THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT & MARKETING
DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH SEMINAR

The Role of Interpersonal Trust
in Promoting Employee Voice and Creativity

By

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All interested are welcome
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Abstract

Organizational environments are becoming increasingly complex, dynamic, and interdependent. As it is difficult for managers to detect, interpret, and handle these challenges all by themselves, employees have been recognized as an invaluable source of comments and creative ideas for addressing and solving critical problems and issues (e.g., Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004). Indeed, employee voice and creativity can play a key role in enhancing organizational functioning. However, employees often feel unsafe to express their opinions because they believe that voicing comments and suggesting new ideas for change are risky behaviors that may challenge the status quo and upset their leader or coworkers (Detert & Burris, 2007; Janssen, 2003; Van Dyne & Lepine, 1998).

Given the potential risk of being criticized and offended by leaders or coworkers, individuals’ willingness to engage in voice and creative behaviors may depend on the extent to which they trust their leader and coworkers to respond appropriately towards them. A central tenet of the trust literature assumes that interpersonal trust allows people to accept vulnerability to others, and thus promotes risk-taking behaviors (e.g., Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Seeking to advance understanding of whether, how, and when interpersonal trust facilitates employees to voice their concerns and come up with creative ideas, we conducted a series of field studies to develop and test alternative hypotheses about direct effects, moderating effects, and indirect effects of trust in relation to employee voice and creativity. The results suggest that the relationship between trust and employee voice and creativity is complex and may not be uniform across different conditions, indicating that theoretical frameworks including boundary conditions for trust effects are needed. I will present and discuss the results of these field studies on the role of trust in promoting employee voice and creativity.