisational perspective that need to be delivered to the employees, and you are representing the interest of the organisation and you are trying to build that trusting relationships so that employees understand the reasons for these programs coming in, why they are there, how they are going help the employees, or in some cases what may be a slightly negative impact, and trying to make them understand…At times we can also be a judge. You get both parties coming at you, you have a line manager and an employee coming at you and you need to be able to establish what the facts of the situation are, and you can then provide guidance and recommendations as to what the next course of actions may be." (HR Business Partner)

According to the Senior Production Manager and the Environment Health and Safety (EHS) Advisor, HR also plays a fundamental role in the development of trust by promoting it as one of the organisation's core values:

"*HR discusses trust more than any other departments. It's part of our values. We are measured on values and trust is one of them. The values that are generated by the HR, that we should live, have trust in them...I will be as open and honest as I can be with everyone I deal with. So if somebody is talking to me about trust, it would normally be an HR person." (Senior Production Manager)*

"To me all the leaders, whether it's management, team leaders,

supervisors have to have that trust ownership, but HR is also in charge of that part. Our HR Director always promotes trust as one of our core values. Now it's pretty much linked to our Global Performance Management System and you are scored against the values. Do you show passion, caring, trust each day and every day in your job role? So it's more and more becoming part of what you do every day." (EHS Advisor)

Similarly, the Procurement Director and the Project Accountant also highlighted the role of HR as promoter of trust throughout the company. However, at the same time, they also emphasised the need to support trust through every other staff members within the organisation:

"I think somebody needs to own it and it would be HR. But trust should be something that, I guess, started by the HR but then it needs to be followed and supported by every single individual in the organisation. Because if it hasn't then you haven't instilled the value and it becomes just a ticking box exercise." (Procurement Director)

"Trust is usually broken when there has not been communication or the communication is misunderstood or misinterpreted. So who has the responsibility for communication? It is both sides, employees as well as employers. And how do you ensure to have employees within the organisation that are going to communicate in a good way? It's through your recruitment, training and performance management policies. So is the HR ultimately responsible? Yes, in so far as they define these policies. HR puts the structure in place but every manager within the organisation

has to implement that. And then, once that is in place, it is up to the
employees, everybody in the organisation, to make it happen." (Project
Accountant)

Conversely, other respondents manifested instead their doubts on the capacity of the HR department to promote trust throughout the company. In this regard, the Environment Health and Safety (EHS) Manager commented, for example:

"If you are going to ask HR how you can improve relationships to make
trust better, they are really quite good at it...I think the hard part is how
you implement it, it's easy enough to tell people that trust is this, this, and
this, but the hard bit is how you implement it, how you really get people to
gain trust." (EHS Manager)

The Plant Engineer, despite recognizing the importance of trust as an organisational value, accused the HR staff of not putting the value into practice but focusing instead on the wrong activities:

"I think the values are a great thing but I don't think they work. But I
believe it would be great if everybody had their working lives around that,
but it just doesn't happen...I feel the HR in here do the job that they
shouldn't do, and don't do the job that they should do. HR should be
looking after the workforce, monitoring absenteeism, sickness. I don't feel
we do that. Our HR girls sometimes do projects like reshuffling the
reception area, what that has to do with HR I really don't know." (Plant
Engineer)

Similarly, the Senior Production Manager also manifested his scepticism, identifying

a gap between the values promoted by the HR team members and their behaviours:

> *"From an HR point of view, trust is critical, it's one of our values. But I think what they say and what they do is not always the same thing. For instance, one of the HR Business Partners got the engineers and the operators to sign a new contract that we put pressure on them to sign, to be more flexible. And she recently said at a meeting that they were stupid for signing it, because now we could do what we want with them. And I take that very personally because this is my team she is talking about, it tells me that she doesn't care." (Senior Production Manager)*

Additionally, he also criticized the company's HR Director for his lack of interactions with production operators, as well as for pursuing a personal agenda:

> *"The guys never see him. He doesn't go to speak with them at all...I think he takes decisions based on him getting a ticking in the box from his global boss, rather than what's the right thing. An example I would use is the Global Performance Management System we have here, the GPS. I think it is very problematic for operators but he committed that we would be the first plant to implement it, so it's telling his boss it is brilliant, he is getting a pack in the back, but the person who takes the pain to implement that is me, and that has caused me some mistrust." (Senior Production Manager).*

Finally, the Production Operator D and the Global Archive Manager also expressed serious doubts on the role of the HR staff as a promoter of trust, due to their dealings with disciplinary hearings and redundancy situations:

> *"I have seen all the values but to be honest I don't interact much with HR,*

I don't have any issues at work so I don't really tend to interact with them. I think you maybe need to ask somebody who has actually been in trouble because I don't really see HR that often…I don't think they are a promoter of trust within the company just because the way I hear people speaking about them...I think HR only gets involved if people have been warned or things like that." (Production Operator D)

"I think HR should try to lead in this area but I think it is probably also quite difficult. HR has a difficult job to do. Probably if you have been in a process where you have been made redundant or something, you are going to be a lot less trusting I guess." (Global Archive Manager)

4.5.2 NatureOrg

The Senior HR Business Partner of NatureOrg explained that trust has become increasingly important for the HR department in recent years in order to improve its reputation and to modify the traditional perception of HR as the 'police' of the organisation:

"We need to ensure that we are open and honest, that we deal with people fairly because we are often seen as the police you know, the police of the organisation. This is the traditional view of HR…the HR team hasn't got the best reputation in the world, it is seen as the police that tell us no because of legislations. I think we suffered in the past with our reputation within the organisation because we were seen as quite bureaucratic, you know the one who says no, especially when we were personnel. Back in the dark days, we were personnel not HR, and we were the police who said no

to everything…we were very strict, this is the policy and you can't deviate."

(Senior HR Business Partner)

Despite the previous negative reputation, according to both the interviewed HR Business Partners, the reputation of the HR staff has significantly improved in recent years thanks to the new appointed HR Director, who has brought more flexibility into the HR department:

"When I joined we were personnel, and it was almost the personnel team in their little office…we had the big book that said no, you can't do that, you have to follow the rules, you have to do this. It was a very old school approach, whereas the head of HR that came in…wanted us to be more proactive, to be more engaged with the business. We wanted to bring into the business a new partner approach. So rather than sitting separately within our own ivory tower, we were part of the business, we were helping them to deliver what they needed to deliver." (HR Business Partner)

"Becoming HR we have tried to become part of the business and allow managers to make their own decisions...now we are much more flexible and pragmatic in our approach...it's about putting the emphasis on management back to the managers rather than HR controlling everything. I think we are certainly trying to build that trust back up within the organisation. From the last corporate services survey within the organisation, HR was the only score to increase...our score compared to the previous year had increased, whereas other corporate services units hadn't." (Senior HR Business Partner)

The new approach of the HR department is more pragmatic and business focused. HR tries to help the business achieving its objectives by being more open to discussions and negotiations. As the two HR Business Partners explained in the following comments, this enhances managers' trust by allowing them more freedom in decision-making processes:

"This has built up a lot of trust because managers know they now can make their own decisions, and we will help them where we can. We'll find solutions that they are looking for, but obviously keep it within legislations, guidelines and best practices...generally, the reputation is certainly improved because we are more business focused rather than control focused if you like. We want to help the business to achieve its objectives and we are much more involved in that strategic side of thinking, as opposed to just saying you can't do that, no you can't do this. And because we are helping them to work around and find ways to achieve what the business wants to achieve, that creates trust." (HR Business Partner)

"As Business Partners we have been outlining what we believe the options are, the risks involved in carrying those through and then allow managers to manage and make those decisions...I have seen much more negotiation and mediation coming on now, whereas before it was like the policy states this. Now it is like the policy states this, these are the parameters, these are the options, a pragmatic approach would be this. So you are much more looking at resolutions rather than the policy says no. I think that brought trust at the centre of our operations." (Senior HR Business Partner)

Similarly, the Trade Union Convenor also confirmed the increased importance of trust for the HR department. She acknowledged that many union members used to have a negative opinion of HR, and that the stipulation of a recent partnership agreement with the trade union has facilitated the development of stronger trust relationships:

> *"Union members see HR as protecting the senior management rather than helping them with their particular issue. It is a perennial issue, it is not just in this organisation, it does happen everywhere. We are working on changing that. I don't think HR consciously does that, but that's the perception that employees have, that HR aren't there to help them. They just refer back to a policy when in actual fact an employee is looking for assistance rather than being told to go and read a policy. So that can cause some problems, however we are getting better at it. Trust is being felt by both sides, we both feel we can actually share more now than we could do twelve months ago, and that has had benefits for our staff. We don't have as many grievances being raised now, so we can deal with things in a more informal way, much quicker. There is less stress for employees because we deal with things openly and honestly. So yeah, trust has improved and has become more important for us, also because we have recently signed off our partnership agreement, which is a set of rules and guidelines that management, HR and the union would work with and respect." (Trade Union Convenor)*

Despite the comments of the HR Business Partners and of the Trade Union Convenor, only few other respondents expressed trust toward their HR colleagues. Among them, the Recreation and Access Officer argued, for example, that she trusts the HR staff due

to the development of personal relationships with them:

> *"I suppose because I know them a lot better, I trust them a lot. You know, I know I can take a query to them and I can get a reply, but that's not to say that I didn't trust them in the past, it's just that I wasn't working with them. I think it is the people that you are working with a lot that you do build up a relationship." (Recreation and Access Officer)*

Similarly, the Advice Information Officer also manifested his trust toward the HR staff and he also confirmed the high level of trust from his colleagues:

> *"I trust them on an individual level, I know quite few of them and whenever I try to have any dealings with them they have been fine, I have no reasons to doubt that they are not trustworthy. They are good, they are honest and they have got integrity…I think on balance, the majority of people would be relatively positive about HR." (Advice Information Officer)*

Conversely, the Unit Area Administrator and the Information Systems Team Leader manifested their personal trust toward the HR colleagues; however, they also recognized a lack of trust from other organisational members:

> *"On a personal level, I have a good relationship with HR and I trust that when I contact them they will either give me the answer I need, or they will find out the answer and get back to me. However, on a non-personal level, I know that there is not a lot of trust with HR from some staff and I think that's because they maybe had a bad experience with a particular member of the team, who hasn't been helpful and hasn't got back to them…and if they don't get the support and advice from that person, it knocks the trust*

for the whole HR." (Unit Area Administrator)

"As far as I am concerned, for the stuff I had to deal with them, they have been 110 percent, they have gone out their way to help. But people usually don't like them, they don't trust them…HR could be more vocal, they could be more interactive with people, they could have workshops teaching the policies of the company, and they don't do that, and I think HR gets bad press because of it. They don't put themselves out there, they don't ask if anybody has got any problems…or even once a month having a newsletter from HR, for a big company like this I think they should be doing more."
(Information Systems Team Leader)

Similarly, the Corporate Planning Analyst also distinguished between his own personal trust toward the HR department and a lack of trust from his colleagues, due to geographical and communication issues:

"My own trust is maybe about 8 out of 10, but if you have to take an organisational view, maybe it would be 3 or 4 along the bottom, and the reasons for that is that I don't think the rest of the organisation fully appreciates the pressure on HR, so that impacts upon their perception of whether they can trust the HR...in my personal dealing, and I have quite a bit of dealing with HR, if they say they are going to do something, they will do it. So I don't have issues with that…there is something about how close you are to them as well, I do think there is a geographical dynamic to it, which is partly about distance but also about communication." (Corporate Planning Analyst)

Equally, the Administration Officer also emphasised a communication issue, arguing that employees do not generally hear from HR unless they have a problem, and this lack of contact undermines the possibility of developing trust relationships:

> *"You don't really hear from HR unless you've got a problem when you have to contact them...I don't really know whether to trust them or not as I don't have any reasons to contact them. But I definitely think that this lack of contact does not facilitate the development of trust with them."* (Administration Officer)

The Environmental Assessment Advisor and the Operation Officer B emphasised instead a geographical issue, describing how the centralization of the HR department at the new organisation's headquarters has considerably weakened the relationships with the HR staff members:

> *"I guess it has maybe changed since our headquarter has been moved up here, because when we were previously in smaller offices, you did get to know the person that you were dealing with in HR, and you could speak to them. But now, I have no idea who half of the HR people are and I sit on the same floor as them...I don't know them personally, there seems to be so many changes of staff and nobody have been introduced to us...so there are a lot of people walking up and down that corridor that I don't know who they are."* (Environmental Assessment Advisor)

> *"Years ago you would have the HR team over here in this office, and the people that were doing HR knew everybody, they knew their personal problems, they knew their issues, they knew things that were going on, they*

knew the dynamics, the team set up. Now HR don't know the people they

are advising about, they don't know the problems that they have, they don't

know the personal issues that are going on. So they can't relate to the staff

that are asking the questions...they don't really care, unless the business is

getting done, they don't care...we have also asked that the HR function is

decentralized, because we have people in this building that are more

capable of doing the job. But they won't do that, they want to keep

everything centralized." (Operation Officer B)

Differently, the External Funding Officer manifested his lack of trust toward his HR colleagues, accusing the HR department of not following the same recruitment freeze that has characterized the rest of the organisation:

"You know we have had a recruitment freeze for the last 3-4 years, however

the HR team seems to be the only one who has risen and they have recruited

posts that didn't exist before...at the moment the number of staff they have

got in there seems over proportional. How a department can recruit when

there is a recruitment freeze everywhere else? And if there is a recruitment

freeze, then half of HR hasn't got a job to do anyway, because most of their

job is recruiting. So yeah, strangely there are anomalies like that."

(External Funding Officer)

On the same line, the Efficient Government Officer also observed that HR has been the only department getting larger and it has become more corporate-led:

"HR seems to get bigger whereas the rest of the organisation got smaller,

and HR seems to be dictating rather than discussing. In the past, things

would have been discussed, and there seems to be a new strategy within HR about how things will be done...I trust HR less now than I did few years ago, I feel HR has changed quite dramatically. In the past, I would have seen HR there to manage resources, but also to manage the welfare of staff. But now, I no longer see that welfare part in HR. I don't trust them as much as I did...HR is becoming far more corporate-led, in that they are there to manage the resources and not there for the welfare of the resources." (Efficient Government Officer)

Furthermore, she also explained that the HR staff has modified their approach in recent years by focusing less on employees' welfare:

"We used to have a welfare officer who was part of the HR and that post no longer exists...there have been changes in management within HR, more private sector people have come in, so perhaps a little harsher. The tone of correspondence, actually even the tone of the spoken words sometimes, it's far more straight to the point, and sometimes I feel that HR is taking that a little bit too far...I think in the past this was different, there was a more 'cotton and wool' kind of approach, whereas now I think it just sounds harsh, sounds harder...I believe within the organisation, HR aren't seen as a place where you would go for your welfare or advice, because they are…in management team's pocket." (Efficient Government Officer)

Similarly, the Unit Area Administrator argued that HR has lost their personal caring touch; while the Environmental Assessment Advisor manifested his lack of trust toward the HR staff, accusing them of scarce constructivism and of a lack of flexibility:

"There is a natural distrust for HR. That's just there and I think it's important that HR are aware of that and are consciously trying to improve on that and be more open, and be conscious about their decisions that do impact on people. And I think even more so nowadays, HR has to give that personal touch. I think one of the worst things that happened with HR is that they used to be called personnel and they then became human resources. I think that was the biggest mistake, because now it's almost like you are just a number, you are not a human being anymore, and I think we need back that personal touch that was there before." (Unit Area Administrator)

"I don't actually think HR generate a lot of trust with their staff. My experience when I am discussing this with colleagues is that they are not terribly enabling for the individual, they are enabling for the organisation and they will try to deliver what the organisation needs, but there is no flexibility in terms of what staff might need. And I am not entirely sure what our HR department does to be honest. There are a lot of systems in place now, which kind of make you think why do we need so many HR people if we have got to do all the things online...so I don't understand quite enough of what HR does...I get on very well with the girls I line managed and so I haven't had to engage with HR. But you know, just in little things, I don't find them hugely constructive, I think they are very much following a process and procedures, there is no flexibility." (Environmental Assessment Advisor)

The Program Manager and the Corporate Planning Analyst recognized instead some

conflicting priorities, which seem to negatively affect the development of trust in HR:

"I think the trust would be pretty low. It shows up in staff surveys but also in just chatting around with people, included senior managers...some of the things that they have said to me expressed pretty low regard or trust in HR on the competence and advice they provide. To be fair to them, I think HR is sort of being twisted in between. On the one hand, wanting to be supportive and trusting, but equally wanting to cover their own asses on the other hand, and making sure that if a situation goes wrong then they have the audit trail that supports whatever decision they come to at the end of the day. And I just don't see how these two things can actually be compatible with one another, I think they just tear HR apart." (Program Manager)

"I think HR struggle in that they have a function that they have to deliver, but struggle to get traction because of the other functions that they deliver. So their effort in building capacity and succession planning and learning and development and these side of things, cannot be done in isolation but often they are seen in isolation. And it is difficult then to build trust because individual automatically think that succession planning is a bit making sure that individuals get out of the job, or you know the feeling that as soon as you go someone else comes in and therefore you are not as valuable to the organisation. So it is a difficult dynamic that HR has to deal with in that respect." (Corporate Planning Analyst)

Additionally, the Program Manger also confessed that he has almost stopped seeking

or relying on the HR staff, given the poor advices he had received in the past:

> *"I came across circumstances where HR has been less than helpful, or tell me something which I know as a manager it's wrong. So to some extent, I don't really trust them...I don't think they are going to be dishonest but I find them to be incompetent on occasions. You have fairly junior or middle-ranking members of staffs, who got not so much experience, making decisions or even misunderstanding policies...and so I have then to check the policy myself and find out in due course that it is not how it should be done. And it has happened quite a few times. I think there are management and competency problems in HR, the lesson I learned over the years is of not relying on them entirely and to use my own judgment, and even sometimes to challenge the advice you are given because it is not always that useful."* (Program Manager)

Similarly, the Project Manager and the Efficient Government Officer also expressed their doubts on the capacity of the HR staff to provide the correct advices and the right kind of information when requested:

> *"I trust the HR to have thought enough about the policy that govern our welfare and how we deal with things like bullying, stress and absences, and to have consulted with people to make sure that they reflect the culture of the organisation. I trust them much less to give me the information that I need from them."* (Project Manager)

> *"Service standards are falling in HR. You can email them, and if you are emailing HR it is normally something quite important to you, otherwise*

you wouldn't be going to HR. And well, certainly at the moment, I wouldn't

trust to get a response." (Efficient Government Officer)

The lack of HR's competence seems to be determined by the recruitment's difficulties and the high turnover rate characterizing the HR department, as explained in the following comments by the Unit Area Administrator and by two operation officers:

"I think there is quite a regular turnover of the senior HR advisors and

that must have knocked the trust within HR. And also, I think they have

quite a difficult time recruiting staffs. They have a lot of agency staff,

casual junior staff, so there isn't this one constant figure that you could

always refer to and build up a relationship with." (Unit Area

Administrator)

"The problem with HR is that anyone that is any good obviously leaves

very quickly and then they get new people in and they then don't know the

policies. So you are phoning up to ask a question and half of the times you

are quicker to do it yourself; or you ask them advice and you don't agree

with what they said, then you have got to check it yourself and you find out

that they gave you the wrong advice." (Operation Officer A)

"Some people in the HR department have been given retention payments

and that's payment on top of their salary to ensure that they stay, because

we have such a big turnover in HR staff...they don't know their own

policies, they are not consistent, they are just incompetent basically."

(Operation Officer B)

Additionally, the Learning and Development Officer - besides acknowledging the

department's high turnover, the competency gap of the HR advisors, and the headquarters relocation issues - she also expressed some concerns in relation to the recent adoption of the HR partnering model:

> *"I think there is a lack of trust in HR across the organisation. Partly because historically managers turn to HR for the answers and they were used to that happening, and so in changing to a different approach that has caused a bit of trust to break down...the business haven't understood the new way of working in HR and what that really means for the organisation. I think the perception was that HR is going to dump stuffs on managers to do and they are going to call themselves business partners. So getting that trust back has been quite a difficult one. But also this hasn't been helped by our headquarters relocation, as we lost nearly half of our HR department, and over the years there has been quite a lot of turnover in HR, so advisory staffs have been quite inexperienced, and all that have really undermined the trust in HR." (Learning and Development Officer)*

Further concerns related to the adoption of the HR partnering model were also expressed by other respondents, such as the Project Manager, the Environmental Assessment Advisor, and the Continuous Improvement Manager:

> *"I am not quite sure what the role of HR department is these days. When I first started, people expected HR to do everything, everything HR-related should be HR to do it. Now that's not so much the case...there is perhaps less trust that individuals have in HR because they are not sure of what they have the authority to do and what has to go to HR." (Project*

Manager)

"I think since all these new HR systems are in place, they have depersonalized an awful lot of what HR is doing now. I never had to go to HR for any personal problems or management problems, but I do feel as if I wouldn't know who to go to speak to, certainly I wouldn't know what they look like and they are on my same floor." (Environmental Assessment Advisor)

"It has been grumbling over the past few years, we have had a lot of moving to what we call self-service systems. So we are all expected to do much more administration, and I think there has been a little bit of resentment from people as they don't feel it is their job, and they probably think HR should deal with people's administration." (Continuous Improvement Manager)

Finally, as for SpiritCo, respondents of NatureOrg also manifested different opinions when questioned about the influence of the HR department on the development of trust relationships across the organisation. The HR Business Partner explained, for example, that the HR department has played a fundamental role in building a trust relationship with the Trade Union, as well as in providing support to managers. However, she also simultaneously emphasised that HR does represent only a small part of the whole organisational jigsaw, therefore it cannot be considered as the solely responsible for the development of trust within the organisation:

"HR is key, we are key to build a good relationship with the trade union to ensure that we bring changes and that we consult and we talk with them,

and we have made very significant steps in the last year or so in that relationship, thanks to the new partnership agreement. We are the conduit really between the organisation and the trade union side. I think we have a huge part to play in managing that relationship. But I think we are also part of the jigsaw, it is not something we can do on our own. We are trying to help managers to manage their people better, we coach and guide managers. So yeah, we have got a big part to play but we are just a part of the jigsaw, we are not responsible for it, it's the whole organisation." (HR Business Partner)

Similarly, the Senior HR Business Partner also emphasised the HR's role in terms of supporting the relationships between employees and their respective line managers:

"As HR we have a big part to play. I think trust relationships come mainly back to the individuals and their colleagues and their line managers, their immediate team. The relationships that they have there are what create the trust initially, that is the foundation upon which it is all based. But HR need to help the managers and help the employees with these relationships. If there is an issue, we need to help the manager to help the employee resolving the issue, so there is an influence on the trust that we have between us and the employees through the line manager's chain." (Senior HR Business Partner)

The two HR Business Partners were not the only respondents emphasizing how HR has positively impacted the development of trust. The Learning and Development Officer also explained that HR staff needs to make sure that the correct policies are in

place in order to empower managers during decision-making processes:

"I think making sure that there are robust policies in place that are understandable and easy to use. You know that the guidance on the policies are easy to access and easy to use and they are supportive to managers, and that they are empowering the managers to make decisions and to help them to take responsibility for the decisions that they take, and to build that trust. If there was a problem and HR would have come in and take the decision, I think that would undermine trust, that would be bad practice although managers quite often look for that because, if it is a difficult situation, they sometimes would like HR to make the decision. But actually that is not the role of HR. Their role is to let managers know what the implications are, know what good practice is, and be able to support managers to carry out good practices and doing their job." (Learning and Development Officer)

The Continuous Improvement Manager described the role of HR in setting up the right policies, which build the foundations for building trust across the organisation:

"I think the role HR plays at the moment is a more supporting and advisory role, it has changed over the last few years. I would say previously they were getting involved in disputes a lot more, they were much more hands-on; whereas lately, I think the expectation is that managers should sort these things out and HR should set up policies and procedures, the supporting mechanisms if you like to help the organisation and managers to cope and manage these types of cases. And only when something

fundamentally brakes down then you would expect HR to come in and help and provide support. So I think the relationship changed a little bit, but certainly they developed the lead on developing the policies that underpin how we operate...so they do play a role in setting the foundations for building good working relationships and trust across the organisation."
(Continuous Improvement Manager)

Similarly, the Operation Officer D and the Trade Union Convenor also emphasised the fundamental role of HR in creating policies, which sustain the development of trust throughout the organisation:

"If HR are being well resourced, they have a clear idea of what they have to do, then that makes me feel the organisation works well at its core, because they are at the core, whether they are setting up policies or implementing these policies. If they don't, if they are short on staff, they haven't been keeping clear direction, if I go to them for advice and it's not sure who I should contact, whether the advice is clear and correct, that makes me feel there is less trust across the organisation." (Operation Officer D)

"The development of policies is key to everybody in this organisation because a policy would impact on every single member of staff...and so HR is key, because if we get those wrong, both unions and HR have to live with the fall out of something that was badly written or poorly thought out. So for me, policy is the basis of everything...I think the partnership work has had a big impact, you know being able to sit down and talk calmly,

negotiate openly and frankly, having open discussions and not having

hidden agendas, work in partnership with the organisation to achieve what

is best for the organisation...the new partnership policy has definitely

helped to build more trust throughout the organisation." (Trade Union

Convenor)

Conversely, other respondents expressed instead their scepticism on the capacity of the HR staff to promote trust. In the following comment, the Operation Officer B argued, for example, that, although the HR department could play a fundamental role in fostering trust relationships, it is not able to pursue this in practice:

"I think the HR department's role is vital in producing trust and

unfortunately they are terrible, absolutely terrible, and they don't foster

trust in the organisation. They don't know their own policies, you know if

two people phone up on the same question, you would get two different

answers. They don't keep consistency at all. They are absolutely terrible,

they don't foster trust in the organisation at all." (Operation Officer B)

The Advice Information Officer argued instead that the development of trust mainly depends on the actions and openness of senior managers, as opposed to the adoption of any HR policies:

"I think HR are there to cater for staff when you have any problems. But,

at the end of the day, things like trust I think you are better starting from

the top by being more open, and that builds trust far faster than the

implementation of a trusting policy within the organisation. I think it has

to be from the top...you can't foster trust on people, you can't make them

trust you because that would actually only form distrust…you know, we have got our core values, that would have started from senior management saying these are the values that we want you to work toward to, and HR to a degree would help pass the message on, but we could have had a notice board to pass the message on, it's the same thing." (Advice Information Officer)

Similarly, the Project Manager also recognized that HR does play a limited role in the promotion of the organisational core values, which are instead mainly fostered by the management team:

"I haven't observed in my time in the company that HR has really rolled out the sort of core values in the way that let's say the management team attempts to do. Sometimes I actually wonder whether HR understands them. For example, we have our competencies against which we write our performance reviews, and when you read the competencies list, and somebody in HR has written down what they mean, this doesn't mean anything. It's very hard writing a report about somebody against these values, I find them quite opaque, not easy to understand." (Project Manager)

The Environmental Assessment Advisor argued instead that the responsibility of engendering trust primarily lies in the direct relationship between employees and their respective line manager, and not in the adoption of any HR systems:

"I mean HR, human resources have a lot of systems in place if you are line managing...what you have to do in terms of your staff, appraisal review,

what you have to do if you have to discipline folks…in terms of line management there are processes that you are meant to follow. But that doesn't engender trust, I think it is the manager that has to implement it." (Environmental Assessment Advisor)

Finally, the Program Manager highlighted that the procedural and disciplinary nature of HR policies determines that HR staff can even be detrimental to the development of trust relationships within the organisation:

"I worry that a lot of what HR does is quite procedural and sometimes I think that is actually counterproductive for building relationships and trust with staff and get the best out of people. HR's processes and procedures can indeed create a degree of distrust. The ideology of HR management puts managers in a sort of two faces position: on the one hand, all of the sort of tools and techniques associated with HR management are there to create a supportive and trusting environment; but, on the other hand, they are used in a kind of disciplinary manner through formal kind of reviews and so on, and I think that tension can be quite difficult to manage sometimes. HR is very process driven and I think it somehow stimulates the wrong types of behaviours, and it sucks out the trust that we are trying to build." (Program Manager)

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Introduction

In this thesis, trust has been studied with a multi-level approach aimed at extending the current literature perspective based on a single-dimensional understanding of trust (McEvily and Tortoriello, 2011) and at correcting the optimistic bias that permeates most of the research on trust in organisations (Gargiulo and Ertug, 2006) by contributing to the literature with a more integrated approach. As discussed in the literature chapter, organisational scholars have primarily focused on interpersonal social-psychological processes, merely acknowledging some of the influences of the work environment, or organisational context, without sufficient theorization (Möllering, 2006). Filling this gap entails an important shift in research attention from studying intra-organisational trust solely in dyadic relations to focusing also on the dynamics of the employment relationships, and on the effects of the organisational environment in which business relations are embedded. In other words, as Siebert at al. (2016) have suggested, the literature needs to take a sociological and, arguably, more critical turn.

The present chapter reviews the findings of the thesis in relation to its core research objective, providing a broader critical reflection upon central themes and concepts raised in the literature review and methodology chapters. To answer the first research question - i.*e. What are the main factors influencing the development of intra-organizational trust at an interpersonal and organizational level?* – the chapter firstly analyses the importance of intra-organisational trust in the management of the

employment relationship and then focuses on those identified mechanisms influencing the development of trust at either the interpersonal or the organisational level. As Searle and Skinner (2011) suggested, the findings confirm that intra-organisational trust can develop at both an interpersonal and organisational level, and it is determined not only by individual experiences and relationships but also by the workplace itself (Gillespie and Dietz, 2009).

An awareness of the different sources of intra-organisational trust helps to understand more fully the precise dynamics of trust at work and to envisage circumstances in which trust may take an optimistic, high trust dynamic, as well as a pessimistic, low trust dynamic, within the same organisation. As Grey and Garsten (2001) and Zaheer *et al*. (1998) have noted, systemic (i.e. organisational) and interpersonal level of trust are interrelated and affect each other. A full understanding of trust at the organisational level is not possible without reference to the individuals who are members of the organisation, and a full understanding of personal trust is not possible without analysing the organisational context in which such personal trust (or distrust) develops. Secondly, the chapter discusses trust in relation to the Human Resource function answering the second research question, i.e. "*What role does the Human Resource function play in the development of intra-organisational trust, and to what extent is it perceived positively or negatively by organisational members?*" The findings describe a fractured and dysfunctional situation for HR staff, who seems to have significant issues in building and promoting trust relationships. In agreement with Siebert *et al.* (2016), this significant lack of trust suggests that the normative HRM literature fails to acknowledge the existence of inherent conflicts between employees and employers within the employment relationship that HR practitioners hardly try to mediate.

5.1 The importance of trust in the employment relationship

Over the last several decades, management researchers have increasingly recognized that intra-organisational trust plays a fundamental role in work organisations; however, empirical evidence has generally but not consistently supported this perspective (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001). It is apparent that trust is of vital importance to modern organisation theory. Management researchers have in fact increasingly recognized the importance of trust as an organizing principle (Bachmann and Zaheer, 2006) for coordinating tasks and promoting cooperation. As discussed in the literature review chapter, numerous research studies have indicated that trust is necessary for effective cooperation and communication and for building the foundations of cohesive and productive working relationships. Furthermore, the continuous changes affecting the workplace in the direction of more participative management styles, self-directed teams, and empowered workers have contributed to increasing the importance of trust, whereas control mechanisms have been reduced or removed. In fact, whereas hierarchy elicited cooperation in the form of compliance from workers, trust can elicit cooperation in the form of active commitment and identification (Korczynski, 2000).

The findings of the research confirm the importance of trust for the functioning of both the analysed organisations. Respondents depicted trust as a psychological and operational mechanism, which facilitates superior quality work and the achievement of objectives by allowing to successfully work independently and as a team. They confirmed that trust favours the development of effective working relationships by enhancing motivation and their reliance on colleagues, and by obtaining more constructive and positive interactions wherein information can be shared and confidentiality is guaranteed. On an operational level, trust works as a coordination

mechanism to facilitate the successful delegation of tasks and to improve decision-making processes; on a psychological level, it serves instead to maintain motivation by directing the work of each members of staff toward a common goal.

Despite the recognized importance of trust within both the analysed organisations, numerous respondents conversely acknowledged a diminishing level of trust, particularly toward their respective senior managers. At SpiritCo, they identified the increased business pressures and the higher level of stress as the main factors determining a lack of trust within the company. Similarly, at NatureOrg, respondents identified the organisation's incessant pursuit of efficiency, the increased business pressures, the tighter deadlines, the unsustainable workload, and the lack of sufficient opposition to Scottish Government's requests as the main factors determining a lack of trust within the organisation.

The collected data confirm that the employment relationships of both the organisations have been profoundly affected by continuous organisational restructuring and increased external pressures to provide more efficient and effective services (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000). Their respective workforces have been exposed to progressively tighter financial regimes, increased workload and stress, and a close monitoring of organisational performance. As Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) have suggested, the incessant request for higher standards and more accountability seems to foster conditions of suspicion and blame, hence hindering the development of trust.

The registered low level of trust seems to corroborate the argument on the decline of trust discussed in the literature chapter (Dietz, Martins, & Searle, 2011; Thompson, 2003). In agreement with Dietz *et al.* (2011), the findings suggest that redundancy

programs, perceptions of job insecurity, increased workloads and stress do all contribute to damaging the development of trust. To better understand why most of the respondents manifested a low level of trust, despite recognizing its importance within their organisations, the following two sections will separately analyse the respective dynamics of trust at the interpersonal and at the organisational levels.

5.2 Dynamics of trust at the interpersonal level

In order to examine the dynamics of trust at the interpersonal level, it is important to observe how the development of trust can vary according to the different hierarchical levels of the organisation. As Fox (1974) suggested, trust is embedded in the hierarchical power structure of an organisation and therefore, to provide better insights into the structural causes and antecedents of trust, the referent facets of the relationship being invoked need first to be established (Hardin, 1993). Indeed, besides acknowledging that trust can vary according to subjective predisposition and intrinsic personal attitudes (e.g. EHS Advisor, pp. 61) by influencing the perception we have of others (Yakovleva *et al.*, 2010), the findings suggest that trust can also significantly vary according to the specific characteristics of the considered job role. At SpiritCo for example, different levels of trust can be distinguished between staff members having a role on the company's shop-floor and those working instead in the office's environment. Levels of trust seem to be higher within either of the two groups, as staff members have an opportunity to work more closely with each other and to keep interacting on a daily basis (e.g. Production Operator E, pp. 75).

A further important distinction can also be made considering the different working approach of the staff members belonging to these two groups. As the Procurement

Director described (pp. 61), those covering higher positions (i.e. typically working in the office's environment) tend to focus more on building and enhancing their trust relationships by seeking increased responsibilities and extending their influence within the organisation. On the opposite, members of staff working at the lower hierarchical level (i.e. typically on the shop-floor) tend instead to be less interested in further developing their influence within the organization, and they are therefore less motivated to enhance or expand their trust relationships.

As Kramer (1995) suggested, those 'at the bottom' and those 'at the top' of the organisation tend to experience trust differently. Indeed, such proposition can be further elaborated by focusing on the three main job roles in the hierarchical structure of the two analysed organisations, i.e. employees, line managers and senior managers. For employees with a non-managerial role, the development of trust seems mainly an outcome of their willingness and capacity of successfully delivering results, and consequently acquiring further responsibilities in their job. As the Events Coordinator of SpirtCo mentioned, trust in this case mainly represents: "the ability to handle situations in the right ways, in the right time frame, and with the right outcomes" (pp. 62). Very similarly, the comments from the Operation Officer D (pp. 68) and the Corporate Planning Analyst (pp. 68) also confirmed that the development of employees' trust within NatureOrg. is primarily determined by their capacity of producing good consistent work and quality material.

Two examples from SpiritCo can be used to further illustrate this point. Firstly, the case of the Production Team Leader (pp. 62), who has managed to build trust relationships with her colleagues by delivering what was expected from her, and

therefore she has recently been promoted. Secondly, we can consider the case of the company's agency drivers, who, given their precarious employment conditions, are often unable to properly deliver what is expected from them, and therefore they are constrained in the development of trust relationships with their colleagues (e.g. Material Controller, pp. 63*).*

Other mechanisms determine instead the development of trust with line managers. Their higher hierarchical position demands a different and more challenging set of expectations, which managers need to be able to fulfill in order to develop trust relationships (e.g. Manufacturing Development Manager, pp. 63). Respondents from both the organisations suggested that line managers need to build trust by being available to their team members and providing support (e.g. Operation Officer A, pp. 68; Environmental Assessment Advisor, pp. 69), by treating equally their subordinates despite the different hierarchical position, by providing a certain degree of autonomy (e.g. Unit Area Administrator, pp. 70), as well as by providing mentoring and development opportunities (e.g. Senior HR Business Partner's, pp. 79). As Möllering (2006) suggested, trust is based here on an institutionalized role, which sets a specific pattern of expectations among actors. Managers tend to be a source of embodied organisational actions, therefore high or low trust toward them can be interpreted as a response to employees' perception of organisational support (Ferres *et al.*, 2005).

The data also suggested that, in order to develop trust, managers need to be consistent and avoid making promises they do not have the power to fulfill. This can indeed be quite problematic and it can create issues when managers are required to deliver on multiple levels, or they have to respond to competing priorities. In this regard, the

Procurement Director of SpiritCo (pp. 64) suggested, for example, that managers need to be very careful in not developing a friendship type of relationship with their subordinates. This confirms, as Fulmer and Gelfand (2012) have suggested, that interpersonal trust might be more difficult to develop when two parties have power differences than when they hold similar power.

We can utilize again two examples from the data to further illustrate the unique aspects characterizing the development of trust relationships with line managers. Firstly, the Material Controller of SpiritCo (pp. 64), despite acknowledging the reciprocal nature of trust, described how the unequal bargaining power (Mather, 2011) between herself and her line manager implies that the latter does not have to put the same degree of effort in building trust. The second example is given instead by the Continuous Improvement Manager of NatureOrg (pp. 70), who described how line managers, differently from employees, may have to simultaneously deliver on multiple levels and balance competing priorities, which can affect the development of trust relationships with them. As other respondents also commented, line managers need to be trusted in taking decisions that are best for the overall unit or team, as opposed to the single individual (e.g. Corporate Planning Analyst, pp. 68), and they also need to have trust in the decisions that are being cascaded down from senior managers, as these could affect the development of trust relationships with their own team members (e.g. Unit Area Administrator, pp. 103).

The development of trust relationships with senior managers seems instead to be determined by mechanisms primarily related to the leading role that they hold within the two organisations. Senior managers of SpiritCo have been able, for example, to

develop trust by assuring the company's successful functioning, consequently guaranteeing a degree of job security to their employees (e.g. Administration Officer, pp. 70). As some scholars already acknowledged (Carnevale and Wechsler, 1992; Oomsels and Bouckaert, 2012), job security seems to constitute an important antecedent for the level of trust that staff members can develop toward their senior management team (e.g. Production Operator C, pp. 65), as well as for developing a sense of purpose toward the job (e.g. Warehouse Team Leader, pp. 65). Indeed, as Den Hartog (2003) has suggested, visioning is more important for developing trust with senior managers than lower-level managers.

Conversely, other respondents of SpiritCo manifested instead a lack of trust toward their senior managers, due to their role at the top of the organisational ladder (e.g. Plant Engineer, pp. 66). This lack of trust was indeed also directly confirmed by both the interviewed company's directors of SpiritCo, who recognized the existence of a series of political games played by the members of the senior management team to pursue their own personal agendas (e.g. Technical Director, pp. 67; Procurement Director, pp. 67). As Chen and Indartono (2011) also suggested, this confirms that politics in organisations and manipulative behaviors are negatively related to the development of trust relationships.

The senior managers of NatureOrg are instead less trusted in their capacity of safeguarding jobs and effectively running their organisation. The degree of uncertainty affecting the organisation is, for example, well described by the Senior HR Business Partner (pp. 98). Senior managers are alleged of a lack of transparency and communication, of being too remote and not sufficiently involving their staff, of taking decisions that do not have the best interest of their staff at heart, and of pursuing

personal and political agendas without sufficiently standing against the requests of the Scottish Government (e.g. Environmental Assessment Adviser, pp. 74*).*

The findings from both the organisations confirm Albrecht and Travaglione (2003)'s argument that the development of trust toward senior managers is mainly determined by their capacity of providing a degree of stability and job security, and by effectively communicating with their staff members. As Norman *et al.* (2010) have suggested, senior managers engaging in positive and transparent communication seem to obtain a higher level of trust from their staff, while their actual and perceived accessibility can positively influence the development of trust toward them (Worrall *et al.*, 2011). However, for most employees, the decision to trust senior management seems to be based more on the outcomes of organisational decisions made by them (Costigan and Berman, 1998; Tzafrir, 2005) and on the perceived fairness of these decisions (Connell *et al.*, 2003; Tyler, 2003). In other words, as McCauley and Kuhnert (1992) suggested, trust between employees and senior managers tend not to be interpersonal in nature, and not based on the direct personal experience of their character, words and actions.

The focus on the job role provides a valuable conceptual vehicle for making the micro-macro link between trust in individuals and their organisational context (Perrone *et al.*, 2003). In line with the psychological tradition, the findings confirm that the development of trust is also influenced by the characteristics of the relationships that staff members form with each other. The importance of developing effective interpersonal relationships is already well validated by the intra-organisational trust literature (Searle *et al.*, 2011b; Mayer *et al.*, 1995), which has acknowledged that communication constitutes the backbone of any interpersonal relationships (Carnevale

and Wechsler, 1992; Payne and Clark, 2003; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000) and plays a key role in the development of trust.

The findings confirm the literature (Hill *et al.*, 2009; Den Hartog, 2003) suggesting that it is easier to build trust through one-to-one, face-to-face interactions, as opposed to having to build trust through remote forms of communication (e.g. Procurement's Director, pp. 75; Project Manager, pp. 79). In order to obtain an effective communication, it is fundamental for staff members to be able to identify with the persons they are interacting with and to adjust their behaviors accordingly (e.g. Corporate Planning Analyst, pp. 80).

There seem to be certain scenarios where communicating effectively is particularly vital. That is the case, for example, for those situations where decisions need to be taken or deadlines need to be respected. Firstly, it is fundamental for both line managers and senior managers to involve other staff members as much as possible in decision-making processes and obtaining their buy-in on decisions. Participative and consulting decision-making, that gives followers a voice, is a key dimension of procedural justice, and it has already been found to be a key factor in the development of trust in leaders (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002; Gillespie and Mann, 2004). Secondly, it is also essential for every staff members to promptly communicate beforehand whenever a deadline cannot be respected (e.g. Operation Officer A, pp. 79*).* The significant challenge of communication in decision-making scenarios was, for example, well described by the Unit Area Administrator of NatureOrg (pp. 103).

Direct communication seems also to be important for the development of trust relationships with senior managers. Within SpiritCo, those staff members who had in the past an opportunity to collaborate more closely with their senior managers, or had

an opportunity to develop closer personal relationships with them, manifested a higher degree of trust toward them (e.g. Events Coordinator, pp. 75; Production Operator C, pp. 76). Conversely, when a specific role does not allow sufficient interactions with senior managers, it negatively affects the development of trust relationships with them. This is well described, for example, by the Technical Director of SpiritCo (pp. 77), who acknowledged that employees, who do not have regular interactions with him, might have developed a certain lack of trust due to unmet expectations.

A very similar dynamic is also observable within NatureOrg. On the one hand, there are staff members trusting senior managers due to some previous personal collaborations with them (e.g. Efficient Government Officer, pp. 80; Continuous Improvement Manager, pp. 81). On the other, there are also numerous examples of lack of interpersonal communication and lack of direct interactions with senior managers, which have hindered the development of trust toward them (e.g. Information System Team Leader, pp. 81-82). Indeed, the lack of communication and visibility of senior management seems to be a widespread issue for many respondents of NatureOrg (e.g. Operation Officer B, pp. 82).

All this supports Costigan *et al.* (2011)'s argument that top management should be careful in adjusting their communication style when employees' trust drops. As Beslin and Reddin (2004) suggested, face-time can indeed improve employees' trust perception of top management. In other words, trust is higher when decisions that can seriously impact on the employee are taken by someone with whom the employee has a dyadic one-to-one interaction (Roussin, 2008), or a face-to-face relationship (Blunsdon and Reed, 2003). As previously mentioned, trust between employees and senior managers tend to be not interpersonal in nature, but based instead on

organisational outcomes; however, direct interpersonal relationships with senior managers might become relevant when trust is broken down at the organisational level.

Respondents from both the organisations also highlighted the importance of guaranteeing confidentiality with both their peers and line managers for ensuring the development of trust (e.g. Production Line Manager, pp. 77; Information Systems Team Leader, pp. 83) and how not holding confidential information, while trying to pursue personal agendas, could negatively affect the development of trust *(e.g. Operation Officer B, pp. 83).*

In agreement with the literature (e.g. Whitener *et al*., 1998), staff members of NatureOrg also confirmed the importance of autonomy for favouring the development of trust. As Perrone *et al.* (2003) already explained, autonomy is what allows individuals to exercise discretion in a way that conveys their underlying motives and intentions. Therefore, it is essential for managers to carry out their job without standing over their colleagues' shoulders; while, for employees, it is important to have the opportunity to work without being constantly overseen. Additionally, the findings also suggest that autonomy is particularly important for members of staff who are remotely managed, for those having a manager that works part-time (e.g. Administrator Officer, pp. 84; HR Business Partners, pp. 84), as well as for those managers who need to cope with a potential lack of available resources (e.g. Unit Area Administrator, pp. 83).

Furthermore, staff members of SpiritCo also highlighted the importance of honesty, integrity and respect for facilitating the development of trust relationships. For line and senior managers, honesty and integrity seem to be particularly important in all those scenarios where their commitments must be fulfilled (e.g. Manufacturing

Development Manager, pp. 77-78*)*. In this regard, the literature is already very exhaustive, as many scholars and researchers have considered honesty as a pivotal facet of trust (Cummings and Bromiley, 1996; Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, 1999), while many others have adopted the concept of integrity as part of the Mayer and colleagues' model of individual trustworthiness (Mayer *et al.*, 1995). However, these researches have often remained focused on the interpersonal level without sufficiently connecting these concepts to the organisational environment. Conversely, the findings provide an interesting example (i.e. Production Operator B, pp. 78) of how a lack of honesty, integrity, and respect can negatively affect the development of trust consequently to the introduction of a new organizational practice, such as the night-shift for the production operators and engineers of SpiritCo.

5.3 Dynamics of trust at the organisational level

Within SpiritCo, the thriving business environment of the company has facilitated the development of trust relationships by guaranteeing a high degree of job security (e.g. Production Operator A, pp. 65). The HR Business Partner (pp. 85) described how the need of the organisation to become more efficient, while still delivering high standards products, has led to a series of cultural changes that have affected the development of trust. The offering of training and management courses, as well as the implementation of various management practices, have, for example, positively affected the development of trust by influencing individual behaviors. The running of management training has broken down some of the barriers impeding the development of trust between individuals (e.g. Production Line Manager, pp. 86); while the implementation of new managerial practices, such as '5S', 'Continuous Improvement', and 'Lean

Manufacturing', has allowed to positively influence the development of trust by more clearly defining staff's roles and responsibilities, consequently obtaining from them a higher degree of involvement in the business (e.g. Production Team Lead, pp. 86). Other management practices positively influencing the development of trust are team-working, adopted for setting common goals and preventing the pursuit of personal agendas (e.g. Project Account, pp. 87; Procurement Director, pp. 87*)*; cross-functional teams, which favour a higher degree of collaboration across departments (e.g. EHS Advisor, pp. 88); and the Global Performance Management System (GPS), which favours a higher degree of transparency and a better promotion of the organisational core values (e.g. Production Operator D, pp. 90-91). In particular, the GPS allows each staff member to have access to the annual objectives of all their peers and managers, enhancing the level of transparency within the company. It also facilitates the promotion of trust as an organisational core value, by making it part of the company's performance management process. As part of their annual objectives, staff members are in fact requested to provide evidence that demonstrate their focus and efforts to build trust relationships with their colleagues.

Additionally, besides the implementation of new management practices, the adoption of new communication tools, such as company-wide monthly briefs and organisational core values, has positively affected the development of trust. On the one hand, the use of company-wide monthly briefs has allowed better sharing of information and increased involvement of staff members in decision-making processes (e.g. Events Coordinator's, pp. 89). On the other, the adoption of the organisational core values has allowed employees to better focusing on trust (e.g. EHS Manager, pp. 89-90), especially by having the values incorporated into the company's performance

management system (e.g. Global Archive Manager, pp. 90). In agreement with Nooteboom (2002), the data confirm that employee's perception of their organisation's trustworthiness can be derived from shared values and norms. These are particularly important because they can contribute to the development of 'affect-based' trust among employees (Lämsä and Pučėtaitė, 2006). Indeed, committing to commonly share values can allow increasing trust by developing a collective identity (Den Hartog, 2003) and deeper kind of relationships (i.e. developing 'identification-based' trust).

Similarly, respondents of NatureOrg also described various mechanisms positively influencing the development of trust at an organisational level. They referred, for example, to the consensual decision-making process characterizing the organisation (e.g. Continuous Improvement Manager, pp. 96), the higher degree of openness and transparency recently obtained with the adoption of the partnership agreement with the trade union (e.g. HR Business Partner, pp. 96), as well as the incremental use of IT communication systems and video conferencing (e.g. Directorate Support Manager, pp. 97). Additionally, one of the interviewed Project Manager (pp. 97) also emphasised the implementation of more structural business and corporate planning processes, which have allowed to enhance trust by improving professionalism and management within the organisation. This confirms Six and Sorge (2008)'s argument that greater formalization of interpersonal dealing can coincide with the building of trust, as individual behaviors are subject to valuable constraints.

Other respondents acknowledged a high level of trust within the organisation as a consequence of the positive organisational culture (e.g. Operation Officer D, pp. 98) and of the high level of respect existing between staff and management (e.g. Recreation

& Access Officer, pp. 98). Alongside the mentioned organisational features, it was also highlighted that the organisation's reduced budget, together with the increased business pressures distressing the organisation, have positively affected the development of trust between staff members by obliging managers and employees to collaborate more closely with each other (e.g. Trade Union Convenor, pp. 97).

Conversely, other respondents recognized instead several mechanisms negatively influencing the development of trust. At SpiritCo, the Manufacturing Development Manager (pp. 86) described, for example, how the development of trust is influenced by the characteristics of each department and by the hierarchical structure of the organisation, suggesting that lower levels of trust might be found at the higher level of the organisational ladder. Other respondents expressed their doubts on the organisational core values, arguing that these are not sufficiently enforced to make any real difference (e.g. Procurement Director, pp. 91), that they are not properly respected by senior managers (e.g. HR Business Partner, pp. 91-92), or even that they have been adopted as a reputational facade to hide the problems created by the intensification of pressures and the increased organisational demands (i.e. higher workload and widen responsibilities) placed on the workforce (e.g. Production Operator B, pp. 92, 94).

Indeed, other respondents also confirmed the negative effects produced by the increased workload, the stronger business pressures, and the higher levels of stress within the company (e.g. Plant Engineer pp. 92-93). It was described, for example, that staff members have to increasingly struggle to keep their promises and commitments (e.g. Project Accountant, pp. 93); that the introduction of new organisational systems, adopted to cope with the increased workload, has created some resentment and passive

resistance from staff members (e.g. Events Coordinator, pp. 95); and that the constant changes affecting the company have prevented employees from having a sufficient degree of stability (e.g. HR Business Partner, pp. 95) and have fostered the risk of driving fears and of generating a blaming culture between staff members (e.g. Manufacturing Development Manager, pp. 94).

This evidence seems to confirm Gillespie and Dietz (2009)'s argument that structurally embedded pressures are the cause of a demanding and unpredictable working environment, which is more conducive to trust failures. Two interesting examples from the data can be utilized to further illustrate how increased business pressures can detrimentally affect the development of trust relationships. Firstly, the Material Controller (pp. 94) described how business pressures can affect the trust relationships between a manager and his/her team members when they are not able to cope with the increased workload. Secondly, one of the production operators (e.g. Production Operator E, pp. 95) described how business pressures have recently led to the introduction of the night-shift for production operators, which in turn has negatively affected the development of trust toward senior managers undermining their integrity.

Similarly, a large number of respondents from NatureOrg also recognized that the severe business conditions facing the organisation in recent years, its declining budget and the increased business pressures have hindered the development of trust relationships. The Senior HR Business Partner (pp. 98-99) recognized, for example, a substantial degree of uncertainty caused by the lack of sufficient resources and of adequate communication from the organization; while the Corporate Planning Analyst (pp. 99) focused on the degree of instability caused by the continuous changes

characterizing the organisation, confirming that organisational changes can indeed negatively impact on the development of trust (Kiefer, 2005). Equally, other respondents recognized the existence of a certain degree of cynicism and resistance amongst staff members, due to the continuous changes characterizing the organization (e.g. Efficient Government Officer pp. 101; Advice Information Officer, pp. 101).

Other respondents focused instead on the negative impacts caused by the lack of resources in the organisation. This has negatively affected the development of trust by, for example, reducing the capacity of staff to deliver what they have promised to their colleagues (e.g. External Funding Officer, pp. 99), by deteriorating the quality of staff's jobs (e.g. Directorate Support Manager, pp. 99-100), by creating more business pressures and stricter deadlines (e.g. Unit Area Administrator, pp. 100), by determining a lack of career and promotion opportunities for members of staff (e.g. Program Manager's, pp. 100), and by causing threats of possible redundancy situations (e.g. Operation Officer C, pp. 100). The findings confirm that relational contract breaches can be linked to low employees' trust in organisations (Montes and Irving, 2008) and these can also create tensions in the relationship between employees and their respective line managers (e.g. Information Systems Team Leader, pp. 101).

Furthermore, the organisation's incessant pursuit of efficiency has also solicited the introduction of a series of monitoring and auditing systems, which have negatively impacted on the development of trust by causing frictions and resistance from staff members (e.g. HR Business Partner's, pp. 102). Respondents pointed out the negative effects caused by the grants system (e.g. Unit Area Administrator, pp. 102), the monitoring system adopted for controlling internet usage and clearing desks (e.g. Operation Officer B, pp. 102), the monitoring system for 'desk-sharing' (e.g.

Environmental Assessment Adviser, pp.103), the uneven application of the 'flexi-time' system (e.g. Operation Officer A's, pp. 103), and the hierarchical system of approval for decision-making (e.g. Program Manager pp. 103).

Such systems seem to be in line with the "New Public Management" reforms described by Oomsels and Bouckaert (2012), which champion organisational decentralization coupled with mechanisms of control such as performance monitoring and auditing, or internal control systems and administrative regulations, that limit lower-tier managerial discretion. These types of mechanisms might effectively replace trust as a mechanism of control because they reduce the effective need for trust. Where there is no more risk or discretion, trust is indeed no longer necessary (Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Rousseau *et al*., 1998; Fulmer and Gelfand, 2012). Other scholars have similarly argued that such systems introduced a degree of institutionalized distrust into public sector organisations through a series of institutional measures and control mechanisms (Van de Walle, 2010; Dubnick, 2005). This is also confirmed by the comment of the interviewed Program Manager of NatureOrg (pp. 157), where he clearly explains that the above mentioned organisational systems can indeed significantly undermine the development of trust by affecting individual behaviors and interpersonal relationships.

5.4 Trust dynamics and the HR function

HRM policies and practices have often been regarded as the most influential area for trust development inside organisations (Blunsdon and Reed 2003; Whitener, 1997, 2001; Dietz *et al.*, 2011). HR professionals are requested to build people management systems that deliver a high level of employee commitment and engagement, and although trust dynamics have rarely been the explicit focus of most HR models, they

suffuse them all (Searle and Skinner, 2011). Indeed, as Searle and Skinner (2011) explained, trust issues do surface throughout the entire 'employee cycle' and they relate to the content of HR policies and intervention, as well as to the way they are applied in a consistent, fair, and effective manner.

HR policies and their enactment can express the organisation's competence, integrity, concern, care and respect for its employees and their interests, consequently impacting on the development of trust. Effective, fair and supportive HR policies and practices are in fact on the organisational 'front-line', as they are pivotal to employees forming positive psychological contracts (Westwood *et al.*, 2001) and can influence positive organisational outcomes (Ferres *et al.*, 2005). They seek to shape employees' expectations regarding reciprocal obligations between managers and staff, anticipated performance levels, treatments at work (e.g. welfare, voice), and the prospects for progression within the organisation (Searle and Skinner, 2011).

In agreement with the literature, the findings confirm that trust is perceived as very important for the HR department of both the organisations. At SpiritCo, the HR Business Partner (pp. 104-105) highlighted the need for HR to build trust with both employer and employees to be able to represent the view of both parties. As Ulrich (1998) explained, on the one hand HR professionals need to act as 'strategic partner'/'change agent' to design policies and practices that secure productive employees, reflecting the will of management. On the other, they also play the role of 'employee champion/ advocate' attending to the needs and welfare of employees.

Similarly, the Senior HR Business Partner of NatureOrg (pp. 114) also described how trust has become increasingly important for the HR department in recent years, in order to improve its reputation and modify the traditional perception of HR as the 'police'

of the organisation. Following the hiring of the current Head of HR, the department has adopted a new approach to help the organisation achieving its objectives, being more proactive, pragmatic, flexible, and more engaged with the business (e.g. HR Business Partner, pp. 114-115). Equally, the Senior HR Business Partner (pp. 115) also highlighted the new central role of trust for the HR department.

Additionally, numerous other respondents from both the organisations also confirmed the importance of trust for their respective HR departments, describing how the HR staff needs to develop personal relationships with the workforce (e.g. Recreation and Access Officer, pp. 116), held confidential information, and provide support to employees when they are facing problems and they might not receive sufficient support from their direct line managers (e.g. Production Operator B, pp. 105). A good example, demonstrating how the support of HR can positively influence the development of trust, is provided by the Production Team Leader of SpiritCo (pp. 106), when she described how she trusts her HR colleagues due to the support she had received from them in the past while facing some personal issues.

Despite these positive acknowledgments, the majority of respondents conversely manifested a lack of trust toward their respective HR colleagues, identifying several mechanisms which have negatively affected the development of trust toward them. At SpiritCo, respondents recognized, for example, that a lack of employees' support from HR staff could be detrimental to the development of trust (e.g. Warehouse Team Leader, pp. 107). The involvement of HR in cases of disciplinary hearings and redundancies situations has also been recognized as a factor hindering the developing of trust, particularly for staff members working on the shop-floor (e.g. Global Archive

Manager, pp. 108; Material Team Leader, pp. 108). This seems to create a fundamental issue in terms of how HR staff are being perceived by other organisational members (e.g. EHS Advisor, pp. 108-109). Indeed, several studies have already demonstrated that HR professionals can struggle with these conflicts (Caldwell, 2003; Francis and Keegan, 2006), particularly when commercial imperatives take priority over employees' welfare or fairness concerns.

Other important factors, determining a lack of trust toward SpiritCo's HR staff, are their lack of confidentiality and incapacity of taking decisions (e.g. Manufacturing Development Manager, pp. 109), as well as the perception from employees that HR is primarily responsible for defending the interests of the organisation (e.g. EHS Manager, pp. 109-110). In this regard, one of the production operators (i.e. Production Operator E, pp. 110) described, for example, that HR staff tends to manipulate things to defend the interests of the company; while the HR Business Partner (pp. 110-111) recognized that, by operating at a strategic level, HR staff can indeed negatively affect the development of trust relationships with employees.

Furthermore, the findings also identified a lack of interactions between production operators and the HR Director, who has been accused of pursuing a personal agenda (e.g. Senior Production Manager, pp. 113), which seems to further undermine the development of trust relationships with HR. This confirms a recent CIPD's report (Hope-Hailey, 2012), which states that HR is often seen as solely focused on the concerns of the business, or of senior managers, and therefore it appears insufficiently impartial to be trusted.

Equally, respondents of NatureOrg also identified several mechanisms negatively influencing the development of trust toward their HR department. Firstly, the lack of sufficient interactions and communication with the HR staff seems to undermine the possibility of developing trust relationships with them (e.g. Administration Officer, pp. 118). Indeed, the recent centralization of the HR department at the company's headquarters has depersonalized relationships with the HR staff members and has consequently reduced the level of trust toward them (e.g. Operations Officer B, pp. 118). Secondly, the adoption of the HR partnering model has further contributed to depersonalize relationships (e.g. Environmental Assessment Adviser, pp.123) and has created some resentment amongst staff members for the increased amount of people's administrative tasks, which have been delegated to them (e.g. Learning and Development Officer, pp. 122-123).

The devolving to line management of responsibilities for the employment relationship fits with established strategic models of HR 'business partnering' (Francis and Keegan, 2005), which should liberate HR practitioners for more 'value-added' activities as 'change agent' and 'strategic partner' (Ulrich, 1998). However, Francis and Keegan (2005: 27) found that many managers have 'neither the time nor the training to give HR the priority it needs'. As a result, the reputation of HR can become tainted unjustly. This is also confirmed by a recent CIPD's report (Hope-Hailey, 2012), describing the devolution of people management's responsibilities to the line managers, together with the recent establishment of HR shared service centers to reduce costs (e.g. outsourcing of payroll functions), and the alignment of the HR function with senior managers' agendas. According to Hope-Hailey (2012), because of these changes, HR is often seen as too remote from the workforce to the point that staff members do not even know

where the function is located. Indeed, the findings from NatureOrg confirm that the adoption of the HR partnering model, together with the centralization of the HR department at the new headquarters, have significantly weakened the trust relationships with the HR staff members of the organisation (e.g. Environmental Assessment Advisor, pp. 118; Operation Office B, pp. 118).

Other respondents highlighted instead that the HR department has not followed the same recruitment freeze that has instead characterized the rest of the organisation (e.g. External Funding Officer, pp. 119). It has also faced recruitment difficulties and high turnover rate, which have negatively affected the development of trust by not allowing the instauration of long-term relationships with HR staff (e.g. Unit Area Administrator, pp. 122). The high turnover has also generated a consequent lack of competence among HR advisors *(*e.g. Operation Officer A, pp. 122; Operation Officer B, pp. 122); consequently, line managers have started having doubts on the HR's capacity of providing correct advice and the right kind of information when requested (e.g. Project Manager, pp. 121-122; Efficient Government Officer, pp. 122). This has been strongly emphasised by one of the interviewed Program Manager (pp. 121), who admitted of having even stopped seeking or relying on HR staff for any advice.

Furthermore, other respondents also highlighted that HR staff has become more corporate-led and less focused on the welfare of employees *(*e.g. Efficient Government Officer, pp. 119-120). They argued that HR has lost its personal 'caring' touch toward employees, following the transformation from 'personnel' to 'human resources' (e.g. Unit Area Administrator, pp. 120)*,* and that HR staff has kept struggling between conflicting priorities that hinder the development of trust (e.g. Program Manager, pp. 120-121). These findings support Hope-Hailey (2012)'s argument that there seem to

be problems and tensions associated with HR, seeking to be a strategic business partner while at the same time trying to have a role which supports high-trust and harmonious employee relations. Harris (2007) has also suggested that the demands placed on HR specialists in the UK public sector have been particularly intense, and their role has changed far more radically than their counterparts in the private sector. The findings of this research suggest that this shift might also have produced substantial trust issues for HR specialists in the public sector.

Respondents also confirmed that HR staff do play an important role in the development of trust within their respective organisations. The HR Business Partner of SpiritCo argued, for example, that HR staff can positively influence the development of trust by simultaneously operating at multiple levels. On the one hand, they can design and deliver practices and systems such as High-Performance Teams, or the Global Performance Management System, on behalf of the organisation; on the other, they can act as a judge, defending the interests of employees (e.g. HR Business Partner, pp. 111). HR does also play a role in promoting trust as an organisational core value (e.g. Senior Production Manager, pp. 111), particularly by connecting the value of trust to the company's performance management system (e.g. EHS's Advisor, pp. 111-112). Similarly, HR staff also plays a central role in the development of trust at NatureOrg (e.g. Operation Officer D, pp. 125-126). They have a crucial role in supporting managers to carry out good practices and correctly doing their jobs (e.g. Senior HR Business Partner, pp. 124), and they also need to make sure that the right policies are in place to empower managers during decision-making processes (e.g. Leaning and Development Officer, pp. 124-125). As the Continuous Improvement Manager (pp.

125) explained, these policies build the foundation for enhancing trust and developing good working relationships. A good example of an HR policy positively influencing the development of trust is the recently signed off partnership agreement, i.e. a set of rules and guidelines that management, HR, and the company's trade union should work with and respect (e.g. Trade Union Convenor, pp. 126).

The findings generally confirm that HR activities and policies do exert an important influence on the process of building trust relationships across the two organisations. As explained in the literature chapter, HRM policies covering the full employment cycle can directly affect the level of trust (Searle and Skinner, 2011; Whitener, 1997) and can influence employee's perception of organisational trustworthiness. Both the content of HRM policies, as well as the perceived fairness with which they are delivered, are central to employees' perception of organisational trustworthiness (Mayer and Davis, 1999; Searle *et al.*, 2011a), and employees interpret these policies as statement of intent, indicative of the personified organisation's commitment and trust toward them (Skinner *et al.*, 2004; Whitener, 2001; Guzzo and Noonan, 1994).

In agreement with Perrone *et al.* (2003), the findings confirm that the effective design and implementation of HR activities is important for the development of trust. Both the organisations seem to support the development of HR practices, regularly included in High Involvement Working Systems (Searle, 2013; Young and Daniel, 2003), to improve communication and foster participation and empowerment of employees. Practices such as cross-functional teams, organisational values, company-wide monthly briefs, the global performance management system, or the partnership agreement with the trade union have been adopted to solicit stronger psychological contracts, characterized by a high level of employee's commitment and the

mobilization of greater discretionary efforts from employees. In turn, these practices have positively influenced the development of trust within both the organisations.

Despite recognizing the importance of HR, most respondents from both the organisations also agreed that the development of trust cannot be the sole responsibility of HR staff. The Project Accountant of SpiritCo (pp. 112) emphasised, for example, that trust needs to be supported by both managers and employees to be effectively developed; while the HR Business Partner of NatureOrg (pp. 124) commented that the responsibility for the development of trust lies in the entire organisation. Similarly, other staff members of NatureOrg also commented that the development of trust within the organisation is mainly determined by the close personal relationships between employees and their respective line managers (e.g. Environmental Assessment Advisor, pp. 127), as well as by the actions and the degree of openness of senior managers (e.g. Advice Information Officer, pp. 126-127). These findings seem to support Dietz *et al*. (2011)'s argument that HR can contribute to creating the conditions for trust to thrive, but it is up to managers, as 'owners' of their staff's psychological contracts, to deliver on trust building. As the authors suggested, the line manager are responsible for the immediate working environment around an individual employee, whereas senior managers are more accountable for the organisation's wider culture.

Conversely, other respondents of SpiritCo expressed instead more doubts on the capacity of their HR department to promote trust across the company (e.g. EHS Manager, pp. 112; Plant Engineer, pp. 113). According to some of them, dealings with disciplinary hearings and redundancy situations limit, or even impede, HR staff from developing trust relationships (e.g. Production Operator D, pp. 113-114; Global

Archive Manager, pp. 114). The company's Senior Production Manager (pp. 113) also identified fundamental contradictions between the way HR staff claims to promote trust and the way they actually behave in practice. As Caldwell (2003) also suggested, this seems to confirm that HR professionals sit uneasily between opposing managers and employees' interests, and that, besides being normatively committed to trust-building models of employment relations, they paradoxically often find themselves involved in designing and implementing trust-reducing practices.

Equally, some respondents from NatureOrg expressed their scepticism on the capacity of their HR department to promote trust across the organisation, accusing HR staff of not being sufficiently visible (e.g. Information Systems Team Leader, pp. 117; Administrator Officer, pp. 118), not sufficiently knowing their colleagues (e.g. Operation Officer B, pp. 118), not adequately focusing on employees' welfare (e.g. Efficient Government Officer, pp. 119), being incompetent and inconsistent (e.g. Operation Officer B, pp. 122), and even of being detrimental to the development of trust by being unconstructive and by lacking of sufficient flexibility (e.g. Environmental Assessment Advisor, pp. 120). These findings seem to support Harris (2007)'s argument on the difficulties of the HR function, within the public sector, to promote a higher level of employee commitment while having to deal with a sector offering resource constraints, continuous restructuring, and a growing level of employment regulations. This seems to produce a fractured and dysfunctional situation where it seems to be extremely difficult for HR staff, working in the public sector, to promote trust relationships across their own organisation.

5.5 Dynamics of trust in the employment relationship

The findings have confirmed the importance and the benefits of intra-organizational trust within the employment relationships. Trust has been found to play a fundamental role in obtaining effective cooperation and communication, in enhancing motivation, and in building the foundations of effective and productive working relationships. The data from both the organisations has confirmed that the development of trust within the employment relationship can be affected by the specificity of the considered job role, by interpersonal dynamics, as well as by numerous organisational factors.

Organisational actors holding different job role – e.g. employees, line managers, and senior managers - have been linked to different mechanisms facilitating or hindering the development of trust. For employees, the primary mechanism of trust development seems to be their interest (or capacity) of delivering results, seeking increased responsibilities, and extending their influence in the organisation. Some employees may look for a 'fair day's work for a fair day's pay' arrangement and a minimum level of trust, as it was the case for the agency drivers of SpiritCo, others may instead manifest a high degree of moral involvement in the organisation and a willingness to work toward a 'high trust' employment relationship, characterized by mutual loyalty and broader support (Rousseau *et al*., 1998). The difference between these individuals is determined by their specific employment conditions, as well as by their personal approach toward their job, and problems of trust could arise when employees' personal beliefs do not coincide with the organisational demands placed on the job role.

Different types of mechanisms determine instead the development of trust with line managers, whose institutionalized role in the employment relationship sets a specific pattern of expectations toward them. In order to develop trust, line managers are in fact

expected to be available and providing support to their team members, to treat equally their subordinates despite the lower hierarchical positions, to provide a certain degree of autonomy, to provide mentoring and development opportunities, and to avoid making promises that they do not have the power to fulfill. In this case, problems of trust could arise when line managers might have to deliver on multiple levels and might need to respond to competing priorities and conflicting expectations.

Differently, the development of trust relationships with senior managers is instead mainly determined by their willingness (or capacity) of assuring stability and job security in the employment relationship, consequently guaranteeing the successful functioning of the organization and allowing staff members to have a purposeful job. Senior managers reserve the power and the authority to significantly influence employment conditions, therefore the development of trust toward them tends to be less interpersonal in nature (McCauley and Kuhnert, 1992) but more related to organisational factors such as downsizing or restructuring processes. Consequently, problems of trust could arise when senior managers are unable of safeguarding jobs, they lack sufficient transparency, they do not sufficiently involve their workforce in decision-making processes, or they even manifest manipulative behaviors (i.e. playing political games) to pursue personal agendas.

The findings have also demonstrated the link between the above job roles and specific interpersonal dynamics, which can also affect the development of trust. Job roles can, for example, affect the frequency and the nature of specific relationships, therefore those staff members having a role, which allows closer personal relationships with senior managers, manifested a higher level of trust toward them. Furthermore, in line

with the psychological tradition discussed in the literature chapter, the findings have confirmed that the development of trust can be influenced by interpersonal factors such as honesty, integrity, respect, confidentiality and autonomy.

Furthermore, the findings have also revealed that the development of intra-organizational trust can be influenced by organizational practices and the wider organizational context. SpiritCo has been able, for example, to nurture trust by adopting team-working practices (i.e. cross-functional teams), company-wide monthly briefs and organisational core values. Similarly, NatureOrg has managed to support the development of trust through structural organisational processes, a positive organisational culture, and the recent introduction of the partnership agreement.

Conversely, an increased competitive environment and an incessant request for more efficiency and higher standards have simultaneously impinged on the development of trust relationships within both the organisations, fostering conditions of suspicion and blame. At SpiritCo, increased business pressures and the constant changes affecting the company have considerably hindered the development of trust by undermining staffs' integrity and by creating a sense of instability. Likewise, continuous organisational changes, a declining budget, and a shortage of sufficient resources have produced high uncertainty amongst staff members of NatureOrg. Increased pressures, tighter resources, and overworked conditions have undermined trust by eroding staffs' integrity and their capacity of delivering results. Additionally, business pressures have also solicited the implementation of several systems to closely monitoring staffs' activities and performance. These systems have introduced a degree of institutionalized distrust into the organisation by impacting the way individuals operate and by weakening the employee-organisation bonds.

In summary, the findings have demonstrated that both the organizations are characterized by trust dynamics that simultaneously operate at multiple levels. Therefore, it is possible to envisage numerous circumstances in which trust may take an optimistic, high trust dynamic, as well as a pessimistic, low trust dynamic within the same organisation. Fox (1974)'s perspective, which is underrepresented in the intra-organisational trust literature, offers significant potential for providing a more complete explanation of these concurrent, and potentially contrasting, trust dynamics inside organisations. As Siebert *et al.* (2015) explained, Fox (1974) retained a degree of faith in high trust dynamics as a possible mechanism of social integration, despite being pessimistic on the possibility of improving trust relationships within the employment relationship given its structured antagonism (Edwards, 1086). According to Fox (1974), especially in the case of professional groups, the experience of work can have a relational and sometimes ideological contract rather than a purely economic one. Therefore, despite the low trust dynamics inherent in the employment relationship, professionals can still be trusted for their personal and creative skills, the strong commitment to the values of the organisation, self-control and high autonomy, and they respond accordingly in exhibiting a high degree of trust.

In the light of Fox's analysis, the findings of this thesis reaffirm the need to develop a perspective that is able to combine the structurally influenced and agentive aspects of organizational trust relations. By shifting the attention to the employment relationship, it is possible to recognize that different actors might have different interests and different aims, and share a limited degree of common purpose. Consequently, while attempting to develop trust through effective interpersonal relationships or engaging managerial practices, low levels of trust could simultaneously arise due to structural

and institutional constraints, or structurally influenced behaviours and practices.

The significant lack of trust toward HR staff registered within both the organizations clearly supports the argument on the necessity of studying trust through a multi-level analysis. Despite the acknowledgment from the interviewed HR Business Partners that trust does constitute a key ingredient to successfully encourage employees' commitment to organisational goals, the findings reveal that HR staff of both the organizatuions are yet struggling to develop trust with employees. Indeed, as Kochan (2004) has suggested, the HR's dilemma of championing and developing trust with employees, while simultaneously endeavouring to be part of the management team, seems to determine a crisis of trust and legitimacy for HR staff.

At NatureOrg, for example, HR staff has attempted to develop trust by modifying the traditional perception of HR as the 'police' of the organisation, while being more proactive, pragmatic, flexible and open to discussion and negotiation. However, the organisation's resource constraints, its continuing restructuring processes to gain further efficiency, the diminishing job security, the growing level of employment regulations have determined that, despite HR being normatively committed to trust-building models of employment relations, they very often end up not being trusted.

Additionally, the relocation of the HR department to the new headquarters and the increased use of self-service intranet systems have also reduced the opportunity for face-to-face interactions between HR and other members of staff, consequently reducing the possibility for HR staff to build trust relationships with their colleagues.

Despite the attempt to develop trust at an interpersonal level, other organizational factors limit significantly the HR's capacity of developing trust relationships across

the two organizations. This seems to be the case at NatureOrg in particular, whereas it is less evident at SpiritCo due to its more thriving business environment.

This portrays a dysfunctional situation for HR staff due to the inherent conflict of interest between employees and employers within the employment relationship, which HR practitioners struggle to mediate. However, this worrying lack of trust has not yet been sufficiently recognized within the trust literature. As Siebert *et al.* (2015) have suggested, this is probably because trust research that links to human resource management practices is typically underpinned by a 'unitarist' ideology, which emphasises consensus around common goals and harmony of interests; therefore, it has blindly focused only on high trust dynamics.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

6.1 Theoretical and empirical contributions

This research has proposed a multi-level study of intra-organisational trust with the aim of obtaining better insights into the state of trust in organisations. The key contribution made by the thesis is an attempt to advance the trust literature by simultaneously analysing both interpersonal and organisational factors affecting the development of trust. The analysis of different job roles has provided a valuable conceptual vehicle for making the micro-macro link between trust in individuals and their organisational context (Perrone *et al*., 2003). Organisational actors holding different job role – e.g. employees, line managers, and senior managers - have been linked to different mechanisms facilitating or hindering the development of trust.

It is also evident that differences in who is trusted and by whom reflect the institutional embeddedness of workers' trust in their organisation, the hierarchical power structure of the organisation, and the power imbalance between different organizational actors. Interpersonal and organisational trust dynamics are in fact mutually constitutive of each other, as intra-organisational trust is embedded in the wider structural and institutional context of the employment relationship. As Mollering (2005) suggested, the tension between structure and agency is inherent in trust relationships; therefore, the study of intra-organisational trust needs to combine the structurally influenced and agentive aspects of organisational trust relations.

Referring to the structure-agency debate in social sciences (Giddens & Pierson, 1998; Delbridge & Edwards, 2013), structural and agentive approaches to trust research need

to be reconciled. There is a need to go beyond the typical high-trust analysis and the sophisticated HRM prescriptions to trust building, characterizing much of the current trust literature, which are often predicated on an unrealistic unitarist frame of reference. As Siebert *et al.* (2015) have suggested, trust research that links to human resource management (HRM) practices is typically underpinned by a 'unitarist' ideology, which emphasises consensus around common goals and harmony of interests, therefore suggesting inherently high trust dynamics. However, this dominant functional perspective precludes deeper questions on the development of trust, particularly in light of the recent critiques of 'soft' HR as a 'failed project' (Thompson, 2011). In other words, it fails to take into account the nature of the employment relationship.

When investigating intra-organizational trust, trust researchers have focused on the organisation as unit of analysis but have neglected, or played down, the nature of the employment relations in most organisational contexts. They have often implied that employees' trust could either be assumed as the default position (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) or regarded as a desirable state to be achieved, often raising unrealistic hopes toward employees and managers. Consequently, the current lack of trust in Western organisations often seems to be treated as a pathology, merely rooted in poor managerial communication and leadership.

Conversely, by shifting the attention to the employment relationship's contested nature and its associated dialectics of control and resistance (Mather, 2011), this thesis has demonstrated that trust may be very fragile and easily broken. This suggests that there are more deep-seated issues in the employment relationship, which need to be better considered when investigating the development of trust in organizations, and that the increased attention to intra-organisational trust within the literature may be due to the

fact that the development of trust is actually becoming increasingly problematic (Möllering, Bachmann, & Lee, 2004).

The second main contribution made by the thesis is an analysis of the role of the human resource function in the development of intra-organisational trust. Within the literature, HRM has been cited as key to building and maintaining trust (Whitener, 2001), as it does permeate the 'social system of work' (Blunsdon and Reed, 2003) shaping the employment relationship, and developing psychological links between organisational and employees' goals (Arthur, 1994; Iles *et al*., 1990). The design of HRM strategies and processes is intended to enhance trust by enabling cooperation among organisational actors in pursuit of mutual gains (Searle and Skinner, 2011). However, no studies have until today investigated to what extent the HR function is trusted by other organisational members, and whether HR professionals can play a key role, as an active agent, in the development of trust relationships.

The findings of the thesis have confirmed that trust is perceived as very important by all the interviewed HR Business Partners, as they need to represent the interests of both their employer and employees by simultaneously operating at multiple levels. They believe to have a fundamental role in supporting and empowering managers during decision-making processes, in defending and advocating the interests of employees, and in acting as a strategic partner by promoting HR policies and practices on behalf of their employer. Indeed, HR practices such as cross-functional teams, organisational values, the performance management system, and the partnership agreement have been found to positively influence the development of trust within the two organizations.

Conversely, numerous respondents expressed scepticism on the capacity of their HR colleagues to build and promote trust relationships. Some of them simply argued that trust cannot be the sole responsibility of HR staff, but it is up to line managers and senior managers, as 'owners' of their staff's psychological contracts, to contribute to creating the conditions for trust to thrive. They emphasised that the responsibility of engendering trust primarily lies in the direct relationship between employees and their respective line managers, as well as in the actions and openness of senior managers, and not in the adoption of any HR policies or practices.

Other respondents manifested a significant lack of trust toward their HR colleagues, arguing that the procedural and disciplinary nature of HR policies means that HR staff can be hardly trusted and can be very detrimental to the development of trust relationships. By operating at a strategic level, HR staff can negatively affect the development of trust with employees, particularly when commercial imperatives take priority over employees' welfare or fairness concerns. Within both the organisations, HR has been often seen as mainly focused on the concerns of the business, or of senior managers, undermining the employee-HR relationship at a fundamental level. Confirming the research report by Hope-Hailey (2012), the HR departments of both the organizations often ends up being considered insufficiently impartial to be trusted. Within SpiritCo, HR has been specifically accused of being too remote from the workforce, of being often involved in disciplinary hearings and redundancy situations, and of being primarily aligned with senior managers' agendas. As Harrington and Rayner (2011) have suggested, the alignment with management seems to prompt dissonance for HR staff and appears to challenge their integrity. Similarly, within NatureOrg, HR staff has been accused of increasingly responding to the interests of

senior managers and not sufficiently focusing on employee' welfare, of lacking of competencies and confidentiality, of not being sufficiently visible due to the devolvement to line managers of an increased number of people's administrative tasks, and finally of having depersonalized and weakened relationships with employees due to the centralization of the HR department at the new organisation's headquarters and due to the adoption of the HR partnering model. Employees do not generally hear from HR unless they have a problem, and this lack of contact undermines the possibility of developing trust relationships, to the point that staff members do not even know who their HR colleagues are, or where the HR function is located (Hope-Hailey, 2012). As Harrington and Rayner (2011) have suggested, by taking the role of sole advisor and absolving their decision-making to line management, HR seems to undermine its credibility by retreating from taking risks and failing to take any leadership role.

In summary, HR staff sits uneasily between opposing managers and employees' interests, as there is a plurality of interests and power asymmetries within the employment relationship. In both the organisations, HR staff struggle between conflicting priorities that hinder the development of trust, while simultaneously trying to play a more strategic role. The result is that on the one hand, HR attempts to infuse more trust into the employment relationship by acting as an HR partner and by focusing on practices and policies which elicit employees' empowerment and mutual commitment. On the other, these practices seem to represent a thin 'façade of trust' (Hardy *et al*., 1998), which hides deeper trust issues in the employment relationship, caused by problematic actions such as restructuring, downsizing, intensification of pressures or higher workloads. The HR partnering model seems also to distance HR

from the workforce, diminishing their opportunity to play the role of 'employee champion' (Ulrich, 1998) and confirming the worrying indications of a structural isolation of the department (Francis and Keegan, 2006).

6.2 Reflections and future research

The research has been motivated by the observation that the concept of trust as a multi-dimension construct is still poorly understood, and there is a need to further extend our understanding of the dynamics of trust in organisations. By simultaneously investigating trust dynamics at both interpersonal and organisational levels, such framework had allowed a more sensible interpretation of possible contradictions between the operational dimensions of trust, enabling the researcher to gain a better insight into the state of intra-organizational trust. As Fulmer and Gelfand (2012) argued, trust within any one level does not occur in a vacuum and needs to be considered in relations to the factors operating at the other levels.

The findings have demonstrated that trust relations are both the outcome of specific interpersonal interactions, as well as context dependent. It is essential to understand the effects of the organisational context on individuals and their relationships when attempting to investigate trust in the workplace. Intensified competition and business pressures, continuous organisational changes, and perceived organisational politics are all examples of contextual factors negatively affecting the development of trust, by making the employment relationship more risky and precarious.

In order to explain these factors, trust researchers should refer to the long tradition in organisational sociology and in the industrial relations literature, which has argued that the employment relationship is an inescapable struggle, or structural antagonism,

between managers and employees over work intensity. For example, organisational politics are closely related to issues of power but these have not attracted much attention within the trust literature (Bachmann, 2006). Although there have been studies on trust in leaders and among parties with different levels of power, little research has focused on how power differences may affect trust dynamics (Bachmann, 2006). The way in which individuals might develop trust, depending on their relative power within the organisation, represents a fruitful avenue for further research.

The findings of the thesis have also demonstrated the benefits of investigating trust dynamics in relation to specific job role (i.e. employee, line manager, senior managers). As Perrone *et al*. (2003) have argued, this provides a valuable conceptual vehicle for making the micro-macro link between trust in individuals and their organisational context. The relationship between trust and specific job roles represents another exciting and promising area for further research (Searle and Skinner, 2011).

Specific attention has also been given in the thesis to the role of HR and to the challenges faced by HR professionals in developing trust relationships. The findings have reported a fractured and dysfunctional situation for HR staff, where it seems to be extremely difficult for them to develop, or promote, trust relationships across their own organisations. This low level of trust cannot be simply explained by a deficit of people management skills, or a lack of effective HR policies, as much of the current trust literature seems to suggest (Siebert *et al*., 2016). This risk of raising unrealistic expectations toward HR professionals, without acknowledging the existence of conflicts of interest between employees and employers within the employment relationship, which HR practitioners need to hardly try to mediate.

In this regard, more research is required to better differentiate between the impact of HRM practices and policies on trust, and the impact of those who enact them. Furthermore, given the reciprocal nature of trust, the level of trust that HR practitioners might have toward other employees could also be of great importance (Tzafrir, 2005) and it could represent a further interesting avenue for new research. Torrington et al. (2005) have also suggested that employees, who do not trust their employer, can make ineffectual the work of any HR functions. This represents a valuable suggestion for a further area of research, which could investigate how trust relationships between specific organizational actors might affect the development of trust with other actors.

Ultimately, the explanations derived from this study are fallible and open to revision. Novel studies might find, for example, further nuances and conditions that this thesis was not able to uncover, particularly in terms of inter-links between the investigated levels of trust. Trust across levels is still at the nascent stage of scholarship (Fulmer and Gelfand, 2012) and future work is needed to further investigate how trust develops across levels of analysis. The author acknowledges that by focusing only on the interpersonal and on the organisational levels, the research has neglected to investigate how personal dispositions could also influence the development of trust, or how trust relationships might also be influenced by teams or other group dynamics.

Other limitations of the research are also due to problems of access, as the data have been collected from only two organisations and from a limited number of respondents. However, despite the contingencies of their contexts, adopting a comparative case-study design has allowed the researcher to construct more general explanations of the development of intra-organisational trust, which should allow other researchers to

analyse trust more holistically as a multi-dimensional construct in other organisational settings. More scholars first need to accept that trust consists of multiple strata, and their empirical methods should then evolve with the level of complexity and sophistication achieved in their conceptualizations of trust. This would facilitate the investigation of distinct levels of casual power, without risking of overemphasizing neither the effects of structural forces nor the subjectivities of the actors involved.

6.3 Policy implications for HR practitioners

HR practitioners need to be aware of their role in shaping trust relationships within organisations. Trust-building is one of the most fundamental knowledge for HR professionals (Sparrow and Marchington, 1998) although, as already mentioned in the literature review chapter, trust does not feature in the orthodox HRM models as a distinct individual outcome (Guest, 1997). HR policies and practices, such as performance management systems, employees' monitoring systems and reporting practices, as well as decision-making processes should all be examined for their implicit and explicit messages about trusting relationships. HR staff also needs to monitor levels of trust and trust-building cycles, especially during times of rapid changes, providing a 'barometer' for senior leaders of the temperature of the organisation. As Dietz, Martins, and Searle (2011) have suggested, a trust audit, asking what expectations have been set by a specific policy and whether these can be fulfilled, would represent a good place to start.

HR staff should also be aware of their potential bias toward management, of the impact that this could have on their evaluation of employees' trustworthiness (Harrington and Rayner, 2011), and of the fact that employees might consequently not trust that they

will be dealt with even-handedly. To ensure their effectiveness, HR professionals need to maintain their internal credibility (Guest and King, 2004; Boselie and Paauwe, 2005) and to secure their influence within the organisation by gaining buy-in from line managers and senior managers. This will be reflected by the prominence given to HR in the organisation, its willingness to invest and improve HRM practices, and its power to challenge management's behaviours when appropriate.

Furthermore, it is also important to recognize that HR staff can contribute to creating the conditions for trust to thrive, but it is up to line managers and senior managers to deliver on trust building. To avoid trust pitfalls, HR should pay attention to the quality and capacity of line managers and develop their competence and character (i.e. their trustworthiness). Indeed, when line managers are required to deliver HRM policies, they have often reported feeling abandoned (Harris, 2007) or insufficiently supported by the HR staff (Hope-Hailey et al., 2005), particularly when the delivery of HRM tasks is perceived to distract them from core tasks (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003). Bond and Wise (2003) have suggested that line managers might be unwilling to execute HRM-related tasks, or might lack skills and knowledge when they do.

HR practitioners need also to support senior managers in developing a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes trust behaviours, and in being able to distinguish the development of trust at an interpersonal and at an organisational level. In fact, senior managers' position within the organisation may limit their opportunities to develop trust on an interpersonal basis, therefore they need to be aware of how their leadership activities can contribute to the organisational trust environment.

Finally, HR practitioners need to be aware that, despite the positive impacts of HR policies and interventions, the development of trust can also be negatively influenced

by other organisational factors such as disciplinary hearings, workload pressures, or redundancy situations. These factors, together with other commercial imperatives, can be seen by employees as taking priority over employee's welfare and fairness concerns, thus negatively affecting the way HR practitioners tend to be perceived.

As both Fox (1974) and this research have recognized, it is possible to develop trust relationships on an interpersonal level, despite unfavourable conditions of structured antagonism within the employment relationship. Therefore, it is important for HR practitioners to try to mitigate the severities of the employment relationship and its low trust dynamics, by keep focusing on the development of trustful interpersonal relationships. Conversely, HR staff cannot afford to depersonalize relationships and to remain too remote from the workforce, without running the risk of isolating themselves and of being perceived as untrustworthy.

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Appendix 1

<u>Interview questions</u>

1) What is your job role and how long have you been working for the organization?

2) How important is trust to get things done within the organization?

3) What is the current level of trust within the organization? Do you think levels of trust are falling or raising?

4) Which factors are the most important for developing trust in the organization?

5) Can you tell me how you develop trust with your line manager, with your colleagues, and with senior managers?

6) Do you think there are any external factors, out of the control of your line manager or of senior managers, that influence the development of trust?

7) How does the HR staff influence the development of trust in the organization?

8) What is your perception of the HR department? Do you trust your HR colleagues?

Appendix 2

Respondents Table

Spirit Co.	Nature Org.
HR Business Partner	Environmental Assessment Advisor
Technical Administrator	Efficient Government Officer
Events Coordinator	Trade Union Convenor
Production Team Leader	Senior HR Business Partner
Production Line Manager	HR Business Partner
Senior Production Manager	Program Manager
Material Team Leader	Continuous Improvement Manager
Materials Controller	Unit Area Administrator
EHS Advisor	Operation Officer A
EHS Manager	Operation Officer B
Plant Engineer	Operation Officer C
Global Archive Manager	Operation Officer D
Warehouse Team Leader	External Funding Officer
Project Accountant	Project Manager
Procurement Director	Advice Information Officer
Technical Director	Directorate Support Manager
Production Operator A	Learning and Development Officer
Production Operator B	Recreation and Access Officer
Production Operator C	Corporate Planning Analyst
Production Operator D	Information Systems Team Leader
Production Operator E	Administrator Officer