An Investigation into Trust and its Effect on Teams

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Certificate of Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree, nor has it been submitted as part of the requirement for another degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of this thesis itself have been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Mahwish Ali Bhatti

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Abstract

Project failures have become a major concern for researchers and practitioners. According to the literature, organisations very often give attention to teamwork as there is a view that it is essential for the smooth operation of a project (Thamhain 2004; Bubshait et al 1999).Therefore, teamwork is one of the important factors for the success or failure of a project. In addition to the importance of teamwork, team issues affecting its performance also need attention. Among these team issues, people issues are least discussed in the literature (Dirks & Ferrin 2001). One such team issue is trust.

Trust is believed to be influenced by individual personality, individual behaviours and interpersonal relationships (Hassanein & Head 2004; cited by Lumsden & McKay 2006). When it comes to the individual's behaviour, much of the psychology literature believes it to be influenced by various sources. One example is David (2007) who produced a model showing human nature, personality and culture among the sources that influence an individual's behaviour. Moreover, trust is deeply rooted in an individual's personality (Akhter 2004; Sutherland & Tan 2004). As the importance of teams has been stressed it is quite evident that the most important attribute that makes up teams, i.e. humans, has a strong impact on a team's trust and performance. Unfortunately, due to limited empirical studies on trust in Information Technology (IT) literature, the aspects of individuals' behaviour are missing and the studies from the psychology literature are not reflected in IT or project management literature.

The research presented in this thesis is an exploratory study and it introduces a framework to help understand how trust influences IT project teams. It also includes the role of project managers and team leaders in improving trust within teams. The framework encompasses the role of project managers and team leaders in building trust within a team highlighting loyalty, communication management, motivation, etc. It also includes aspects of individuals' behaviour which affect trust within a team.

A qualitative study was carried out to achieve the objectives of this study. The analysis of responses was done from six semi-structured interviews of IT project managers and

team leaders from two Australian organisations, gathered based on their experience in managing team projects. The individual behaviours found in this study that can affect trust, and consequently projects, were frustration, compassion, deception, transparency, idleness, talk (gossiping), inappropriate behaviours, inappropriate work attire, unnecessary disturbance, bad odour, playing practical jokes and an immature attitude. The role of managers and team leaders in improving trust within teams and the team members found in this study were to: operate with transparency, earn respect, maintain the flow of communication, promote team building activities, share team/project success, motivate team members, and keep the team united. The results showed that trust is a central element and without trust, teamwork will be negatively affected resulting in project failure and poor team performance.