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School leadership in times of uncertainty: Hands-on Trust!

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ABSTRACT
In times of uncertainty, school leaders may need to review and adapt their leadership to meet the challenges imposed. Developing and fostering trusting relations in schools could provide solutions on how to cope with hectic and demanding conditions. Previous research has documented that trust ensures (among others),higher learning outcomes, positive and supportive school climate, increased teacher responsibility and professionalism, organizational citizenship behaviors, unhindered communication, cooperation, continuous professional learning and enhanced teachers' collective efficacy. The paper aims to provide evidence on how trust facilitates school leaders and teachers to meet and overcome difficulties, especially in times of uncertainty (e.g., Covid-19 period). It also suggests that where trusting relations bloom, the chance schools perform adequately under any circumstances, is particularly high.

Keywords: *Faculty Trust, School Leadership, Trust, Uncertainty.*

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INTRODUCTION

In our era, the world is expandingly changing, at a pace never witnessed before.Schools,being heavily influenced by the surrounding environment, are in a constant race to cope with ever-demanding situations. Globalization, the rapid development of technology, climate change and extensive population mobility, have become part of our lives and constantly reshape the world. Schools being open social systems, constantly interact with their environments and frequently need to reinvent and reshape the way they function, to cope with forces in the world around them [1]. Schools, especially in our days, face extreme pressure deriving from a rapidly changing external environment [2]. The Covid-19 global pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide and also upset how students are educated worldwide [3], is an example of how, new challenges emerge, demanding leaders to adapt and inspire. In fact, in times of uncertainty, people, evermore, seek firm leadership guidance. In times of change and uncertainty, leaders continuously need to review their leadership [4], to deal successfully with ever-changing situations. However, effective leadership requires extensive human behavior change, because when adaptation efforts fail, collective benefits are not guaranteed [5]. As educational leaders seek to maintain and improve the quality of teaching and learning, especially in times of uncertainty, evidence demonstrates that the quality of interpersonal relationships, enhanced by mutual trust, couldmakethe difference, becausethe wayschool leaders, teachers, students, and parents interact, sets the tone for everything that happens in schools [6, 7 & 8].

Trust is considered a key factorfor positive interpersonal relationships [9], thus it becomes an essential ingredient when school leaders seek to maintain or even improve interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, at the school level, collective faculty trust, including trust in parents and pupils [10, 11], facilitates coping successfully with anxiety, uncertainty, and equity issues. Therefore, schools with positive climateand high levels of trust, appear to have the fundamental ingredientsconsidered necessary, for building a culturethat can be resilient in times of crisis [12]. There appears to be a consensus among educational scholars that principals' behaviors and actions affect the degree and quality of trust within schools [11, 13]. Additionally, school leaders who built, cultivate and nourish trust, are more likely to establish trustworthy leadership that could help them successfully cope with any organizational turbulence from the outside environment. Trust is, perhaps, the most essential factor associated with the concept of organizational stability in turbulent times [12, 14], because trust is vital for introducing, preserving, repairing, and elevating social relationships at work [15].

Defining trust

Although research on trust has received substantial attention during the last years, the efforts to define the term pose achallenging task, because trust is a highly complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon [16, 17, 18]. Trust is defined, according to the various lenses, levels, and points of view, that someone chooses to approach it.Indeed, trust has evolved

from a one-dimensional definition to one that includes the dynamic and multifaceted nature of trust 19, 10, 16, 20, 21, 22, 13]. Davis and Schoorman [23] described trust as the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of others. Mishra [22] has conceptualized trust as a multidimensional term, involvingthe facets of competence, openness, concern, and reliability. Based on the work of Mishra, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran defined trust as 'an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest and open' [20] a definition that has gained wide popularity, for defining trust in the school context.

The key definitions of the term, therefore, accept that trust is, in general, an individual's hope or belief, oftenin situations of vulnerability, that the actionsor motives of another person are honest, fair, andbased on integrity.Trust can be motivated by positive past behaviors; however, it is also dynamic [24] and is developed based on individual or organizational relationships. Trust also permits a person with less power to depend on another individual (the leader), to make decisions aligned with their well-being [25].

METHODOLOGY

The paper aims to briefly present the most researched positive outcomes of trust both in the general literature, as well as the literature on trust in schools and especially how schools benefit during a crisis when trusting relations pre-exist. The literature review presented in the paper spans mainly from the late 1990s up to date, when the main body of research on trust in schools has been carried out. It is assumed that the period under examination is sufficient since, during that period, the main body of articles on trusthave been produced. The paper also reflects on the role of the school leader in enhancing trust [13] and how schools where trusting relations prevail, are more likely to adapt and perform in ways that remedy the consequences of abrupt situations, e.g. the Covid-19 pandemic.

Even though the paper does claim to have a meta-analytic purpose, a number of specific criteria were introduced to enhance the validity of the issue presented. At first, the search strategy was primarily based on the PRISMA 2020 statement [26] guidelines. The articles for analysis werecollectedmainly from Google Scholar, CORE, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and the Bielefeld Academic Search Engine (BASE). Furthmore, for each of the databases, similar search criteria were used. The protocols included single cues or/and a combination of cues, relevant to the topic in discussion (e.g. trust, trust definitions, leadership, trust facets, positive trust outcomes, leadership in times of crisis, etc.). Finally, from the vast number of papers examined, those that contain the most citations were chosen.

The importance of trust in schools

Unexpected changes like the covid-19 pandemic could bring an organization to its knees. Since the beginning of 2020, most governments worldwide have implemented emergency plans, such as lockdowns, hybrid learning models (home and school-based learning, online teaching, virtual learning, etc.) in order to cope with the extraordinary conditions imposed by the covid-19 pandemic. Many countries have temporarily kept schools closed and banned sports and cultural activities to contain the pandemic's spread, leading to considerable changes in educational systems. In countries where schools remained open or reopened at some point, teachers had to cope with challenging conditions involving strict hygiene measures and physical distancing. Thus, at an international, national and community level, the pandemic has forced leaders to respond to both the direct and indirect effects of this crisis, with almost no time for preparation, planning and reaction [5]. In organizations where trusting relations bloom, changes and new challenges are more likely to be dealt with successfully. Without trust, organizations cannot adapt and perform especially in hectic and stressful situations where sacrifices, change of habits and working conditions, may be demanded.

Trust has been associated with a plethora of positive results. Dirk and Ferrin's [27] meta-analysis reported that trust in leadership had a significant relationship with individual outcomes, including job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, turnover intentions, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and a commitment to the leader's decisions. Dirks & Skarlicki [28] also provided evidence that trust can substantially influence organizations' individual, team, and organizational levels. Thompson [29] stated that enhancing trust in the workplace has implications for employees and organizational health and is thus a psychological, sociological, and managerial issue that ultimately impacts productivity and innovation and increases employee commitment and organizational effectiveness. Regarding the school context, Bryk and Schneider [6] asserted that trust in schools builds the infrastructure needed for all parties to work for common goals through an increased sense of responsibility and cooperation. A significant number of surveys have linked facultytrustin the school leader with increased school effectiveness in general [6, 30, 31, 32 & 33].

Trust in schools has been directly or indirectly linked to improved learning outcomes. A four-year longitude research conducted byBryk and Schneider [6] also determined that, where trust relations were high, schools had almost three times more chances to improve their mathematics and language scores. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis [34] found that there is a direct correlation between trust in the school leader and learning outcomes, with the data demonstrating a moderate but statistically significant correlation between teachers' trust in their principal and students' learning outcomes. Sun and Leithwood [35] examined the effect of trust on learning outcomes, with the overall power index

showing a relatively high overall correlation concerning the effect of leadership on learning outcomes through teachers' trust in the leader. In times of uncertainty, like the covid-19 pandemic, educational systems worldwide needed to adapt, implementing online and hybrid learning models. However, even under those demanding situations, their main objective remained to keep the learning outcomes of their students similar to those before the pandemic. Even though there is no sufficient body of evidence yet, there appears to be a growing belief that where trusting relationships were high, schools succeeded in maintaining at least their usual learning outcomes [36, 12].

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) is a helpful definition to highlight those voluntary behaviors in which teachers are involved and extend beyond their formal duties [37]. Zeinabadi and Salehi [38] reported that previous research has shown that teachers with high levels of OCB voluntarily pursue innovative ideas, support and suggest activities beyond the curriculum activities, and actively participate in many school committees. As the level of trust in a schoolimproves, co-workers will approach work on a morevoluntary and willing basis [39, 20]. The relationship between OCB and leader trust was examined in several studies [40, 27, 41 & 42], which directly linked leader trust with increased OCB levels. Dirk and Ferrin [27] explain that in the absence of trust in the leader, the subordinate will avoid engaging in activities beyond the contractual obligations of his job. DiPaola and Hoy [37] found similar results, indicating a significant effect of trust in the school leader with high levels of OCB. In times of uncertainty, therefore, where Organizational Behaviors are present, it is more likely that teachers will do whatever is necessary to take on initiatives, working in their free time, to ensure that business will continue as usual. Indeed, during the covid-19 crisis, many teachers exceeded their job description requirements, providing psychological support to their pupils, creating social networking teams for better communication, preparing videos and other material and in general adopting their work in ways for teaching and learning to proceed unhindered.

Due to the rapid development of technology, education systems are called upon to recognize the existing reality and adapt. Adaptation often presupposes a small or significant change in the structures of school systems. Bryk and Schneider [6] found that changing, improving and adapting schools requires the active involvement of teachers, as they will have to take the risk, manage the conflicts that may arise, adopt interventions, work with colleagues to implement and evaluate change-improvement initiatives. Their research also revealed strong evidence that in schools with increased levels of trust, teachers were much more willing to work towards improving the school. The importance of trust concerning a school organization's ability to change and improve was also examined by Louis [43], concluding that the more established trust there is, the greater the chances of achieving change and adaption are. Louis et al. [44] also reported that schools exhibiting high levels of trust, promote collective decision-making and so change initiatives are more likely to be successful. The present pandemic has made it clear that only schools that could adapt and change could stand a chance of producing high-level performance in stressful and challenging times.

Collaboration can be defined as the joint interaction withina group in allactivities that are needed to perform a shared task [45]. Trust facilitates and enhances collaboration between the members of an organization [30]. Tschannen-Moran [46] concluded that collaboration between teachers was highly correlated with trust in the principal. For collaboration to be genuine and effective the school leader needs to create an atmosphere of mutual trust, but also monitor the collaboration so it will not lead to forced collegiality [47, 48]. It has been found that in high trusted environments, individuals feel comfortable asking for help, are more likely to engage in joint tasks, interact and learn from their colleagues, leaving aside their doubts and insecurities [49]. In general schools, with high levels of trust were more likely to show a high degree of cooperation among all members of the school [50]. Collaboration and trust have reciprocal nature. On one hand, developing cooperation requires time, energy, and resource sharing from all parties. This process, on the other hand, brings people closer, developing stronger trusting bonds [51, 35]. Effective collaboration is linked with positive outcomes for students and appears to be a key component of equitable educational prospects [52]. Collaboration and mutual support, therefore, are essential in times of crisis. School leaders and teachers need to collaborate and rely on one another to overcome the difficulties imposed by new challenges to ensure high learning outcomes.

Trust could lead to a supportive and positive working environment [6, 53 & 54]. Forsyth et al. [10] argue that a positive school climate is characterized by vital elements of trust such as non-retention of information, unhindered communication, mutual respect, and justice. The direct effect of trust in creating a positive school climate has been also pointed out by Handford and Leithwood [32], as they associate it with enthusiasm and friendly practices between teachers and the school leader. Pressure and emphasis on accountability often lead to stressful situations. However, when the emphasis isshifted to establishing a climate of trust, facilities and inspires teachers to intensify their efforts to achieve common goals and alsoestablishes the conditions for the cultivation of a pleasant and creative environment [34]. Such an environment is essential in times of crisis. When the stress and pressure are overwhelming due to uncertain and challenging situations, a positive working climate is more likely to help school leaders and teachers to manage and cope, with any situation imposed by the external environment.

Bandura [55] defined self-efficacy as the 'beliefs in one's capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' [56]. While self-efficacy is important to the individual, collective efficacy addresses the larger group in an organization. Within an organization, perceived collective efficacy, therefore, represents the beliefs of group members regarding 'the performance capability of a social system as a whole' [56] and in schools 'the perception[s] of teachers in a school that the faculty can organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students' [57]. Collective efficacy differs from self-efficacy also on the basis that collective efficacy is considered a property of the school [33]. In the school context, inquiry into collective efficacy beliefs underlines that teachers possess not only self-referent efficacy perceptions but also beliefs about their overall joint capability as a school faculty [58]. These perceptions reflect an organizational property recognized as perceived collective efficacy [56, 57 & 51]. Many studies have also, directly or indirectly, correlated collective belief competence with improved learning outcomes [58, 35].Goddard et al. [57] also examined the link between trust and collective efficacy. They hypothesized that trust between colleagues would correlate with collective efficacy at the level of collaboration to achieve pedagogical goals, which typically happens in schools with high levels of trust. Their hypothesis was confirmed since the research results showed a high correlation between collective competence and trust in colleagues. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis [34] emphasize that the school leader can cultivate solid collective belief incompetence in his/her teachers when he expresses his/her trust in their abilities as professionals to promote learning daily regardless of the prevailing circumstances of the school or the environment. Perceived collective efficacy, therefore, is more likely to promote groups' motivational commitment to their tasks, resilience to adversity, and performance accomplishments [59]. High levels of trust appear to increase the perception of collective efficacy in schools and through this, leaders and teachers are more likely to feel competent that they will perform adequately even in extreme and demanding circumstances.

To successfully meet the various expectations imposed by the rapid developments in technology, the ongoing demands for changing the educational systems and the effects of globalization, school leaders and teachers turn to professional learning. Continuous professional development is mainly cultivated in professional learning communities. Such communities engage all professionals to pursue continuous learning within a positive, supportive, and self-created community. Professional learning communities among others are linked with better learning outcomes since they provide opportunities for professional staff to explorein-depth the teaching and learning process and to acquire knowledge on how to become more effective in their work with pupils [60]. Instituting a professional learning community within a school does not take place automatically or suddenly. It requires a devoted and intentional effort on the part of the school leader and the teachers. Leithwood et al. [61], claimed that specific leadership behaviors, which they categorize as 'supportive', 'professional' and 'protective' (p. 680), could facilitate the creation and development of professional learning communities. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis [34] linked the above behaviors with trust. They emphasize that the behaviors suggested by Leithwood et al. [61] play a crucial role in eliciting trust as well. Teachers' trust in the school leader's personality also appears to be linked to the smooth functioning of professional learning communities in schools [2]. Teachers who trust their leader are more likely to be receptive to improving their professional level and engaging in vocational learning programs. The broader culture of trust, but especially trust in the school leader, has also been cited as a critical condition for developing professional learning communities, in which teachers can improve as professionals as much as possible [62, 44]. The covid-19 era demanded leaders and teachers adapt their practice and learn how to use technology to assist their teaching and communication with students. In schools where teachers already function as professional learning communities, such an endeavor is more likely to succeed.

Trust in the leader facilitates communication [40, 27]. According to Norman et al. [63], open and honest communication has, traditionally, been considered an essential component of effective organizations. Through communication, information is channeled and analyzed. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy [64] consider trust essential for effective communication since the accuracy and quality of communication may be limited, defective and perhaps even inaccurate without it [40]. Noonan et al. [65] demonstrated the interdependence between communication and trust. They claimed that trust and communication are interconnected; the dissemination of information and communication are, on the one hand, the basis for building trust; on the other hand, trust improves and strengthens communication. It is evident that the smooth operation of schools may depend on the quality of communication that exists, mainly between teachers and the school leader. Trust seems to ensure a high level of communication [63]. Open and honest communication appears to be critical in times of uncertainty where all information needs to be passed from the school leader to teachers and vice versa accurately and effectively.

Geist and Hoy [66], referred to teacher professionalism as those behaviors that indicate that teachers are committed to their work and are willing to cooperate with the rest of the school staff to reach their common goals. Baggini [67] argues that for teachers, professionalism is understood in terms of what extent they overcome the complexities and to what extent they can apply their skills and experiences in relation to their profession. The degree of teacher professionalism in a school is found to be strongly related to the trust present among all actors in the school. High trust is associated with professional behaviors [68, 69 & 2]. When teachers trust their principals, they appear more professional, increasing the quality of the learning outcomes and contributing to higher school effectiveness [34]. Since

professionalism in schools is evident through productive collaboration, the diffusion of teaching practices and reflective dialogue, qualitieswhich are indeed essential during difficult and demanding circumstances because they provide teachers with a variety of tools needed to cope with hectic and frustrating situations.

Many studies have also researched the absence of trust and its consequences in organizations [6, 31, 70 & 20]. In the absence of trust people are increasingly reluctant to take risks, require protection against the possibility of betrayal, and ever more seek to defend their interests [71], most of the time at the expense of their work. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran [72] reported that in school settings with high levels of distrust, teachers are less likely to engage in situations that require collaboration, resulting in a climate of isolation and misunderstanding. Lack of trust leads individuals to self-protective behaviors, as they will not risk opening or sharing information with other individuals, making cooperation and communication difficult. Lack of trust can also cause feelings of insecurity and anxiety [73], lead to irresponsible and unwise behaviors [64] and results in low rates of moral commitment to performance [74].

Conclusion

Unforeseen and demanding situations like the theCovid-19 pandemic, pose considerable pressure on social environments and scientists appear to agree that we may have witnessed the peak of the iceberg. When summoned to lead and inspire in ever-changing circumstances, the stakes are high. The unprecedented challenges to teaching and learning caused by the pandemic, or other crises to come, require leaders that adapt their leadership in a way to ensure the smooth operation of schools and to deliver the best possible learning outcomes. School leaders are expected to lead so that schools can perform effectively under any circumstances since, even in times of crisis and uncertainty, accountability and expectations remain [75]. The evidence reviewed emphasizes that trust could provide an answer to how school leaders could cope with hectic, and demanding situations imposed by crises, like the covid-19 pandemic. School leaders need to build and sustain trusting relationships with all stakeholders, horizontally and vertically, as the benefits of such an approach are visible and tangible throughout the organization. Trust could ensure, higher learning outcomes, positive and supportive school climate, increased teacher responsibility and professionalism, organizational citizenship behaviors, unhindered communication, cooperation, continuous professional learning and enhanced teachers' collective efficacy. It could also boost leaders' and teachers' eagerness to adapt and perform under difficult conditions.

Trust and its positive outcomes could increase the possibility for schools to meet, adapt, and overcome any turbulence or crisis imposed by the surrounding environment. Even though the paper argues (based on well-documented previous research) that trust may be highly relevant, to the extent to which schools can meet, adapt, and overcome any turbulence or crisis imposed by the surrounding environment, research can examine the role of trust in specific (e.g. Covid-19), periods of crisis to provide more insights for future reference.

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