

Ana Nešić Tomašević<sup>1</sup>, Sanja Batić Očovaj<sup>2</sup>, Danijela Lalić<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup> Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Serbia<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Law and Business Studies dr Lazar Vrkatić, Serbia

# Unlocking Workplace Dynamo: The Impact of Internal Trust and Communication on Igniting Work Engagement

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## Abstract:

**Research Question:** This study delves into the intricate relationships among internal communication, internal trust, and work engagement within the context of a developing business environment undergoing cultural and economic transition. **Motivation:** The fundamental research inquiries seek to ascertain the interconnections between the studied phenomena and elucidate the nature of these relationships. Work engagement, identified through previous research and contemporary business practices, emerges as a pivotal force with profound implications for motivation, management, and personal development within organizations. **Idea:** The introduction sets the stage by emphasizing the study's focus on relationships in a transitioning business environment. Subsequent sections meticulously articulate research objectives, explore the existing literature, pose research questions, and delineate the chosen methodology, elucidating the importance of standardized instruments and the rationale behind the selection of the Serbian organizational context. Results are presented with a focus on the identified correlations, leading to the formulation of two models. The subsequent discussion critically compares these models, offering insights into the implications of trust-determined communication on work engagement. Limitations are candidly acknowledged, underscoring the need for interpretative caution. **Data:** The research methodology predominantly employs a quantitative approach to unravel the complexities inherent in internal communication, internal trust, and work engagement. The study encompasses a substantial sample size, consisting of 708 respondents representing 16 working organizations in Serbia. **Tools:** To gauge these phenomena, standardized instruments such as Internal Trust, a shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, and the Internal Communication Scale were employed. The anticipated results unveil robust correlations among the elements under scrutiny. **Findings:** The findings culminate in the proposition of two models, with structural equation modelling revealing a model where trust determines communication, subsequently influencing work engagement as the more fitting representation. This model presents a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics within organizational frameworks. **Contribution:** Despite acknowledging certain limitations in the study, the research underscores its importance in the quest for the most influential factors contributing to work engagement in organizations. The research serves as a valuable contribution to the broader discourse on organizational behaviour, shedding light on crucial factors that influence employee engagement in evolving business landscapes.

**Keywords:** internal communication, internal trust, work engagement, organizations

**JEL Classification:** L20, Z13

## 1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

The basic research questions of this paperwork refer to which factors direct the behaviour of employees in aspect of desirable employee engagement, in what way it is related to internal organizational communication, and to what extent it is possible to build interpersonal relationships that would create a positive work context. In this respect, the three main fields of work are related to internal communication, trust and work engagement.

\* Corresponding author: Ana Nešić Tomašević, e-mail: ana.nesic@uns.ac.rs

Organizational communication, a broader concept than internal communication, sets the stage for exploring the latter. Research on organizational communication delves into information dissemination and employee perceptions (Mount & Back, 1999). The characteristics of organizational communication are shaped by its directions, presenting a multidimensional construct involving satisfaction with information flow and job-position-based relationships (Downs & Hazen, 1977). Internal communication, spanning all organizational levels, is a complex phenomenon rooted in meaning and values, facilitating organizational interaction (Karanges et al., 2015). Quirke (2017) contends that it integrates information, challenges, and motivates employees, managing a dynamic work environment while fostering engagement and commitment. It significantly influences employees' attitudes and feelings, directly impacting organizational performance (Men & Stacks, 2014). Effective internal communication is pivotal for organizational success, ensuring productivity through directed roles and responsibilities. Additionally, robust internal communication processes contribute to harmony in vulnerability management, fostering trust among employees.

Trust in an organizational context involves one party accepting the actions of another without direct control, based on the expectation of specific, important actions (Mayer & Gavin, 2005). It is an individual inclination to believe in determined aspects (Zaheer et al., 1998), relying on communication confidence, faith in good intentions, and the ability to navigate uncertainty (Moorman et al., 1993). Trust involves feelings and rational thinking fostering information sharing (Lewis & Weigert, 1985), resulting in a readiness to invest efforts based on positive expectations from prior interactions (Tzafrir et al., 2004). Organizational trust transcends individual trust, comprising ability, benevolence, and honesty dimensions shaping behaviour. Institutionally based trust, a core of intra- and inter-organizational trust, stems from organizational identification with values and practices (Nesic & Lalic, 2017). It characterizes relationships when employees trust each other, their group, managers, and the organization (Duffy & Lilly, 2013), enhancing organizational climate and positive expectations (Ellis & Shockley-Zalabak, 2001). Trust boosts organizational success, adaptability, innovativeness, employee satisfaction, and commitment (Huff & Kelley, 2003), fostering positive attitudes, cooperation, and improved business outcomes (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). A high-trust environment enhances organizational learning (Jiang & Chen, 2017). Gillespie (2003) identifies trust determinants as reliance on knowledge, skills, abilities, delegation, autonomy, and openness to sharing sensitive information. While trust is a general attitude (Janowicz & Noorderhaven, 2006), this discussion centers on employees' trust in organizations and managers, emphasizing it as a result of previous interactions (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012).

In their famous study of work engagement, the authors Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002) defined it as the positive fulfillment and contentment of a working state of mind, characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. According to them, vigor is result of high activation at work. It is manifested in highly energetic work, the willingness to put strong effort in own work, and persistence in facing the difficulties. Dedication is a result of the psychological identification with own work. It is characterized by a sense of meaning, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption is characterized by attention in own work, distorted sense of time, and difficulties with detaching oneself from work. There are empirical findings that identified work engagement as the opposite pole from burnout (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006). Vigor and dedication are considered and proved to be direct opposites of exhaustion and cynicism, respectively. The work engagement leads to stronger involvement, satisfaction and enthusiasm for the work (Harter et al., 2002). Due to the openness to new experiences, engaged workers have more creative ideas and will be more innovative and entrepreneurial oriented (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). It is not just a measure of well-being at the company, but it also has many positive effects on the functioning of the organization, work performance (Salanova et al., 2003) and its relationship with other subjects. In the dynamic landscape of evolving knowledge and the specialization of professional skills, the imperative for fostering robust internal communication and cultivating unwavering trust within organizations has never been more pronounced. As the nexus of organizational dynamics, knowledge sharing emerges as a pivotal force driving performance and innovation. Yet, its seamless integration into the fabric of business culture hinges upon the establishment of crystal-clear channels of internal communication and the nurturing of an environment ripe with trust and collaboration. In this era where expertise reigns supreme, the synergy between knowledge dissemination and internal rapport becomes not just desirable, but indispensable. Picture a thriving ecosystem where ideas flow freely, where every cog in the machinery feels empowered to contribute their insights, and where trust serves as the bedrock upon which innovation thrives. It is within this framework of interconnectedness that the significance of internal communication and trust crystallizes. They form the arteries through which ideas pulsate, the conduits through which knowledge travels, and the glue that binds teams together in pursuit of shared goals. Without these foundational elements, the journey towards organizational excellence becomes fraught with obstacles and inefficiencies. In essence, the evolution of organizational behaviour necessitates a paradigm shift—a realization that the cultivation of internal communication and trust is not just a means to an end, but rather, an end in itself. It is about fostering a culture where collaboration is not just encouraged, but celebrated, where transparency is not just a buzzword, but a way of life, and where trust

is not just earned, but ingrained in the very fabric of the organization's DNA. In this light, the true measure of organizational success lies not just in the achievement of work results, but in the strength of its internal bonds, the depth of its collective wisdom, and the resilience of its collaborative spirit.

### 1.1 Towards a research problem

The assumption in this paperwork is based on previous research that has shown that employees are more likely to engage in their work when they develop a high level of trust in mutual relations in the organization (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008). A number of previous studies showed the impact of internal communication on employees' engagement and organizational performance in work environments such as education, police departments, public service and healthcare (Arif et al., 2009; Carriere & Bourque, 2009; Chong, 2007; Dolphin, 2005). Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) found evidence in four different samples of Dutch employees that downward communication, such as performance feedback, social support and supervisory leadership, positively influences work engagement, when observed through the dimensions of energy, commitment and absorption. Previous research has also suggested that authentic leadership is of great importance for the development of trust and work engagement, and that communication among employees largely depends on the relationship with the leader and towards the leader (Arif & Forbis, 2011).

The supportive communication in organizations increase employees' work engagement (Karanges et al., 2014; Vercic & Vokic, 2017). Communication involves a large number of processes that represent a form of social and emotional life, but also a way of presenting one's social life to other people. Recognizing the role of the communication models in the social construction of organization explained its influences on organization performances (Schoeneborn, 2011). Bstieler (2006), believes that trust mediates pre-trust relationships as well as performance that affects organizational behaviour.

Three research hypotheses were defined, according to the objective, research questions and purpose of the research. The first general hypotheses is:

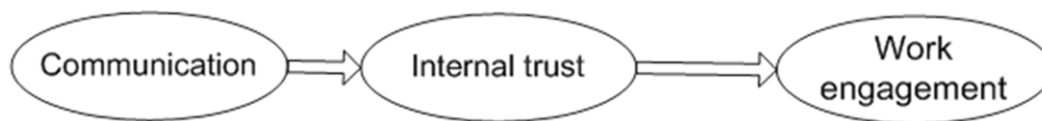
H1 - Internal communication in an organization is trust-based, more precisely trust predicts communication in organizations.

Trust is pivotal in communication patterns, with consequences for its erosion leading to increased vulnerability, risk, and uncertainty in subsequent communications (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017). Studies highlight that individuals perceiving trustworthiness from previous communication experiences are more willing to engage in collaborative work (Mishra et al., 2014). While numerous research works establish strong links between internal communication and trust, the direction of this relationship lacks consensus, given their reciprocal influence through a feedback mechanism (Zeffane et al., 2011). Distrust is empirically linked to communication loss and antisocial behaviour at work, potentially stemming from diverse trust conceptualizations (Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006). Recent studies indicate that organizational trust positively impacts work engagement (Agarwal, 2014), though consensus on its influence on performance remains elusive (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). In global virtual work teams, trust acts as a mediator through which communication affects performance (Sarker et al., 2011). In environments where employees lack information about organizational events, internal communication alone may not increase trust and engagement (Truss et al., 2006). While trust between employees and managers is necessary, it is not sufficient for organizational success; the effectiveness of organizations hinges on established trust among employees. Internal communication fostering trust in the organization forms the basis for dedicated employees and positive employee-manager relationships (De Ridder, 2004; Allert & Chatterjee, 1997; Whitener et al., 1998). Feedback, especially in downward internal communication, is deemed crucial for employee work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Previous research emphasizes the role of internal communication and mutual understanding in organizational behaviour (Kodish, 2017). Pounsford (2007) suggests that storytelling, informal communication, and skills training contribute to increased employee engagement and trust in the organization.

Therefore, another research hypothesis is defined:

H2 - Trust-based internal communication contributes to employee engagement.

The aim of this research was to explore the relationship of internal communication and trust, with work engagement in a developing business environment, as currently exists in Serbia. Based on previous research the authors have assumed communication will affect internal trust, internal trust will affect work engagement (Figure 1). However, due to the results of previous research, the authors allowed a possibility that internal trust will affect communication while communication will affect work engagement.



**Figure 1:** The theoretical model with structural relationships between trust, communication and work engagement

In light of all the above, the third research hypothesis is:

H3 - Relationships between internal communication, trust and work engagement can be clearly defined.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1 Procedure and research sample

The questionnaires were administered in the Serbian language at 16 working organizations located in different parts of Serbia. Some questionnaires were distributed in the paper form by HR or others through on-line questionnaire. Research was approved by managers of organizations, employees were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaires, with assistance available if they had questions regarding terminology used in the instrument. The anonymity was granted to all respondents.

The research sample consisted of 708 respondents from 16 organizations belonging to production and service enterprises (by type of business activity), and are in either public or private ownership (by legal form). The sample structure is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Structure of the sample (N=708)

		Count	Column N %
<b>Gender</b>	male	370	52.3%
	female	338	47.7%
<b>Age category</b>	younger than 25	70	9.9%
	26-35	319	45.1%
	36-45	186	26.3%
	46-60	118	16.7%
	older than 60	15	2.1%
<b>Education level</b>	elementary	4	0.6%
	high school	170	24.0%
	college	94	13.3%
	graduated	440	62.1%
<b>Length of service in the current company</b>	less than 5	385	54.4%
	6-10	164	23.2%
	11-20	102	14.4%
	21-30	32	4.5%
	more than 30	25	3.5%
<b>Type of business activity</b>	Production	283	40.0%
	Service	425	60.0%
<b>Legal form</b>	Public	211	29.8%
	Private	497	70.2%

### 2.2 Measures

*Internal trust* is a unidimensional scale that operationalizes organizational trust as trustor's belief (Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006). It measures the climate of trust within the organization, more precisely the level of trust throughout the organization (Huff & Kelley, 2003). It is composed of four items (i.e., "There is a very high level of trust throughout this organization.", "In this organization, subordinates have a great deal of trust for managers.") followed by a seven-point Likert-type attitude scale, at intervals from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The factorial validity of this instrument was verified with factor analysis (maximum likelihood method). The first factor explained 66% of the total variance ( $\lambda = 2.64$ ). All items had factor loadings larger than 0.70 (Table 2). The reliability of the instrument is satisfactory since the Cronbach's alpha is .88.

**Table 2:** Factor loadings for Internal trust (Huff & Kelley, 2003)

Items	Factor
1. There is a very high level of trust throughout this organization.	.835
2. In this organization, subordinates have a great deal of trust for managers.	.905
3. If someone in this organization makes a promise, others within this organization will almost always trust that the person will do his or her best to keep the promise.	.738
4. Managers in this company trust their subordinates to make good decisions.	.763

*Internal Communication Scale* (ICS) was created on the basis of Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ) developed by Downs and Hazen (1977). This scale operationalized the satisfaction with horizontal communication and downward communication. The authors did not deal with upward communication because it would require the segmentation of research sample according to the job position. Both subscales had 3 items followed by a seven-point Likert-type attitude scale. The subscale Horizontal communication gathered three items related to internal communication with colleagues at work (formal and informal), and the subscale Downward communication gathered three items related to employees' communication about work assignments. The factorial validity of this instrument was verified with factor analysis (maximum likelihood method) with oblique Promax rotation. The first two factors explained 68% of the total variance (Table 3). The first factor, Horizontal communication ( $\lambda_1 = 2.35$ ) gathered items concerning communication with colleagues ("I communicate very often about work tasks with colleagues.", "I have frequent business meetings and written communication with colleagues at work." and "I often communicate with co-workers through informal communications and spontaneous conversations."). The second factor ( $\lambda_2 = 2.20$ ) gathered items concerning Downward communication in organization ("The work tasks are presented to me in advance in a clear and precise way by the superior.", "We solve problems at work together as soon as possible.", and "Communication at work is open and motivating"). The correlation between Horizontal and Downward communication in the organization was 0.62. The reliability of both scales determined by Cronbach's alpha was larger than 0.70.

**Table 3:** Pattern Matrix

Items	HC	DC
I communicate very often about work tasks with colleagues.	.793	.004
I have frequent business meetings and written communication with colleagues at work.	.749	-.048
I often communicate with co-workers through informal communications and spontaneous conversations.	.585	.034
The work tasks are presented to me in advance in a clear and precise way by the superior.	-.166	.921
We solve problems at work together as soon as possible.	.241	.600
Communication at work is open and motivating.	.259	.463

Note: HC - Horizontal communication, DC - Downward communication

*Shortened version of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (UWES-9, Schaufeli et al., 2006) consists of 9 items followed by a seven-point Likert-type attitude scale. Work engagement is measured across and through three dimensions Vigor, Dedication, and Absorption. The scale was intercultural validated (Schaufeli et al., 2006), but it was validated as one-dimensional in the first validation on the Serbian sample (Petrovic et al., 2017).

The factorial validity of this instrument was verified with factor analysis (maximum likelihood method) with oblique Promax rotation. The first three factors explained 81% of the total variance. The pattern structure was in accordance with subscales without significant cross-loadings. The reliability of all three subscales determined by Cronbach's alpha was larger than 0.80 (Table 4).

**Table 4:** Pattern matrix, correlations between factors and eigenvalues for UWES-9

Items	Factor		
	Vigor	Dedication	Absorbance
1. At my work, I feel bursting with energy. (VI1)	.996	.028	-.131
4. At my job, I feel strong and vigorous. (VI2)	.572	.016	.341
8. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work. (VI3)	.547	-.032	.313
5. I am enthusiastic about my job. (DE2)	.262	.038	.668
7. My job inspires me. (DE3)	.074	-.047	.849
10. I am proud of the work that I do. (DE4)	-.036	.236	.680
9. I feel happy when I am working intensely. (AB3)	.188	.441	.218
11. I am immersed in my work. (AB4)	.011	.955	-.118
14. I get carried away when I am working. (AB5)	-.039	.634	.239
Vigor		.588	.786
Dedication			.728
$\lambda$ before rotation	5.920	.918	.488
$\lambda$ after rotation	4.608	4.128	5.135



## 2.3 Statistical analysis

The analysis employed a two-phased strategy to examine variable relationships. In the first phase, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) validated the measurement model, and in the second, structural equation modelling (SEM) verified causal relationships. The hypothesized model included one dimension for trust, two for communication, and three for work engagement, confirmed through CFA. Using SPSS 24.0 with AMOS, the analysis involved 708 respondents from Serbian enterprises. Multivariate normality and linearity assumptions were evaluated, and with no missing data, the final sample size was 708 after removing outliers from an initial 826 respondents. Despite non-normality, the analysis proceeded using the maximum likelihood method for its robustness to non-normal data (Curran et al., 1996).

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistical analysis showed that respondents had a tendency to more positively evaluate their Horizontal and Downward communication, Dedication, and Absorbance (Table 5). The highest average was noticed for Horizontal communication ( $M=5.46$ ). The distributions of the subjects' scores on all subscales except on Internal trust were negatively asymmetric.

**Table 5:** Descriptive statistics for the researched variables

	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	z	Statistic	Z
<b>Internal trust</b>	1.50	7.00	4.73	1.19	-.03	-0.33	-.38	-2.11
<b>Horizontal communication</b>	2.00	7.00	5.46	1.04	-.57	-6.33	.02	0.11
<b>Downward communication</b>	1.00	7.00	5.04	1.18	-.51	-5.67	.34	1.89
<b>Vigor</b>	1.00	7.00	4.65	1.31	-.24	-2.67	-.33	-1.83
<b>Dedication</b>	1.00	7.00	5.09	1.29	-.62	-6.89	.31	1.72
<b>Absorbance</b>	2.00	7.00	5.40	1.05	-.45	-5.00	.08	0.44

### 3.2 Validation of instruments with confirmatory factor analysis

Factorial validity of used instruments was proved with CFA through three steps. In the first step the authors checked a model where all subscales were represented with their latent factors (CFA1). The goodness of fit indicated by  $\chi^2/df$ , CFI, SRMR, and RMSEA presented in Table 6 was satisfactory (Hooper et al., 2008).

**Table 6:** Fit indices for analyzed models

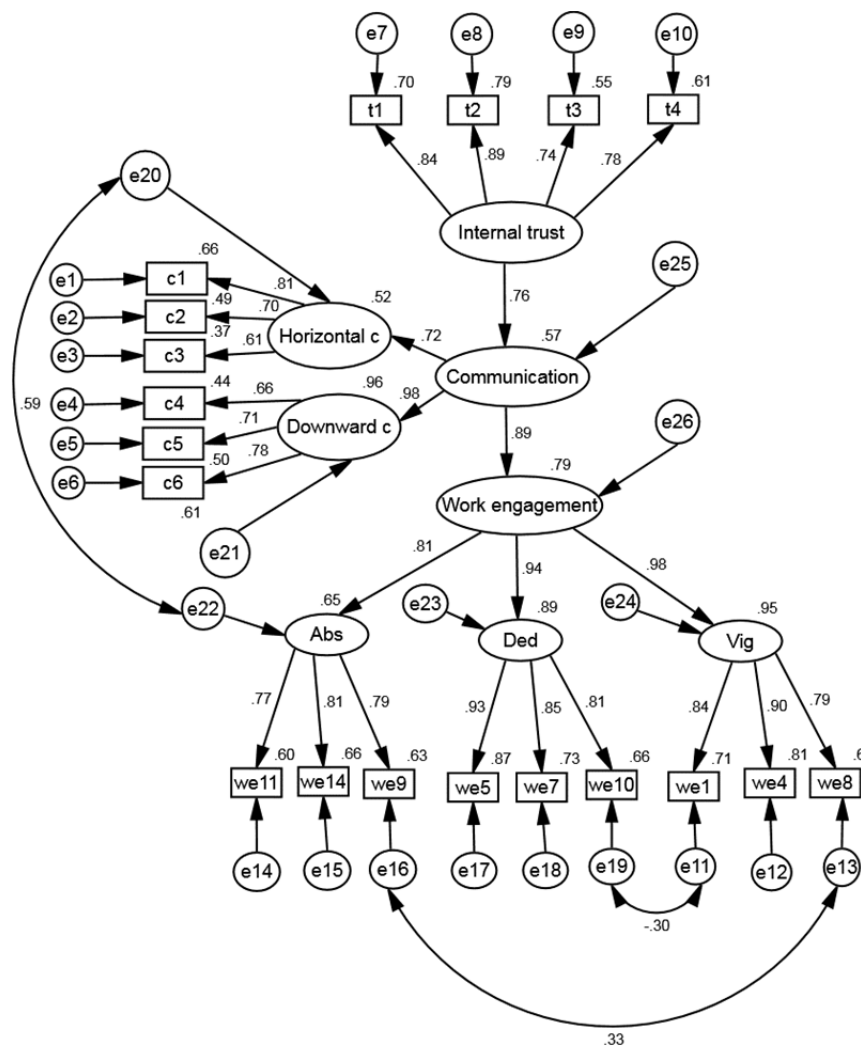
	$\chi^2$	Df	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA	CI 90	RMSEA	AIC
<b>CFA 1</b>	575.789	137	4.203	.952	.0405	.067	.062	.073	681.789
<b>CFA 2</b>	786.403	144	5.461	.930	.0540	.079	.074	.085	878.403
<b>Modified CFA 2</b>	601.343	141	0.464	.950	.0464	.068	.062	.074	699.343
<b>Hypothesized model 1 (Com-&gt; Trust-&gt; Work Eng)</b>	820.409	142	5.778	.926	.0902	.082	.077	.088	916.409
<b>Alternative model (Trust-&gt; Com -&gt; Work Eng)</b>	603.928	142	4.253	.949	.0467	.068	.062	.073	699.928

In the second step, the authors created second-order factors for latent dimensions within the same concept (CFA2). Although this model had a slightly lower goodness of fit than the first, modifications were made to improve it by adjusting relationships between measurement errors. In the third step, post-hoc modifications were performed based on high modification indices (above 35) for specific measurement error covariances (e11 and e19, e13 and e16, e20 and e22), resulting in a modified model with satisfactory goodness-of-fit indices. Residual analysis identified standardized residual covariances higher than 2.58 (but below 2.9) for items we14 and we10, we11 and we10, and we9 and t4. However, these were not considered significant concerns as the overall model achieved a good fit. All subscales demonstrated Cronbach alphas exceeding 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliabilities. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all subscales surpassed 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity. Calculated chi-square values exceeded the critical value of

10.83, which is the critical value of  $\chi^2$  distribution with 1 degree of freedom at a 0.001 probability. Squared multiple correlation (SMC) values were provided, with Horizontal Communication (.96) and Absorbance (.65) showing the highest and lowest reliability, respectively.

### 3.3 Structural equation modeling

The results of structural equation modelling did not confirm hypothesized relationships that Communication determines Internal trust and that Internal trust further determines Work engagement (CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.08; SRMR=0.09). However, the alternative structural model in which Internal trust determines Communication and Communication affects Work Engagement showed acceptable fit to the data (CFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR=0.05). The regression relationships were significant at a level of  $p$  lower than 0.01. Internal trust positively predicted Communication ( $\beta = 0.76$ ; SE = 0.02;  $p < 0.01$ ) and Communication positively predicted Work engagement ( $\beta = 0.89$ ; SE = 0.02;  $p < 0.01$ ). Standardized parameter estimates are provided in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Result of overall SEM model for relationships between Internal trust, Communication and Work Engagement

Due to the model's complexity, both potential indirect effects were examined. Results from bootstrapping re-sampling showed all indirect effects were significant. Internal trust had a significant indirect effect on work engagement through communication ( $\beta=0.67$ ; 95% CI [0.61, 0.72];  $p < 0.01$ ). Internal trust also significantly influenced both dimensions of communication, with a stronger effect on Downward communication ( $\beta=0.74$ ; 95% CI [0.68, 0.80];  $p < 0.01$ ) compared to Horizontal communication ( $\beta=0.55$ ; 95% CI [0.49, 0.61];  $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, Internal trust had stronger effects on Vigor ( $\beta=0.65$ ; 95% CI [0.60, 0.71];  $p < 0.01$ ) and Ded-

ication ( $\beta=0.63$ ; 95% CI [0.58, 0.68];  $p < 0.01$ ) compared to Absorbance ( $\beta=0.54$ ; 95% CI [0.48, 0.59];  $p < 0.01$ ). The same pattern was observed for the effect of Communication on dimensions of Work engagement, with stronger effects on Vigor ( $\beta=0.87$ ; 95% CI [0.82, 0.91];  $p < 0.01$ ) and Dedication ( $\beta=0.84$ ; 95% CI [0.79, 0.88];  $p < 0.01$ ) compared to Absorbance ( $\beta=0.71$ ; 95% CI [0.65, 0.77];  $p < 0.01$ ).

The authors found that both alternative models were insignificant and had worse indices of fit than hypothesized. The model in which was assumed that Internal trust affects Work engagement and Work engagement affects Communication better fitted to data than the model in which was assumed that Communication affects Internal trust and Trust affects Work engagement.

#### 4. Discussion

Although the concepts of communication, trust and work performance are very often researched in the last two decades there are just a few empirical research works on relationships between them (Lin, 2010). While the engagement of employees undoubtedly holds promise for enhanced outcomes, it is crucial to recognize that work engagement alone does not guarantee the attainment of significant results. Rather, it serves as a catalyst, amplifying the likelihood of superior performance with heightened involvement. In essence, work engagement paints a picture of commitment and passion within the workforce, offering a glimpse into the potential for heightened productivity and innovation. However, it is important to distinguish that work engagement itself does not delve into the depths of work performance; rather, it provides subjective insights into one's own work behaviour, serving as a precursor to potential outcomes. This distinction is pivotal, for it underscores the nuanced nature of organizational dynamics. While work engagement serves as a valuable indicator of employee investment and dedication, it is but one facet of the multifaceted prism of performance evaluation. To truly gauge the effectiveness and efficiency of work, a comprehensive analysis that encompasses objective metrics alongside subjective assessments is imperative. Thus, while work engagement holds sway as a harbinger of favorable outcomes, it is only through a holistic examination of both subjective sentiments and objective measures that a true understanding of work performance can be attained. By recognizing the interplay between engagement and performance, organizations can navigate towards a future where employee commitment converges seamlessly with tangible results, fostering a culture of excellence and achievement. The authors started from the most supported assumption that organizations with quality internal communication could lead employees to feel more comfortable in their work environment and therefore are more likely to build a sense of trust that would further increase work engagement (Mishra et al., 2014; Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999). Structural equation modelling revealed that the most fitting model is one where trust predicts communication, and communication predicts work engagement, aligning with prior research (Chory & Hubbell, 2008). The inversion is explained by the crucial role of trust in the effectiveness of communication in Serbian business environments characterized by corruption, antisocial behaviours, and negative managerial experiences (Wallace & Latcheva, 2006). This finding aligns with studies showing how distrust diminishes satisfaction with communication (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Agarwal, 2014), emphasizing the importance of building trust for effective communication. The study confirms the first hypothesis: internal communication in organizations is trust-based, as trust predicts communication. However, the complexity of communication relationships highlights the challenges in explaining employee behaviour in organizations. The authors' caution against universalizing trust study results due to its specific nature in interpersonal relationships and the multiconditionality of trust. The second hypothesis is confirmed: internal communication contributes to employee engagement, with stronger effects on Vigor and Dedication than Absorbance. This may be because Absorbance reflects inner motivation, while Vigor and Dedication are more externally influenced. Quality internal communication is seen as a partial shield against job stress, particularly in preventing burnout. The third hypothesis, stating a clear connection between internal communication, trust, and work engagement, is not fully confirmed. The initial model, suggesting that good communication leads to higher trust and increased work engagement, had lower fit indices than the model where internal trust influences communication. Lemon's groundbreaking study on employee perceptions and their grasp of work engagement shed light on a crucial finding: within organizational settings, the power of dialogic internal communication eclipses that of its formal counterpart in fostering work engagement (Lemon, 2019). This revelation underscores the transformative potential of open, two-way communication channels in cultivating a sense of purpose and commitment among employees. Moreover, amidst the unprecedented challenges posed by the recent global pandemic, Qin and Men's research delved into the profound impact of trust within interpersonal relationships on the psychological well-being of employees, particularly in the realm of internal communication (Qin & Men, 2023). Their findings serve as a poignant reminder of the indispensable role trust plays in nurturing resilience and cohesion during times of uncertainty. In a similar vein, Sulaiman and his collaborators embarked on a journey to unravel the intricate dynamics between internal communication, work engagement, and organizational success. Their research underscores the need for integrative conceptual models to grasp the complexities inherent in



phenomena such as internal communication and work engagement (Sulaiman et al., 2023). By adopting a holistic approach, they shed light on the interconnectedness of these elements and their collective impact on organizational performance. Together, these studies paint a vivid picture of the evolving landscape of organizational communication and its profound implications for employee engagement, well-being, and ultimately, organizational success. They beckon us to embrace a paradigm shift—one where dialogue supersedes monologue, trust serves as the cornerstone of communication, and integrative models illuminate the path towards a future of flourishing workplaces and thriving organizations.

#### 4.1 Limitations of the study

The cross-sectional design used in this research limits the explanation of results, particularly in understanding potentially circular relationships between trust and communication. The design lacks definitive conclusions about the direction of these disputable relationships, and its limitations include reduced generalizability. The authors advocate for longitudinal and experimental studies to uncover the causal relationships between trust, communication, and work engagement. They suggest that qualitative research could enhance understanding and optimize employees' work engagement. While the study had a large sample from diverse companies and sectors, it was convenient and not statistically representative. Self-reported measures introduce subjectivity, and the imprecise definition of studied phenomena poses challenges. The authors highlight the importance of refining the internal communication scale, including more facets of organizational communication, and addressing the need for more specific content components in trust measures. A multilevel analysis, to account for organizational specifics and encourage a more nuanced understanding of relationships within organizations, is recommended.

#### 4.2 Practical implications

This research shows that motivation of employees can be ensured with trust-based communication. Since ensuring the trust can increase the effect of internal communication on work engagement, there is a need to put certain efforts in the rebuilding of trust in organizations without this trust. Authors assume that the results of this research are especially important for work in the companies that passed through certain crisis that resulted in the loss of trust. It is necessary to understand that although communication has huge impact on the success of organizations, it is necessary that trust be rebuilt through visible acts. Research results unequivocally show that work engagement affects the increase of trust and reduce opportunities for the development of mistrust, which has a significant impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of employees (Kahkonen et al., 2021). The symbiotic relationship between trust and interpersonal communication cultivates an environment ripe for exchange and collaboration, serving as a catalyst for motivating work behaviour. Yet, despite the compelling evidence of its pivotal role, one cannot help but ponder why the study of trust remains somewhat overlooked. At the heart of this inquiry lies the complexity of trust itself—a multifaceted construct that transcends mere reliability and extends to encompass notions of truth, capability, and strength (Liu et al., 2022). Such intricacies render trust a subject of profound interest and challenge for researchers and practitioners alike, prompting a deeper exploration into its nuanced dimensions and far-reaching implications. A notable study conducted by Tkalac Vercic and Men in Croatia provides invaluable insights into the intricate interplay between internal communication, work engagement, and organizational dynamics. Through surveying 3,457 employees, the research unveiled a compelling correlation: satisfaction with internal communication not only influences work engagement directly but also exerts an indirect effect through key factors such as organizational support and attitudes towards managers (Tkalac Vercic & Men, 2023). This revelation underscores the ripple effect of effective communication practices, permeating various facets of organizational life and shaping employee attitudes and behaviours. Thus, as we navigate the labyrinth of organizational dynamics, it becomes increasingly evident that trust and communication are not mere components but rather the very lifeblood of thriving workplaces. By unravelling the complexities of trust and delving into its manifold manifestations, we pave the way for a deeper understanding of human behaviour, organizational culture, and the pathways to sustainable success.

## Conclusion

This study pointed out that trust affected the influence of communication on work engagement. The authors considered that it occurs when employees lost their trust in organization as it was case in most of Serbian organizations due to the specific state of economy. Considering the results this study, as well as the results of previous studies, it was assumed that there are circular relationships between researched concepts and strong feedback effects. It seems that is necessary to have a basic trust in the organization formed on previous positive experiences in order to be motivated with internal communication to engage more in work.

Distributions of respondents' score on variables horizontal and downward communication showed us that employees in the research sample had a tendency to positively estimate both dimensions of communication in their organization. The same results were obtained for scores on the dimensions of Work engagement so it was concluded that the research sample had a strong tendency to engage in the work. The Trust's symmetric distribution indicated that employees did not show inclination in answering positively on this scale. Strongly negatively skewed distributions of scores on all variables except on the Trust gave us a reason to assume that respondents manifested a tendency to give socially desirable answers. The authors have suspected that they, relatively to the answers on the other scales, expressed some problem with the trust in the organization. It would be in line with the description of Serbian socio-economic status as a transitional economy where employees have been confronted with privatizations, restructuring, downsizing, closing down and the collapse of a great number of companies (Petrovic et al., 2017) so many of them probably have decreased trust in organizations and managers. New viewpoints on trust suggest a more serious understanding of the language of trust and reliability without the dominance of idiosyncrasies (Wubs-Mrozewicz, 2020).

This study challenges the babble hypothesis that says that communication itself constitutes the primary work, by asserting that the interaction between organizational representatives and employees significantly influences work engagement. Moreover, the findings indicate that initiatives to enhance trust would have a slightly greater impact on downward rather than horizontal communication. Additionally, the study reveals that efforts aimed at bolstering trust and refining communication would exert a more pronounced influence on the dimensions of vigor and dedication at work compared to absorbance. Undoubtedly, investigations of this nature hold paramount importance for comprehending contemporary work environments and are poised to exert considerable influence in the future.

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## /// About the Authors

### Ana Nešić Tomašević

Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Serbia  
ana.nesic@uns.ac.rs



Ana Nešić Tomašević is an associate professor at Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, where she teaches courses of Sociology of Work and Sociology of Technology. She earned her PhD at the University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Sociology in 2016. Also, she received a second doctoral degree at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, Department of Industrial Engineering and Management, Module of Human Resource Management in 2019. She is the author and co-author of over 40 scientific papers, one textbook and has successfully participated in various team projects, both in the academic and non-academic sectors. Her research interests include the development of work and organizations, evolution of modern societies and technology, business communication, internal communication and social participation and activism.

### Sanja Batić Očovaj

Faculty of Law and Business Studies dr Lazar Vrkatić  
sanja.batic@gmail.com



Sanja Batić Očovaj is an assistant professor in Psychometrics and Statistics at the Faculty of Law and Business Studies dr Lazar Vrkatić. She holds a master's degree in statistics, a magister degree in psychology and received her PhD from the University of Novi Sad in 2016. Sanja Batić Očovaj's professional motivation is to help people to use quantitative analysis. Her research focuses on applied social psychology.

### Danijela Lalić

Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, Serbia  
danijela.lalic@uns.ac.rs



Dr. Danijela Lalić is a full professor at the Department of Industrial Engineering and Management, Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad. With over 90 scientific and professional publications, Dr. Lalić is the author of the widely regarded PR handbook, "Examples of Good Practices in Public Relations" (vols. 1–4), considered an excellent guide for professionals in communications. Focusing on the IT industry, she provides consulting services and has applied her expertise at leading companies, including Delta Holding, Microsoft Development Center Serbia, Schneider Electric, ARS Embedded Systems, and more. Dr. Lalić actively contributes to EUPRERA and serves as a national collaborator for Serbia in the European Communication Monitor.