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From Trust to Distance: The Consequences of Erosion of Trust in the Relationship with a Supervisor

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Abstract:

Purpose: *Trust is one of those research categories that is particularly difficult to conceptualize. This article pays special attention to trust between a subordinate and a superior, exposing the structure of managerial behaviours that result in the erosion of trust.*
Design/Methodology/Approach: *The research process used the CAWI method, based on an original survey questionnaire. The collected empirical data was subjected to statistical analysis, in which, among others, a multifactor logistic regression model and polychoric correlations were used.*
Findings: *Analysis of the collected data showed a significant relationship between selected managerial behaviours and the consequences of loss of trust in them experienced by employees. Moderating variables such as gender, age and work experience differentiate the obtained results. The analysed data revealed the strongest relationship between: unfair treatment of employees (A9) and negative attitude to work (B1), manager's abuse of their function and/or position (A2) and unethical behaviour among employees (B7) and treating employees as a source of generating costs (A8) and limited development opportunities (B4).*
Practical implications: *The analysis of the collected empirical data confirmed a significant relationship between the variables, which proves that the behaviour of the manager and the way they treat their subordinates is very important in human capital management. It has a direct impact on the quality of relations between employees and their well-being.*
Originality Value: *The article was created based on the analysis of domestic and foreign literature and a thorough analysis of the collected research results, which revealed the correlation between specific behaviours of managers and the experienced consequences of loss of trust among employees. It is addressed to scientists dealing with the subject of employee trust in the supervisor and managers managing the most valuable resource of the organization – people.*

Keywords: *Trust in the organization, erosion of trust, employee trust,*

JEL codes:

Paper type: *Research article.*

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1. Introduction

"Trust" is a research category that has been of interest to scientists representing various scientific disciplines for many years. It is present in every area of human life, shaping their private and professional relationships. For several decades, its impact on the functioning of organizations has been studied, including the process of managing human capital (Kwok *et al.,* 2021).

Trust in the organizational dimension is treated as a foundation and at the same time an element necessary for the proper functioning of every organization (Borut *et al.* 2025; Schwabe, 2023). It is subjective and fragile, which is why each of its dimensions, exposed to unfavourable factors, can be disturbed even by seemingly trivial things (Lund and Refshange, 2024). In this way, trust is undermined, which in turn starts the process of erosion, which may result in partial or complete loss of trust.

From the perspective of management science, one of the most important dimensions of trust is the trust that an employee has towards their direct supervisor and the supervisor towards the employee, i.e., vertical trust (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). It is impossible to talk about job satisfaction and stress reduction (Markowska-Przybyła, 2021), employee engagement and performance (Fulmer and Dirks, 2020; Bugdol, 2018), as well as work quality (Konovsky and Pugh, 1994), effective change implementation (Vuorenmaa, 2024) and increasing competitive advantage (Reynolds and Lander, 2024) without trust (Haesevoets *et al.,* 2024).

Importantly, trust affects work quality and performance not only at the individual level, but also at the team level (Paschina, 2023). The process of building trust is difficult, while its reconstruction in the employee-supervisor relationship is sometimes impossible. It is therefore extremely important to identify the right moment of trust disruption, because the erosion of trust is an ongoing process, leaving room for reaction and implementation of a recovery plan (Reynolds and Lander; 2024).

The consequences of erosion of trust or its loss affect every level of the organization's functioning, starting from communication disorders (Wziątek-Staśko and Ryszewska, 2024), decreased employee engagement (Rousseau et al., 1998), through difficulties in performing tasks (Reynolds and Lander, 2024) and unethical behaviour, ending with a negative attitude to work (Danish, 2025), which may ultimately lead to personnel losses (Kapuścik, 2015), image and financial losses in the organization (Kocot and Kwasek, 2023).

Although the literature on the subject is a rich source of knowledge on various dimensions of trust, there is little research presented that determines the relationship between specific behaviours of managers and the consequences of losing trust in the direct superior. This fact allowed the authors to identify a theoretical and cognitive gap, which was the inspiration for conducting their own research and preparing the article in question.

The main objective of this article is to present the original research results concerning the diagnosis of the impact of selected managerial behaviours on the type of experienced consequences of employees losing trust in them.

The article consists of four parts. The first part presents the theoretical framework, which is the basis for formulating the research hypotheses. Then, the methodology of empirical research (objective, research sample, statistical analysis methodology) is discussed. The third part presents the analysis of the quantitative research results and verifies the formulated research hypotheses. The final part of the article is a discussion and conclusions, as well as recommendations for business practice.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Trust as the Basis for Implementing Management Methods and Techniques

Trust in an organization creates an appropriate platform for effective communication, reducing conflicts and problems, developing relationships both between co-workers and between employees and employers (Chen *et al.,* 2025; Wziątek-Staśko and Pobiedzińska, 2024). It has a direct impact on employee engagement, quality of work and cooperation (Setyaningrum *et al.,* 2020).

Trust is the foundation of efficient and proper management of an organization. Moreover, the very trust makes the organization perceived as credible, stable and solid (Tigre *et al.,* 2022), which in turn translates into its long-term success (Kocot and Kwasek, 2023).

It is not possible to provide an unambiguous definition of trust. What is more, according to scientists it is easier to define trust by its absence than by its presence (Bibb and Kourdi, 2004).

In the field of management, trust is a belief – that the actions taken by people lead to the achievement of intended goals, a readiness – based on the assessment of the credibility of the other party and a resource – which contributes to the achievement of results, e.g. of economic nature (Wziątek-Staśko and Ryszewska, 2024).

Therefore, trust can be defined as "actions that increase sensitivity/openness toward someone who is not under control, when the punishment suffered by one party, because they abuse the sensitivity of the other party, is greater than the benefit gained by the party exploiting that sensitivity" (Zand, 1972, 230) and "the behavioural dependence of an individual on another person, under conditions of risk" (Curral and Judge, 1995, 152).

Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995, 712) proposed that trust should be treated as "the willingness of one party to be open to the actions of another party in the expectation that the other party will perform an action that is important to the party who has trusted them, regardless of the possibility of controlling the other party".

Trust as defined by P. Sztompka is a bet that the trustor makes on the future actions of others, which are uncertain (Sztompka, 2007). Trust is a "psychological state involving the intention to accept vulnerability to threats based on positive expectations about the intentions or behaviour of another person" (Rousseau *et al.,* 1998, 94).

The Edelman Trust Barometer 2025 report shows that trust in the employer has dropped by 3 percentage points compared to 2024 and is 75%; the result was lower only in 2018 (73%). At the same time, distrust of superiors is growing, which is at 68% and is an increase of as much as 12 percentage points compared to 2021 (Edelman, 2025).

In turn, the Randstad report "Workmonitor 2025: a new workplace baseline" indicates that 77% of employees trust their direct superior, which is a very good result compared to previous years, but as many as 62% of respondents admitted that they hide certain aspects of their personality.

More than half of the respondents (52%) declared that they would resign from work if there was no common ground with their supervisor, and every third person resigned from work during their professional career because they did not trust their direct supervisor (Randstad, 2025). The above data indicate how important trust in the workplace, trust in co-workers and trust in the manager is.

Trust in the supervisor can be included in two theoretical streams. One of them assumes that it is related to the standard process of social exchange (Konovsky and Pugh, 1994; Whitener *et al.,* 1998), but goes beyond simple economic exchange, because the relationship with the supervisor is based, among other things, on goodwill and the perception of mutual obligations (Blau, 1964).

In turn, the second stream focuses on the perception of the supervisor's character, as well as on their influence on the follower (trustee). This theory assumes that subordinates pay attention to the honesty, reliability, justice, and skills of their supervisor (Mayer *et al.,* 1995) and draw conclusions from this that have consequences for their behaviour and attitudes.

Models of trust in the supervisor are based primarily on employee/trustee characteristics (Mayer *et al.,* 1995), supervisor characteristics (Cunningham and McGregor, 2000; Oldham, 1995) and supervisor behaviours (Jones *et al.,* 1975). They also include the employer's guarantees to the employee, which include, among others, compliance with the labour code, ensuring safe conditions – legal obligations, and treating everyone fairly and fulfilling promises – ethical obligations (Sucher and Gupta, 2021).

2.2 Erosion of Trust

Teamwork is closely linked to interdependence on various levels, so employees must rely on others to achieve both shared and personal goals (Mayer *et al.,* 1995). Trust is one of the factors that influence this cooperation (Kwok *et al.,* 2021). In an employee-supervisor relationship, trust encourages employees to devote more time to required tasks because employees who trust their supervisor perform their duties with great accuracy and go beyond their primary professional role (Konovsky and Pugh, 1994). In this way, the supervisor gains a close-knit, mutually respectful team that leads the organization to success. It is thanks to trust that you can achieve really high goals.

The assessment and interpretation of the supervisor's behaviour by employees may change over time. Initially positively assessed actions may be interpreted differently over time (Sverdrup and Stensaker, 2018), so trust develops dynamically in the employee-supervisor relationship (Reynolds and Lander, 2023). This is related to the approach to trust as a multifaceted, multilevel, cross-level, and dynamic construct (Schilke *et al.,* 2023).

The literature on the subject focuses primarily on exposing the issues related to building trust, losing it, and rebuilding it (Gustafsson *et al.,* 2021), which can undoubtedly be treated as key processes related to trust (Mayer *et al.,* 1995; Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). In the literature on the subject, another process, called erosion of trust, is of particular importance (Couper *et al.,* 2020).

The process leading to loss of trust is not incidental. It is rare for an employee to lose trust in their supervisor as a result of a single event. The supervisor's behaviours that can initiate the process of erosion of trust and lead to its loss include primarily:

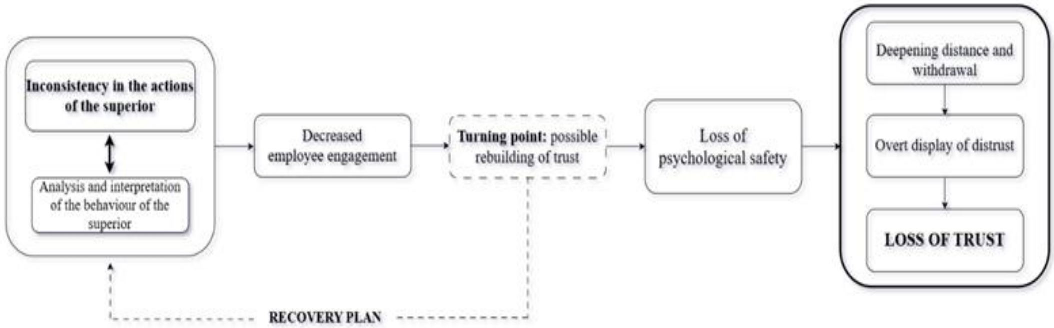
controlling employees in an inappropriate manner, e.g., only selected employees are subjected to control and/or the control is sudden and unexpected (Bugdol, 2018); getting angry, behaving erratically, using offensive language, and humiliating employees (Singh *et al.,* 2019); unfair treatment of employees (Danish, 2025); supervisor's bias towards employees (Mayer *et al.,* 1995); high formalism and the use of too many procedures (Cohen, 2023; Wziątek-Staśko and Ryszewska, 2024); impersonal communication style with employees (Couper *et al.,* 2020); lack of competence, specialist knowledge and ineffectiveness in actions (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002).

The leadership style embodied by the manager also shows a close connection with trust (Duan *et al.,* 2023).

Based on a thorough analysis of the available literature on the subject, many years of observations and their own experience, the authors developed a model illustrating the process of erosion of trust between an employee and their supervisor (Figure 1).

The presented model assumes that the process of erosion of trust includes five stages. The first stage is the employee's encounter with inconsistency. This is the stage in which the employee notices that their supervisor "says one thing and does another", hides their mistakes, and shows a lack of fundamental specialist knowledge (Wziątek-Staśko and Pobiedzińska, 2024).

Figure 1. *Model of the erosion of employee trust in the supervisor*



Source: *Own elaboration.*

At first glance, such situations may not be significant, but the overlap of several situations causes the employee to begin to analyse and interpret the individual behaviours of the supervisor. It should be remembered that trust is subjective (Land and Refshange, 2024), which means that one employee will identify several inconsistencies in the behaviour of the supervisor at the analysis stage, while another will identify a dozen or so. Such situations lead to a decrease in employee engagement (Chen *et al.,* 2025).

This is the next stage of erosion of trust. For the supervisor, this should be a signal that something disturbing is happening in the team, because a decrease in engagement, efficiency, and quality of work are the first clear signals indicating a reduction in the employee's trust in the supervisor. This may be the last moment when the supervisor will be able to regain the employee's trust. In the author's model, this moment is called the "turning point".

It assumes that the supervisor should develop and implement a recovery plan that creates a chance to regain the employee's trust. The recovery plan may include such actions as: enabling employees to make decisions and transferring responsibility for assigned tasks (Sandahl and von Knorring, 2023), making oneself credible through decisions made (Markowska-Przybyła, 2021), as well as organizing regular meetings with employees to discuss activities, challenges and concerns (Kocot and Kwasek, 2023). Transparency in the supervisor's plans and actions as well as honest and open communication are also important, supporting the self-management of employees' emotions (Holmquist, 2021).

However, if the supervisor ignores the situation, the erosion process will deepen until it reaches the fourth stage, which is characterized by the employee losing their sense of psychological security. At this stage, it is characteristic that the employee loses motivation to perform even basic duties, feels that what they do is pointless, and distances themselves from the supervisor and co-workers (Cohen, 2023).

The employee believes that they cannot freely express their thoughts or ask for help because they are afraid of negative comments. The consequence of this stage is an open display of distrust towards the superior. The employee openly questions the superior's orders and decisions, demonstrates a passive attitude in actions, withdraws from the relationship (Ralph and Barling, 2023). This is the moment when the employee often decides to change jobs.

Therefore, they stop caring about their job in any way, which can cause conflicts and the employee's complete withdrawal. This stage of the process ends with a complete loss of trust in the superior, which is often impossible to rebuild. At this stage, rebuilding trust becomes unfeasible, as the relationship between the employee and the supervisor is irreparably severed.

2.3 Consequences of an Employee Losing Trust in their Supervisor

In times of major transformations of organizational roles and increasing authority and the increasing use of artificial intelligence, trust is becoming a more important predictor of good relationships, quality of performed duties and mutual understanding in situations of dependency than ever before.

On the other hand, transformations are not friendly to maintaining trust, so they may more often encounter the phenomenon of the trust dilemma. Inconsistencies in the actions of the superior leading to a certain uncertainty as to their motives may be the triggering factor in that case. As mentioned earlier, this is how the process of erosion of trust begins, leading to its loss (Kapuścik, 2015).

The consequences of an employee losing trust in their supervisor can be considered on the following three levels: for the organization (Bugdol, 2018; Bylok, 2023), for the employee (Kocot and Kwasek, 2023) and for the supervisor (Haesevoets *et al.,* 2024).

They can also be divided into short-term and long-term consequences. Research indicates that a decrease in efficiency is a common consequence for all of the above-mentioned levels (Konovsky and Pugh, 1994; Reynolds and Lander, 2023). In the presented matrix of consequences of an employee losing trust in their supervisor, it can be seen that the most important consequences experienced by employees include a decrease in commitment (Rosseau *et al.,* 1998), a negative attitude towards work (Danish, 2025) and limited development opportunities (Reynolds and Lander, 2023).

Table 1. *Matrix of consequences of an employee loosing trust in the supervisor*

	Short-term	**Long-term**
Employee	− lack of motivation and commitment (Rosseau *et al.,* 1998) − difficulties in completing tasks − limited development opportunities (Reynolds and Lander, 2023) − negative attitude to work (Danish, 2025) − communication disorders (Wziątek-Staśko and Ryszewska, 2024)	− loss of loyalty to the organization (Bugdol, 2018) − job change (Randstad, 2025) − burnout (Edelman, 2025) − persistent distrust of management (Couper *et al.,* 2020)
Supervisor	− loss of authority (Sverdrup and Stensaker, 2018) − limited communication from subordinates (Couper *et al.,* 2020) − difficulties in enforcing issued orders and obligations (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002)	− decrease in the performance of the subordinate team (Konovsky and Pugh, 1994) − isolation and burnout (Puspaningrum *et al.,* 2020), − loss of position (Couper *et al.,* 2020)
Organization	− lack of team effectiveness (Fulmer and Dirks, 2020) − decrease in productivity (Kocot and Kwasek, 2023) − deterioration of the atmosphere in the workplace (Kapuścik, 2015)	− decreased financial results (Fulmer and Dirks, 2020) − increased employee turnover (Schwabe, 2023) − increased employee recruitment costs (Kapuścik, 2015) − decreased reputation of the organization as a good employer (Reynolds and Lander, 2023)

Source: *Own elaboration based on sources given in the table.*

On the other hand, the consequences of employees losing trust in supervisor can be very serious for them. They include loss of authority (Sverdrup and Stensaker, 2018), difficulties in enforcing issued orders and obligations (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002) and a decrease in the results of the subordinate team (Konovsky and Pugh, 1994), and this in turn can even lead to the loss of the position.

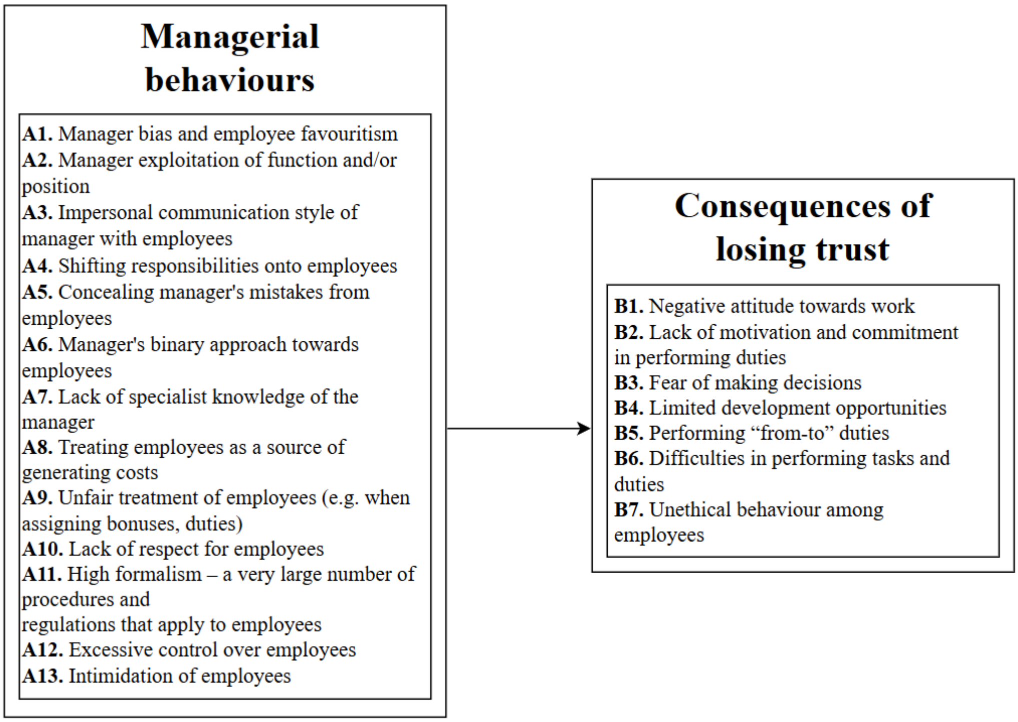
Employees' lack of trust in the manager is undoubtedly a very unfavourable phenomenon, bringing consequences on every level, starting from the consequences for the employee, through the manager and ending with the organization. Even at a basic level, human capital management without the employee's trust in the direct supervisor is impossible.

Based on the thorough analysis of the literature, the main hypothesis (Hg) was formulated, which assumes that there is a relationship between selected managerial behaviours and the type of experienced consequences of loss of trust among employees who have lost this trust in them.

The next hypothesis (H1) is: moderating variables differentiate managerial behaviours that affect the experienced consequences of loss of trust in employees in them.

The model below presents (Figure 2) the relationship between selected managerial behaviours (A1-A13) and the consequences of losing trust in them experienced by employees (B1-B7).

Figure 2. *The relationship between selected managerial behaviours (A1-A13) and the consequences of losing trust in the manager experienced by employees (B1-B7) – model approach*



Source: *Own elaboration.*

3. Research Method

3.1 The Research Sample and Data Collection Method

The empirical study was conducted in the second quarter of 2023. The study was conducted using the CAWI method in a group of 212 professionally active Poles and was a preliminary study.

The sample was selected randomly and consisted of 150 (70.75%) women and 62 (29.25%) men. The majority (53.30%) of respondents had a higher education with a Master's degree, worked in an international organization (44.34%) and held a managerial position (60.38).

In turn, among people who experienced a loss of trust in their superior (N=142), there were 71.13% women and 28.87% men. The largest group was aged 31 to 50 (64.62%), with work experience of over 20 years (36.62%) (Table 2).

Table 2. *Characteristics of the study group*

Characteristics		**N**	**n***
Gender	Woman	150 (70.75%)	101 (71.13%)
	Man	62 (29.25%)	41 (28.87%)
Age	20-30 years	37 (17.45%)	26 (18.31%)
	31-50 years	137 (64.62%)	88 (61.97%)
	51-60 years	33 (15.57%)	23 (16.20%)
	61 years and over	5 (2.36%)	5 (3.52%)
Education	Secondary	45 (21.23%)	32 (22.54%)
	Bachelor's degree	54 (25.47%)	35 (24.65%)
	Master's degree	113 (53.30%)	75 (52.82%)
Work experience	Up to 5 years	29 (13.68%)	20 (14.08%)
	6-10 years	30 (14.15%)	19 (13.38%)
	11-15 years	43 (20.29%)	28 (19.72%)
	16-20 years	37 (17.45%)	23 (16.20%)
	21 years and above	73 (34.43%)	52 (33.62%)
Type of organization	International company	94 (44.34%)	59 (41.55%)
	Private company	61 (28.77%)	41 (28.87%)
	Private company	57 (28.89%)	42 (29.58%)
Position	Managerial position	128 (60.38%)	80 (58.34%)
	Non-managerial position	84 (39.62)	62 (43.66%)

Note: *N – number of respondents, n – number of respondents who had contact with the phenomenon of loss of trust in the superior*
Source: *Own elaboration based on own research.*

3.2 Validation of Measurements and Statistical Methods of Data Analysis

The quantitative study was conducted based on the author's survey questionnaire. The first stage of the analysis was to check the consistency and reliability of the scale used to examine the assessment of managerial behaviours influencing employee trust. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.915 and all items included in the scale have positive discriminatory power.

Various statistical methods were used to conduct the analyses. The analysis of qualitative variables was performed by calculating the absolute frequencies and percentages of all values that these variables could take. Multivariate analysis of the influence of potential predictors on the dichotomous variable was performed using logistic regression.

The results were presented in the form of OR parameters with 95% confidence intervals. Correlations between the dependent variable and the independent variable were analysed using the polychoric correlation coefficient. The analysis was performed in the R program, version 4.4.2.

4. Results of Empirical Research

4.1 The Relationship between Selected Managerial Behaviours and the Type of Experienced Consequences of an Employee's Loss of Trust in them

The analysis of the collected empirical data was aimed at demonstrating the relationship between the manager's behaviour and the consequences of the loss of trust experienced by their employees (Table 3). It was necessary to calculate the polychoric correlation between the variables – selected manager's behaviour and the consequences of the employee's loss of trust.

The results of the analysis confirmed the main hypothesis (Hg), which assumes that there is a relationship between selected managerial behaviours and the type of experienced consequences of employees' loss of trust in them.

The assessment of the impact of "using the function and/or position" on trust in the manager correlates significantly and positively with "performing from-to duties", which means that the higher the employee's belief that this behaviour affects the level of their trust, the more often they perform "from-to" duties after experiencing a loss of trust.

Then, the analysis showed a relationship between "a binary approach to the employee" and "difficulties in performing tasks and duties by employees". This means that an employee is more likely to experience difficulties in their daily work if they are convinced of the impact of binary treatment on the level of trust in their supervisor. The last relationship was found between "unfair treatment of employees" and "negative attitude to work", but the correlation in this case is negative, which means that the greater the belief that unfair treatment of employees by their supervisor affects trust in them, the less often the experience of loss of trust resulted in a negative attitude to work.

Table 3. *Correlations between the behaviour of the supervisor and the consequences of loss of trust*

Group	Managerial behaviour	Consequence of losing trust	Polychoric correlation coefficient
All respondents	A2	B5	r=0.139, p=0.041
	A6	B6	r=0.14, p=0.04
	A9	B1	r=-0.176, p=0.009

Source: *Own elaboration based on own research results.*

4.2 The Influence of Moderating Variables on the Relationship between Selected Managerial Behaviours and the Type of Experienced Consequences of Employee Loss of Trust in them

4.2.1 Gender of respondents

Table 4 contains correlations between selected managerial behaviours and the consequences of loss of trust experienced by their employees, taking into account the gender of the respondents. Women most often experience "unethical behaviour among employees" (B7) and "difficulties in performing tasks and duties" (B6).

These consequences correlate primarily with "shifting the manager's responsibilities/obligations onto employees". Also, "unfair treatment of employees" (A9) correlates significantly (p=0.043) and negatively (r=-0.164) with "negative attitude towards work" (B1) among women.

Men primarily experience "fear of making decisions" (B3), which correlates with such managerial behaviours as: "shifting responsibilities/obligations onto employees" (A4), "lack of specialist knowledge" (A7) and "treating employees as a source of generating costs". In turn, "unfair treatment of employees" (A9) correlates significantly (p=0.04) and negatively (r=-0.26) with "difficulties in performing tasks and duties".

Table 4. *The influence of gender on the relationship between managerial behaviour and the consequences of loss of trust*

Group	Managerial behaviour	Consequence of losing trust	Polychoric correlation coefficient
Women	A2	B7	r=0.211, p=0.009
	A4	B6	r=0.187, p=0.021
		B7	r=0.161, p=0.047

	A6	B3	r=0.16, p=0.049
	A9	B1	r=-0.164, p=0.043
	A10	B6	r=0.173, p=0.033
Men	A2	B1	r=-0.303, p=0.016
	A4	B3	r=-0.29, p=0.021
	A7	B3	r=-0.25, p=0.048
		B6	r=-0.267, p=0.034
	A8	B3	r=-0.256, p=0.043
	A9	B6	r=-0.26, p=0.04
	A13	B6	r=-0.284, p=0.024

Source: *Own elaboration based on own research results.*

4.2.2 Age of respondents

The analysis showed differences in the relationship between selected managerial behaviours and the experienced consequences of loss of employee trust in them, taking into account the age of the respondents (Table 5).

Namely, in the age group of 20-30 years, the most frequently experienced consequence of loss of trust was "lack of employee development" (B4), which correlated: significantly (p=0.05) and negatively (r=-0.325) with "manager bias and favouritism of employees" (A1); significantly (p=0.048) and negatively (r=-0.328) with "treating employees as a source of generating costs" (A8); significantly (p=0.021) and negatively (r=-0.379) with "excessive control over employees" (A12).

In the age group of 31-50 years, the analysis did not reveal any statistically significant correlations. In the group of respondents aged 51 and over, the most frequently experienced consequence was "negative attitude towards work" (B1), which correlated with "manager bias" (A1) (r= - 0.399, p=0.011), "shifting duties/obligations onto employees" (A4) (r= - 0.364, p=0.021) and with "unfair treatment of employees" (A9) (r= - 0.592, p<0.0001). In this group, employees also experienced "unethical behaviour among employees" (B7), which correlated significantly (p=0.024) and negatively (r= - 0.356) with "excessive control over employees" (A12).

Table 5. *The influence of age on the relationship between managerial behaviour and the consequences of loss of trust*

Group	Managerial behaviour	Consequence of losing trust	Polychoric correlation coefficient
20-30 years	A1	B4	r=-0.325, p=0.05
	A3	B7	r=0.416, p=0.01
	A8	B3	r=-0.335, p=0.043
		B4	r=-0.328, p=0.048

	A12	B7	r=0.369, p=0.024
		B4	r=-0.379, p=0.021
51 years and over	A3	B1	r=-0.399, p=0.011
	A4	B1	r=-0.364, p=0.021
	A5	B7	r=-0.356, p=0.024
	A9	B1	r=-0.592, p<0.0001

Source: *Own elaboration based on own research results.*

4.2.3 Respondents' work experience

The last analysed moderating variable was the respondents' work experience, which revealed the most correlations between selected managerial behaviours and the consequences of loss of trust experienced by their subordinates (Table 6). In the group of employees with up to 5 years of work experience, “lack of specialist knowledge of the manager” (A7) caused the most consequences of loss of trust among employees, and these were: “negative attitude towards work” (B1), “lack of motivation and commitment in performing duties” (B2) and “unethical behaviour among employees” (B7).

In turn, the most frequently experienced consequence of loss of trust in this group was “unethical behaviour among co-workers” (B7), which correlated with as many as eight managerial behaviours (A1, A3, A4, A5, A7, A8, A11, A12, A13). The analysis showed the least correlations in the group of employees with 6 to 10 years of experience and 11 to 15 years of experience.

Accordingly, there was a relationship between “intimidation of employees” (A13) and “difficulties in performing tasks and duties” (B6) (r= - 0.666, p<0.001) as well as “manager’s binary approach towards employees” (A6) and “treating employees as a source of generating costs” (A8), which correlated with “lack of motivation and commitment in performing duties” (B2).

In the group of employees with 16 to 20 years of work experience, the most common consequence of losing employee trust was “lack of motivation and commitment in performing duties” (B2), which correlated with: “impersonal communication style of manager with employees” (A3) (r= - 0.38, p=0.02), “shifting duties/obligations onto employees” (A4) (r= - 0.455, p=0.05), “treating employees as a source of generating costs” (A8) (r= - 0.441, p=0.006), “high formalism” (A11) (r= - 0.415, p=0.011) and “excessive control over employees” (A12) (r= - 0.361, p=0.028).

In the last group of employees, with 21 years of work experience and more, the analysis revealed a relationship between “shifting duties/obligations onto employees” (A4) and “difficulties in performing tasks and obligations” (B6) (r=0.228, p=0.046). In this group, the most frequently experienced consequence was “negative attitude towards work”, which correlated with such behaviours as “unfair treatment of employees" (A9) (r= - 0.41, p<0.001) and "lack of respect for employees" (A10) (r= - 0.268, p=0.019).

Table 6. *The influence of work experience on the relationship between managerial behaviour and the consequences of loss of trust*

Group	Managerial behaviour	Consequence of losing trust	Polychoric correlation coefficient
Up to 5 years	A1	B2	r=-0.424, p=0.022
	A3	B7	r=0.469, p=0.01
	A4	B7	r=0.47, p=0.01
	A5	B2	r=-0.403, p=0.03
	A7	B1	r=-0.38, p=0.042
		B2	r=-0.389, p=0.037
		B7	r=-0.0389, p=0.037
	A8	B4	r=-0.382, p=0.041
		B7	r=0.376, p=0.044
	A11	B7	r=0.394, 0.034
	A12	B7	r=0.532, p=0.003
6-10 years	A13	B6	r=-0.666, p<0.001
11-15 years	A6	B2	r=0.354, p=0.02
	A8	B2	r=0.343, p=0.024
16-20 years	A1	B3	r=-0.333, p=0.044
	A3	B2	r=-0.38, p=0.02
	A4	B2	r=-0.455, p=0.005
	A8	B2	r=-0.441, p=0.006
		B4	r=-0.391, p=0.017
		B6	r=-0.325, p=0.049
	A9	B4	r=-0.38, p=0.02
	A11	B2	r=-0.415, p=0.011
		B7	r=0.361, p=0.028
	A12	B2	r=-0.361, p=0.028
		B4	r=-0.338, p=0.041
		B6	r=-0.343, p=0.038
21 years and above	A4	B6	r=0.228, p=0.046
	A5	B7	r=-0.321, p=0.004
	A9	B1	r=-0.41, p<0.001
	A10	B1	r=-0.268, 0.019

Source: *Own elaboration based on own research results.*

The above presented results of statistical analysis confirmed the hypothesis (H1), which assumed that moderating variables (gender, age and work experience) differentiate managerial behaviours, which affect the experienced consequences of losing employee trust. It was observed that the nature of correlation between managerial behaviours and consequences of losing trust differs depending on the characteristics of employees.

This means that employees react differently to selected managerial behaviours, e.g. women more often than men experience “unethical behaviour among employees” and “difficulties in performing tasks and duties”, while men much more often than women experience “fear of making decisions”. This confirms that individual employee characteristics have a significant impact on the experienced consequences of loss of trust resulting from the attitudes and actions of the superior.

5. Research Summary and Final Conclusions

The conducted thorough review of domestic and foreign literature provided significant information on the mechanisms related to the initiation of the process of erosion of trust, the model of which was presented above. In accordance with the assumptions, the relationship between selected behaviours of the supervisor and experiencing the negative consequences of the loss of employee trust (Hg) was confirmed.

The results of the conducted study indicate that it is the attitudes and actions of the supervisor – such as inconsistency in actions, failure to keep promises or lack of quality communication – that are the key factor that initiates the process of erosion of employee trust in the supervisor. Similar results were obtained by J. Duan et al. (2023), who proved the relationship between the leadership style and behaviours of managers and employee trust.

In the context of previous studies, the obtained results are consistent with the results obtained by Dirks and Ferrin (2002). They indicated that the quality of the employee-supervisor relationship is a significant predictor in shaping organizational trust. This is also confirmed by a study in which it was proven that the greater the trust in the supervisor, the better the atmosphere in the workplace, which translates, among other things, into the quality of relationships in the team (Bylok, 2023).

Verifying the relationship between the behaviour of the supervisor and the experienced consequences of the loss of employee trust is a confirmation of the psychological contract in the relationship (Rousseau *et al.,* 1998). The first stage of the process of erosion of trust – the employee's encounter with the inconsistency in the supervisor's actions – may be treated by the employee as a violation of unwritten rules in the context of mutual expectations, which results in an emotional reaction in the employee (Griep *et al.,* 2025).

The conducted empirical study allowed for the identification of the supervisor's behaviours leading to the erosion of employee trust and drawing attention to their relationship with the consequences of this process for the functioning of not only the individual in the organizational environment, but also the organization as such.

The results clearly indicate those supervisor's behaviours that violate the norms of social honesty, coherence and transparency in communication. It was also proven that in the situation of the initiated process of erosion of trust, employees experience a number of destructive consequences, both psychological and behavioural, starting from a decrease in motivation, through a decrease in commitment, to unethical behaviour among co-workers.

In the perspective of human capital management, the results of the empirical study confirm that effective management should be based on an ethical, transparent and consistent attitude of superiors. One of the supporting factors is trust, which requires not only knowledge, but also high interpersonal sensitivity, developed emotional intelligence and – most importantly – awareness of the psychological aspects of the employee-supervisor relationship.

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The empirical study provided significant factual evidence regarding the impact of selected managerial behaviours on the experienced consequences of loss of employee trust. However, certain limitations should be noted. The first is the cross-sectional nature of the study, which prevented capturing the dynamics of the erosion of employee trust in their supervisor over time.

Data were collected based on employees' subjective perceptions, which could have influenced and thus distorted the results. This stems from individual differences in interpreting supervisor behaviour. The study's setting within a specific cultural context, which may burden generalization of the results to other cultural conditions, social norms, or organizational structures is another limitation.

It seems reasonable to expand future research to include triangulation, which would deepen our understanding of the psychological mechanisms involved in the erosion of employee trust in their supervisor. It is also advisable to conduct research on a larger sample and expand it to include economic sector and cultural context. This would allow us for identifying specific and universal factors that can significantly influence all processes related to trust in an organization.

7. Practical Implications

The research findings provide valuable information for management in every organization. They point to the need for a personalized approach from manager to employee in human capital management. In light of the study's findings, developing interpersonal skills and an ethical approach to employees is crucial. Monitoring the quality of manager-subordinate relationships is also recommended to identify any disruptions in employee trust so that a corrective action plan (early warning system) can be implemented as quickly as possible.

These solutions can contribute to a better manager-employee relationship, which can contribute to their well-being and reduce the risk of employee turnover.

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