Factors Influencing Work-Related Attitudes of Top Managers: An Expert Perspective

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Abstract. This research in progress paper investigates the multifaceted factors shaping the work-related attitudes of top managers in organizations with a focus on Germany. Through in-depth interviews with seasoned experts, it reveals crucial work attitudes, examines the impact of interpersonal and procedural factors, and evaluates information's role in the principal-agent relationship at top management levels. The findings challenge conventional assumptions, providing different perspectives on leadership and highlighting the evolving nature of management practices in the digital age. The study also explores potential differences between top IT managers and other C-level roles, investigating their implications.

The results of this research based on expert interviews are used in a broader context of research to triangulate literature analysis findings and quantitative surveys in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing top managers' work attitudes. Semi-structured expert interviews were conducted to gain a comprehensive perspective on the influencing factors of work attitudes in top management functions. Six German experts participated, bringing diverse backgrounds and affiliations with professional associations. Despite varied perspectives, universal importance was identified in key work attitudes, challenging assumptions of significant differences between employer and employee representatives. A novel contrast between hierarchical and broader perspectives within owner and worker associations emerged, suggesting a need for a more comprehensive understanding of management approaches. Additionally, interpersonal factors in leadership, information flow, trust-building, were highlighted as contributions. Furthermore, distinctions and commonalities between IT management and other top managerial roles were identified. This study both confirms existing knowledge and introduces valuable insights to management science, potentially shaping future research and practices.

Key words: Work-related attitudes, top managers, interpersonal factors, management practices, leadership.

Introduction

In today's complex and dynamic business landscape, understanding the work-related attitudes of top managers is paramount. These attitudes not only impact individual performance but also ripple throughout the organization, influencing overall success. This scientific paper aims to shed light on some factors that shape these attitudes, drawing from the insights of experienced experts.

In the field of management science, gaining insight into work related attitudes of top managers within organizations is essential. This study aims to contribute by exploring the factors that influence these attitudes by gathering insights from experienced experts and understand the various elements that contribute to the emotional states of managers.

Our overall research goes beyond mere exploration; it involves combining information from literature analysis, expert interviews, and quantitative surveys. This specific paper presents the results of the expert interviews. The goal is to identify and validate factors affecting the attitudes of top managers in general and to gain a broad overview over work related attitudes and factors influencing these. Reviewing existing literature reveals a general goal of discussing individual factors shaping certain work attitudes. For example, Park (Park, 2010) investigated factors that influence attitudes such as work motivation, job satisfaction and

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turnover intention. Her focus regarding the factors was on Performance management and different incentive systems. Yet, utilizing a theory like the principle agent model suggests that factors like information exchange in different forms (Bergh, Ketchen, Orlandi, Heugens, & Boyd, 2019) might have an impact on work related attitudes of employees. Under the presence of information exchange between principals and agents trust evolves (Vanneste, Puranam, & Kretschmer, 2014). Zeffane and Melhem (Zeffane & Melhem, 2018) showed that missing trust can lead to increased turnover intention and decreased work motivation and job satisfaction of workers.

The novelty of our research lies in the design of the interviews and the selection of interviewees based on their role in interacting with top managers. The setup attempts to get a 360° view on the topic researched. Particularly unique is the attempt to compare the views of representatives from top manager workers' associations and employer associations. However, due to the challenges in acquiring experts, especially from the workers' association side for interviews, the significance of the results is limited due to the small number of interviewees per group. We aim to provide fresh perspectives and answers based on the experiences of seasoned professionals. In the following sections, we will delve into the methodology, explaining the different methods we are using to achieve our objectives.

Materials and Methods
Literature review

The literature provides different definitions of the principal-agent relationship, whereby a more generalistic one comes from Pratt and Zeckenhauser (Pratt & Zeckhauser, 1985) which states that "Whenever one individual depends on the action of another, an agency relationship arises. The individual taking the action is called the agent. The affected party is the principal. … The corporate executive is the principal, his subordinates the agents." A more specific definition comes from Jensen and Meckling (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) who define "an agency relationship as a contract under which one or more persons (the principal(s)) engage another person (the agent) to perform some service on their behalf which involves delegating some decision making authority to the agent."

The principal-agent theory builds on the idea of methodological individualism, which tries to explain collective phenomena not based on the identity of the organization itself, yet by analyzing the individual person and their actions (Alparslan, 2006). According to Jensen and Meckling (Jensen & Meckling 1976), companies are perceived as legal frictions that function as a nexus for a set of contracting relationships among individuals.

The principal-agent theory is based on the fact that a top manager (principal) looks for a specialist (agent) for a specific management job (Eisenhardt, 1988), (Eisenhardt, 1989). During the selection process, the principal has to deal with the fact that there is an information asymmetry between him and the candidate. To evaluate the suitability of the candidate for the job and, in turn, to prevent adverse selection, he can try to investigate the hidden characteristics of the candidate through different actions such as signaling, self-selection, and screening.

After the candidate is employed, new risks for the principal arise that are also based on the information asymmetry as the new specialist member has a better understanding of his area of responsibility and possibilities for future development and operation. This might result in the fact that the agent does not fully perform his action in line with the strategy and
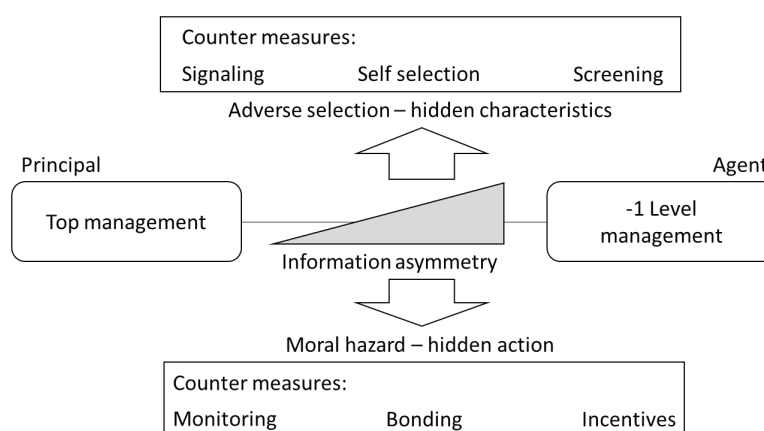

Figure 1. Information asymmetry as a driver for agency cost and possible countermeasures.

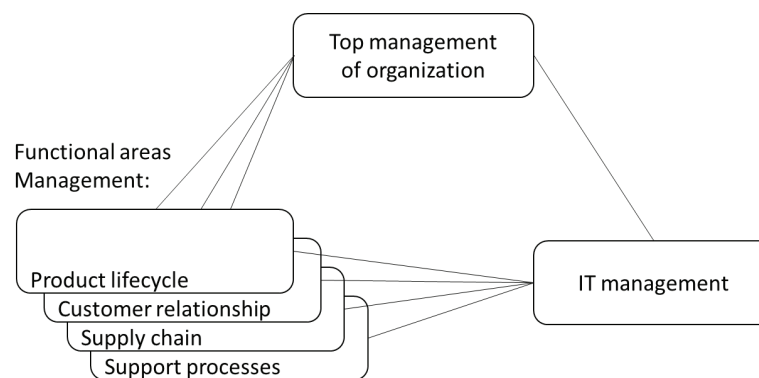Source: author's construction, published previously (Roscher, 2021)

Figure 2. Triadic principal-agent relationships in companies

Source: author's construction based on the model of Gurbaxani and Kemerer (Gurbaxani & Kemerer, 1990)

goals of the top management, which might result in opportunistic costs. Measures to compensate for this risk include monitoring, bonding, and incentives, and all of these are associated with costs, which should be lower than the cost of the opportunistic behavior of the agent. Figure 1 shows the interdependencies within the principal-agent model.

Mertens and Knolmayer (Mertens & Knolmayer, 1995) state that the IT within a company can be described as the agent within the principal-agent relationship. The principal's role is performed by the executive management (CEO/CFO) and the business process organizations (e.g. product lifecycle management, supply chain management, customer relationship management). In both relationships, information asymmetry, conflicts, and associated costs arise and Figure 2 visualizes these interdependencies.

Enns et al. explore different barriers and facilitators to obtain peer commitment to strategic IT proposals and describe differences between lower and middle-level manager influence behaviors and those of top executives and CIOs (Enns, Huff, & Golden, 2001).

This suggests that IT managers could be more successful if they are on the same management level as their peers.

Information asymmetry

Information asymmetry appeared in the scientific literature for the first time in 1970 when Akerlof described the different levels of quality of goods in a market and the information advantage of car sellers over car buyers. In the context of management theory information asymmetry, Connelly et al. (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011) stated that individual managers make decisions based on both public and private information which is only available to a smaller part of the overall public. Stiglitz (Stiglitz, 2002) stated that various people know different things and that workers know more about their own abilities than the firm does.

According to Bergh et al.'s (Bergh et al., 2019) literature analysis, a total of five information types could be identified in relevant scientific literature, namely private information, different information, hidden information, lack of perfect information, and information impactedness

Bergh sorts the five categories into two distinct yet interrelated subgroups:
- creating/sustaining advantages relative to forces for and against transparency
- creating hazards that parties seek to perpetuate or remedy through signals, screens, and ex-ante and ex-post actions.

Information asymmetry arises between those who hold relevant information and those who could potentially make better decisions if they had it (Connelly et al., 2011). However, information asymmetry only exists when subordinates' information exceeds that of their superiors (Dunk, 1992). The economic implication "lies in ascribing costs to information acquisition processes that resolve information asymmetries in a wide range of economic and social phenomena" (Connelly et al., 2011).

According to Edmondson et al. (Edmondson, Roberto, & Watkins, 2003), in the case of executives, the team effectiveness theory implies that "unless group processes is [sic] managed…asymmetric distributions of situation-specific information and interests will reduce top management team decision-making effectiveness."

Furthermore, Bergh et al. (Bergh et al., 2019) summarized the topic as follows: "The information asymmetry concept underlies some of the management field's most important theories and topics. Indeed, limited information may be one of the most common problems surrounding human and organizational interactions of any kind."

Using Bacharach's (Bacharach, 1989) ideas, Bergh (Bergh et al., 2019) stated that information asymmetry

can be used by scholars in different ways, namely as an assumption, as a mechanism, and as a construct (Bacharach, 1989).

According to Bergh's (Bergh et al., 2019) research, information asymmetry is most frequently used as an assumption within a theoretical model. Bergh also gives insights into both the emergence and possibilities for the resolution of information asymmetry.

Conditions leading to informational asymmetry (Bergh et al., 2019) include unobservable or uncertain qualities, structural barriers, and strategic and behavioral barriers to sharing information.

On the other hand, the resolutions to asymmetry (Bergh et al., 2019) comprise incentives to gather and disclose information, precommitment, monitoring and rewards, conveying information via actions, information intermediaries, information concealment, impression management, decoupling, and linking resolutions and antecedents.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth interviews with six seasoned experts where conducted, each with diverse backgrounds and roles within organizations. These interviews formed the backbone of our research, offering insights into the factors influencing work-related attitudes with the limitation of six interviewees.

In-depth interviews can be done as semi structured with the use of open questions (Döring & Bortz, 2016). A predefined interview guideline with three different question complexes are used to guide the interviewee and thereby the interviewer can control topics and the procedure. On the other hand it enables the interviewee to speak freely and think loudly (Döring & Bortz, 2016). This helps him to describe the issues and come up with suggestions and solutions. This gives the interviewer the unique possibility to explore new insights outside of his field of competence. The interviewer might also use circular questions in order to gain insight from other perspectives than the ones of the expert.

Within this research this means that experts should have:

- own experience on either being a subordinate manager or a supervising manager. Yet, the interviewee needs to be able to segregate his own experience from generalized insights gained by his or her task as an expert.
- gained knowledge from research, from work as a consultant or top management coach with a variety of clients on a top management level or from work for an association dealing with topics of leadership and management.

The criteria is checked prior to the first contact and the subsequent invitation of the interviewee and is later on validated in the introductory questions before the in-depth interview starts.

To gain a 360° view on the topic it was decided to choose five different perspectives investigating the topic of factors influencing work related attitudes of top managers as depicted in Figure 3.

In the process of identifying suitable candidates for expert interviews, the decision was made to seek out individuals with extensive experience and diverse perspectives on the subject matter. These individuals were sought based on their firsthand experience as either a principal or agent at a top management level, coupled with one or more of the following qualifications:

- Background as a researcher/lecturer in Management Science or Human Resources.
- Involvement as a representative of employees' associations or employer/owner associations.
- Affiliation as a supplier with regular and close interactions with the executive and top management of companies, specializing in either management consulting or management coaching.

Upon receiving confirmation from the invited individuals, this approach resulted in the identification
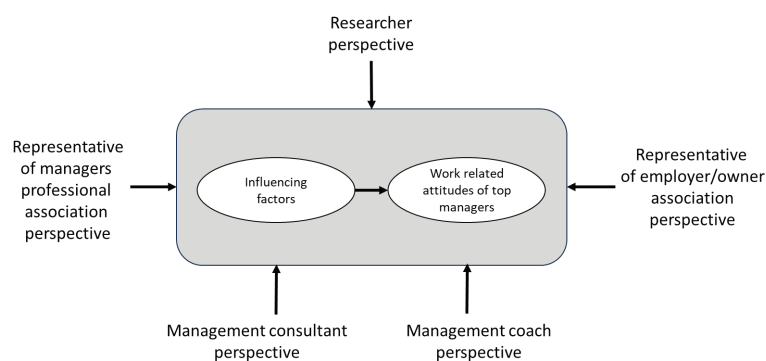

Figure 3. Interviews enable 360° view on Factors influencing work related attitudes of top managers
Source: author's own construction

List of interviewed expert (Germany, 2023)

Expert No.	Main profession	Professional association membership	Highest academic degree	Contributing to perspective	Management experience	Maximal leadership span
1	Owner of consultancy firm		Doctor	Management consulting	15	7-8
2	Executive board member (for multiple firms)	Chamber of Commerce	Doctor	Employer/owner Association	30	20
3	Manager	Workers Association	Doctor	Workers association	16	12-15
4	Psychologist & business coach, owner of a business coaching school	Coaching Association	Doctor	Management Coach	30	5-6
5	Managing director, management consultant		Doctor	Management consulting	22	15
6	Professor, chair holder strategic management	Association of Strategic Management	Doctor	Researcher	20	12

Source: author's own construction

of six experts, as detailed in Table 1. The interviewees are briefed in advance about the topic, the process and outline of the interview. The interview starts with opening questions asking for biographic background of the participant and some administrative questions like the willingness to disclose personal or institutional information. After this the interviewee is asked four main questions in the cause of the interview, supplemented with pre-prepared detailing questions in case the conversation falters. Due to the fact that one interviewee strictly wanted to maintain anonymous, the principal of anonymity was applied to all participants.

All participants have own leadership experience of at least 15 years and all had leadership spans between 5 and 20 direct reports. The types of direct reports varied due to the background and role of the participants from consultants, software developers, military personal, academics, office staff, therapists, coaches to managers with different background.

Our interviews covered a range of topics, including: work-related attitudes of top managers; procedural factors affecting work attitudes; interpersonal dynamics in leadership; the importance of information in the principal-agent relationship; the role of IT managers in digital transformation.

Besides expert number six, who is full professor at a university, two of the interviewees are additionally part time professors at universities for applied sciences and one is visiting lecturer at a university.

The detailed interview guideline in the original German language version which was sent to the experts in preparation for the interview and can be found in the Annex of this paper.

Results and Discussion

In this section, we analyze and discuss the findings from our expert interviews, presenting key insights and their implications. This chapter is divided into several sub-sections, each summarizing and discussing specific aspects of our research.

1. Key Work Attitudes of Top Managers

We identify and discuss the essential work-related attitudes of top managers, emphasizing their contribution to organizational success. Surprisingly, we find a universal consensus on the importance of these attitudes across different stakeholder views as presented Figure 3.

Based on the provided responses from the interview participants regarding the question of the most important work attitudes for top managers, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Commonalities:

- Goal Orientation: The interviews emphasized that goal orientation is a crucial work attitude. Top managers should have clear objectives and the ability to pursue them.
- Willingness to Change: The willingness to change and adapt to new situations was highlighted in several interviews. Managers should be open to new strategies and ideas.
- Authenticity and Credibility: The importance of authenticity and credibility as leadership

tools was emphasized. Managers should lead by example and treat their employees with respect.

- Motivation: The motivation of top management was considered crucial for the success of the entire organization. Intrinsic motivation to make an impact and drive change was particularly emphasized.

Differences between Employer Representatives and Employee Representatives:

The given responses do not show significant differences between employer representatives and employee representatives regarding the most important work attitudes of top managers. Both employer representatives and employee representatives emphasized similar aspects such as goal orientation, authenticity, and motivation as critical factors for the success of top managers.

Ranking of Work Attitudes:

Based on the mentions in the interviews, a preliminary ranking of the most important work attitudes of top managers can be suggested goal orientation, motivation and impact, willingness to change, authenticity and credibility.

It is important to note that this ranking is based on the provided responses and further analysis and research may be needed to validate this order.

The interviews highlighted essential work attitudes among top managers, including a focus on goals, openness to change, authenticity, credibility, and motivation. These attitudes contribute to influencing the success of an organization. There are no significant differences between employer representatives and employee representatives regarding these attitudes, which may indicate the universal importance of these aspects.

2. Balancing Hierarchical and Broader Perspectives

One of the intriguing revelations arising from our expert interviews is the contrast between hierarchical and broader perspectives in management approaches. While the key work attitudes of top managers were found to be universally important, it is crucial to note that the viewpoints presented by our interviewees from owners' associations and workers' associations represent individual perspectives within their respective groups. So, these findings reflect the opinions of one interviewee from each of these groups, acknowledging the potential for variation within these broader categories.

Owners' Association Perspective

From the vantage point of the owners' association interviewee, an emphasis was placed on a hierarchical approach to goal-setting and management. This perspective leans toward a structured and goal-oriented management style. Key takeaways include:

- Goal-Setting: The hierarchical approach underscores the significance of clear objectives and goal orientation. Setting concrete goals and aligning them with organizational objectives are seen as critical to effective management.
- Balancing Individual and Organizational Goals: The interviewee highlighted the importance of balancing individual goals, particularly those of top managers, with the overarching goals of the organization. This equilibrium ensures that individual achievements contribute to the collective success.

Workers' Association Perspective

In contrast, the interviewee representing the workers' association provided a broader perspective on management approaches. While recognizing the importance of goal orientation, this viewpoint considered additional factors, such as organizational culture, trust, and long-term goal alignment:

- Organizational Culture: The workers' association perspective emphasized the role of organizational culture in shaping work-related attitudes. A positive and inclusive culture that fosters collaboration and trust was identified as a critical factor.
- Technology and Innovation: The broader perspective acknowledged the impact of technology and innovation on management approaches. It recognized the need for top managers to adapt to technological advancements and promote innovation within the organization.
- Trust and Long-Term Goal Alignment: Trust emerged as a pivotal factor in this perspective, with a focus on building trust between top managers and employees. Long-term goal alignment was also highlighted, emphasizing the need for goals to transcend short-term targets.

Implications

The juxtaposition of these perspectives highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of management approaches. While the hierarchical approach favored by the owners' association interviewee provides a structured framework for goal attainment, the broader perspective from the workers' association interviewee underscores the importance of culture, technology, and trust.

These differing viewpoints demonstrate that effective management encompasses a spectrum of strategies, and the most successful top managers may find value in drawing from both hierarchical and broader approaches. Moreover, they underscore the evolving nature of management practices, which are increasingly influenced by factors such as culture, technology, and trust.

In the following sections, we will explore other aspects of top management attitudes and behaviors, delving into the interpersonal factors that significantly influence their work attitudes and the role of information in their relationships with principals.

3. Interpersonal Factors in Leadership

We delve into the significance of interpersonal factors, such as leadership compatibility, communication, empathy, and recognition. While common themes emerge, we highlight nuanced differences based on individual experiences and cultural factors.

Interpersonal factors play a pivotal role in shaping the work attitudes of top managers. The insights gleaned from our expert interviews shed light on the key interpersonal elements that significantly influence how top managers perceive their roles and responsibilities within an organization.

Leadership Compatibility

A recurring theme across the interviews was the importance of leadership compatibility. Compatibility here refers to the alignment of values, work ethics, and leadership styles between top managers and their teams. All interviewees emphasized that when there is a fundamental disconnect in these areas, it can lead to dissatisfaction and reduced performance among both managers and employees.

Leadership compatibility extends beyond the ability to work together effectively; it encompasses the capacity to inspire and motivate through shared values and work ethics. This alignment is not only vital for achieving organizational goals but also for creating a harmonious work environment.

Openness and Communication

Open and transparent communication emerged as another crucial factor. This involves leaders being approachable, having open discussions with their teams, and ensuring that employees understand the company's decisions and direction. Effective communication extends beyond one-way exchanges; it fosters a culture where feedback flows freely, allowing for continuous improvement.

Employees who perceive their leaders as transparent and approachable tend to have higher levels of trust and engagement. Such leaders create an atmosphere of inclusivity and collaboration, which can positively impact work attitudes.

Empathy and Team Dynamics

Empathy was consistently identified as a key interpersonal factor. Managers who exhibit empathy and build positive, collegial relationships with their teams are viewed more favorably. This empathy extends to understanding the unique challenges and perspectives of team members, ultimately fostering a sense of belonging and support.

Team dynamics also play a crucial role in shaping work attitudes. Fostering a friendly and supportive work environment, where team members collaborate effectively and support each other's growth, was considered important. A cohesive team dynamic contributes to a positive work culture and helps top managers achieve their goals.

Recognition and Reward

Some interviewees mentioned the importance of recognition and rewarding employees with interesting and challenging tasks. This recognition extends beyond monetary rewards and includes acknowledging and appreciating employees' efforts. When employees feel recognized and rewarded for their contributions, they are more likely to have positive work attitudes and remain motivated.

Trust and Psychological Safety

Trust consistently emerged as a foundational element in shaping work attitudes. Top managers need to create an atmosphere where employees feel safe to express themselves, admit mistakes, and seek help without fear of repercussions. A culture of trust encourages risk-taking and innovation, contributing to a dynamic and adaptable organization.

Psychological safety, closely related to trust, is the perception that one can take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences to their self-image or status. Leaders who prioritize psychological safety create an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing ideas, questioning the status quo, and collaborating openly.

Differences and Additional Insights

While common themes emerged across the interviews, there were nuanced differences based on the individual experiences and perspectives of the interviewees:

Interview 1: This interviewee emphasized the significance of aligning with the values and attitude of top managers, particularly in areas like client relationships. Compatibility in these areas is seen as critical.

Interview 2: This interviewee highlighted the importance of empathy, both for team members and the manager. They also discussed the impact of personal relationships on work dynamics, especially in different cultural contexts.

Interview 3: Team dynamics and interpersonal relationships within the team were considered the top priority in this interview. The interviewee also touched on the role of external stakeholders like customers and investors.

Interview 4: The interviewee mentioned the importance of enjoying working with colleagues and having a friendly, collegial relationship. They also discussed psychological safety and the ability to rely on team members.

Interview 5: Recognition and rewarding with challenging tasks were seen as motivating factors for top managers. They also mentioned that managers should be able to relate to and support their teams on a personal level.

Interview 6: This interviewee provided a comprehensive view, emphasizing the importance of relationships with colleagues at the same hierarchical level, family support for top executives, and trust-building both within and outside the organization. They also mentioned the need for constructive criticism.

The analysis of these interviews reveals a multifaceted picture of the role of interpersonal factors in shaping top managers' work attitudes. While there are commonalities in the themes discussed, the nuanced differences based on individual experiences and cultural/contextual factors provide a deeper understanding of how these factors operate in practice.

Leaders who prioritize leadership compatibility, open communication, empathy, recognition, trust, fairness, and psychological safety can create a work environment where top managers are more likely to have positive attitudes, be motivated, and perform at their best.

Shafagatova, van Looy, & Maleki Shamasbi (2023) suggest that employees' work-related attitudes are influenced by their perception of how their peers at the same level are compensated which shows the high importance of trust and fairness related to reward of employees.

In the following section, we will delve into the significance of information in the relationship between principals and agents in top management, exploring how information flow impacts work attitudes.

4. The Significance of Information in the Principal-Agent Relationship

In the complex web of interactions within top management, information is the lifeblood that sustains effective decision-making and fosters collaboration between principals (executive managers) and agents (top managers). The insights garnered from our expert interviews provide valuable perspectives on the importance of information in this intricate relationship.

All of our interviewees underscored the pivotal role of information in the decision-making processes of top managers. Information is not merely data; it encompasses insights, analysis, and context. It serves as the foundation upon which top managers build their strategies and make critical choices that impact the organization's trajectory.

Interview 1 emphasized that it is not enough for information to flow hierarchically from principals to agents. Instead, a collaborative approach that involves top managers in shaping strategies and goals is crucial.

This approach fosters genuine dialogue and discourse, ensuring that information is not just disseminated but also put to practical use.

Interview 2 highlighted the significance of making information comprehensible and accessible, especially when it concerns financial data. They pointed out that financial information, in particular, plays a critical role in decision-making, and its clarity is paramount. They also acknowledged the value of external consultants and coaching in providing expertise and additional perspectives.

Interview 3 emphasized that information should flow in both directions, from management to top managers and vice versa. Timeliness was considered a key factor in successful collaboration. Furthermore, they acknowledged the importance of external sources of information, such as customer interactions, in shaping strategies and decisions.

Interview 4 brought attention to the problem of inadequate information dissemination. When information is scarce or unclear, it can lead to uncertainty among top managers. This interviewee stressed that information provides a sense of security and that the desire for more information is often present, especially in high-stakes decision-making situations.

Interview 5 emphasized that information serves as the bedrock for decision support. Both structured and unstructured information are considered relevant, and effective communication and coordination are essential in leveraging this information for informed choices.

Interview 6 discussed the dynamic nature of information flow. They noted that leaders view information subjectively, and they often act as interfaces for the flow of information within the organization. Different types of information are required depending on the position and responsibilities within the organization.

In an era marked by digital transformation, the role of information has evolved. It is not enough for organizations to have access to vast amounts of data; they must also possess the capacity to interpret and apply that data effectively. The ability to harness the power of information has become a strategic advantage.

The emphasis on collaboration, dialogue, and transparent information flow in the interviews challenges traditional top-down hierarchical approaches to information dissemination. The digital age necessitates a shift towards a more collaborative and transparent model, where top managers actively engage with information to shape strategies and goals.

The insights from our expert interviews provide a multifaceted view of the significance of

information in the principal-agent relationship within top management. Information is more than just a resource; it is the key to informed decision-making, effective communication, and collaboration. In an age where information is abundant but its effective use is paramount, organizations that prioritize transparent and collaborative information management are better equipped to navigate the complexities of top management.

In the following section, we will delve into the importance of trust in the relationship between leaders and employees, exploring how trust serves as a foundation for positive work attitudes.

5. Trust: The Cornerstone of Positive Work Attitudes

Trust is the invisible force that underpins the success of any organization. It is the glue that binds leaders and employees, fostering a positive work environment and enabling collaboration and innovation. Our expert interviews shed light on the significance of trust in the principal-agent relationship and its far-reaching implications for top managers.

Trust as Empowerment

Interview 1 emphasized that trust empowers employees. When leaders trust their team members to work independently and responsibly, it fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among employees. This empowerment not only leads to increased job satisfaction but also enhances productivity and creativity.

Evolution of Leadership Culture

Interview 2, representing a role in an owners association, highlighted the evolving nature of leadership culture. Trust has become more significant in modern leadership, with an emphasis on coaching and listening. This shift towards a more human-centric approach to leadership recognizes that trust is the foundation upon which leaders and employees can collaborate effectively.

Trust During Challenges

Interview 3, from a workers association, underscored the importance of trust during challenging times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Many leaders passed the trust test during these crises by showing faith in their employees' capabilities. Trust is particularly vital when facing uncertainty and adversity, as it fosters resilience and adaptability.

Reliability and Transparency

Interview 4, representing a business coaching association, emphasized the role of trust in reliability. Trust assures both leaders and employees that they can rely on each other. It signals that there are no hidden agendas, and expectations are clear. Transparency and straightforward communication are key components of this trust.

Trust-Based Leadership

Interview 5 expressed a leadership style based on trust and delegation. This interviewee preferred giving employees autonomy and trusting them to deliver results. Trust-driven leadership aligns with the philosophy that when employees are trusted, they are more likely to rise to the occasion and exceed expectations.

Trust in Risky Situations

Interview 6, a role researcher, discussed the different facets of trust, including task trust and personality trust. Trust allows leaders to delegate and create space for innovation, while also assuming that employees will always exert their maximum effort. Trust is not only empowering but also risk-reducing.

Trust is a recurring theme in our expert interviews, and its importance cannot be overstated. It forms the foundation of a positive and productive work atmosphere. When employees trust their leaders, they are more engaged, committed, and willing to go the extra mile. Trust is a two-way street, where leaders must also trust their employees to act in the organization's best interests.

In an era characterized by remote work, digital communication, and rapid change, trust becomes even more critical. Trusting leaders are more likely to navigate the challenges of the digital age effectively. They are better positioned to lead diverse, global teams and inspire innovation.

On the other side literature also suggest that situations that are challenging and sometimes delicate, such as a change in company structure or downsizing, can put executives into the challenge to uphold and to continue the trust which they receive from their employees (Kraus & Kreitenweis, 2020, p. 151).

In the next section, we will explore the knowledge-related factors that emerged from our interviews, shedding light on the importance of top management's understanding of the activities and job content of their subordinates.

6. Knowledge-Related Factors: Understanding Subordinate Roles

The expert interviews conducted in this study have revealed a consensus on the importance of top management's understanding of the activities and job content of their subordinates. In this chapter, we delve into the significance of this knowledge-related factor in leadership and organizational success.

Proximity to the Work

Interviewee 1 highlighted the importance of top management having a close understanding of the work performed by subordinates. This proximity is crucial for effective decision-making and ensuring a match between leadership and the workforce. When leaders

understand the intricacies of their employees' roles, they can make informed decisions that align with the organization's objectives.

Evolution of Leadership

Interviewee 2, representing a role in an owners association, stressed that top management should not only understand but also be willing to engage in the work of their subordinates. This understanding extends to both knowledge and action. In modern leadership, there is a shift towards a more hands-on approach where leaders actively participate in tasks and processes to gain a deeper understanding.

Balancing Micro and Macro Management

Interviewee 3, from a workers association, discussed the challenge of balancing micro-management and hands-off management. The depth of understanding required depends on the organizational culture and the expectations set by top management. Leaders must strike a balance between being too involved in the details and being detached from the operational aspects.

Trust and Delegation

Interviewee 4, from a business coaching association, argued that the specific details of subordinates' tasks are relatively unimportant for top management. Instead, trust and delegation play a more significant role in achieving successful outcomes. Leaders should trust their employees to perform their roles effectively and focus on providing strategic guidance.

Facilitating Effective Communication

Interviewee 5 emphasized that top management must understand the roles of their subordinates to ensure effective communication and alignment of goals. This understanding helps prevent misunderstandings and supports strategic decision-making. When leaders comprehend their employees' roles, they can communicate more effectively and make decisions that benefit the entire organization.

Strategic Sensitivity

Interviewee 6, from a role as a researcher, discussed the concept of "strategic sensitivity." This involves top management knowing the intricacies of their subordinates' roles, even if they don't engage in day-to-day operations. This understanding enables top managers to communicate effectively with various stakeholders and align organizational strategies. Leaders must possess strategic sensitivity to make informed decisions that drive the organization forward.

The interviews unanimously highlight the importance of top management's fundamental understanding of subordinate roles. This understanding plays a pivotal role in organizational success by enabling effective communication, strategic decision-making, and goal alignment across the organization.

In a rapidly changing business landscape, where agility and adaptability are paramount, leaders who possess a deep understanding of their employees' roles are better equipped to steer the organization in the right direction. They can anticipate challenges, facilitate collaboration, and make informed decisions that positively impact the entire workforce. Furthermore, this knowledge-related factor fosters a culture of respect and appreciation within the organization. When employees perceive that their leaders understand and value their contributions, they are more engaged and motivated.

This is in line with findings from Guillemette and Paré (Guillemette & Paré, 2012) that show an interconnection between the CEO's perception of IT's value and the IT knowledge of the entire top management team, particularly in strategic contexts where IT is seen as having a substantial strategic impact, necessitating alignment between IT and corporate planning.

In the following chapter, we will explore the differences between IT managers and other C-level managers, shedding light on the unique characteristics and challenges faced by IT leaders in the digital age.

7. Comparing IT Managers to Other C-Level Managers

In this chapter, we delve into the differences between IT managers and other C-level managers, shedding light on the unique characteristics, challenges, and perspectives that set IT leaders apart in the digital age.

Strategic Value and Collaboration

The interviews with experts revealed a unanimous perspective on the strategic importance of IT management. All interviewees emphasized that IT managers, like their counterparts in other functional areas, play a pivotal role in driving the organization's success. IT is no longer just a support function but a strategic enabler of business operations.

Cross-Functional Knowledge

Several interviewees highlighted the importance of IT managers having a basic understanding of the functions and processes of their colleagues. This cross-functional knowledge helps in effective communication and decision-making. In the digital age, IT managers must collaborate seamlessly with leaders from various departments to harness technology's full potential.

Service Orientation

The interviews underscored that IT managers, like other C-level executives, are service providers to the rest of the organization. Understanding and fulfilling the needs of internal customers is paramount. IT leaders must focus on standardization and cost-saving measures while delivering solutions that empower the workforce and drive innovation.

Perceived Complexity of IT

One interviewee, representing a business and IT consulting perspective, highlighted the potential challenges in explaining the value and complexity of IT compared to other functions within the organization. The dynamic nature of technology and the rapid pace of change make IT management a unique domain. IT leaders must navigate this complexity and translate it into business value comprehensible to their peers.

Personality Traits for Digital Transformation

Another interviewee, representing a CEO research viewpoint, discussed the specific personality traits and abilities required for roles related to digital transformation. These roles involve promoting change and dealing with resistance, which may be more pronounced in the context of digital initiatives. IT managers need to possess strong change management skills and adaptability to drive successful digital transformations.

The insights garnered from the interviews provide a comprehensive understanding of IT management's unique position in the C-suite. While the role of IT managers shares commonalities with other C-level executives, such as the emphasis on strategic value and collaboration, it also presents distinct challenges.

IT managers must possess a blend of technical acumen and business acuity. They are tasked with translating technology trends into actionable strategies that drive innovation and competitiveness. Their ability to communicate the strategic importance of IT to non-technical stakeholders is crucial.

Furthermore, the dynamic nature of IT, characterized by rapid advancements and evolving cybersecurity threats, demands continuous learning and adaptability. IT managers must stay at the forefront of technology trends and proactively address security concerns.

In the digital age, where technology underpins nearly every aspect of business operation, IT managers are pivotal in shaping an organization's future. Their ability to navigate complexity, drive digital transformation, and collaborate effectively across functions positions them as indispensable leaders in modern enterprises.

Conclusions

The methodology of this research is built on is in-depth expert This paper contributes to management science and practical management and leadership and adds to insights in this field of research as follows:

Six experts from Germany participated in the in-depth interview. The experts have sufficient experience regarding leadership and partly work for the professional associations. Yet, all have a common external viewpoint on the principal-agent relationship on a management level because of their status as an external consultant, coach, member of an association or supervisory board or as a researcher. All hold a doctoral degree in different fields of science and can be considered experienced. Three are appointed professors and one is visiting lecturer.

1. Universal Importance of Work Attitudes: The finding indicates that there are no significant differences between employer representatives and employee representatives regarding key work attitudes such as goal orientation, willingness to change, authenticity, credibility, and motivation is novel. It suggests that these attitudes are universally valued across different stakeholder groups, emphasizing their fundamental role in effective management. This challenges the traditional notion that management attitudes may vary significantly between leaders and employees.

2. Balancing Hierarchical and Broader Perspectives: Even so there are only two individual views from this limited interview study, the contrast between the perspectives of the owner's association and workers association interviewees is novel. While the owner's association interviewee emphasizes a hierarchical approach to goal-setting and management, the workers association interviewee provides a broader perspective that considers factors like organizational culture, trust, and long-term goal alignment. This highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of management approaches that goes beyond traditional hierarchical models. To validate this result, a bigger sample of individuals from both associations should be approached in future research.

3. Interpersonal Factors in Leadership: The common themes across the interviews related to leadership compatibility, communication, empathy, recognition, trust, and psychological safety offer novel insights into the importance of interpersonal factors in leadership. While these aspects have been recognized in management science, the nuanced differences based on individual experiences and cultural/contextual factors provide a deeper understanding of how these factors operate in practice.

4. Information Flow and Collaboration: The emphasis on information flow, dialogue, and active collaboration in developing strategies and goals, as highlighted in the interviews, underscores the evolving nature of information management in the digital age. The recognition of the need for timely, clear, and

understandable data challenges traditional top-down hierarchical information dissemination in favor of more collaborative and transparent approaches.

5. Trust as a Foundation: The emphasis on trust as a foundational element in leadership and employee engagement is not entirely novel but underscores its enduring importance, particularly in challenging times. Trust-building strategies, as highlighted in the interviews, can be seen as a novel approach to fostering a positive and productive work environment.

6. IT Management in Digital Transformation: The insights into IT management's strategic role, collaboration, cross-functional knowledge, and service orientation in the context of digital transformation are novel. These insights provide a more nuanced understanding of the unique challenges and characteristics of IT management compared to other C-level roles.

In summary, the findings of the interviews confirm existing knowledge and practices, while also providing valuable insights to management science. These insights include questioning conventional assumptions, presenting viewpoints from practitioners in different roles on leadership and organizational dynamics, and shedding light on the dynamic nature of management practices in today's workplace. Such insights have the potential to influence future research and management practices, fostering innovation and adaptability in the field of management science.

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