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**Improving Impersonal Trust:**

**The Role of Trust in Colleagues and Supervisor,  
Propensity to Trust, and Corporate Sustainability**

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# Abstract

*Negli anni recenti, il tema della fiducia è diventato sempre più importante all'interno delle organizzazioni, in quanto elemento in grado di sostituirsi ai meccanismi di controllo. Per questo motivo, la letteratura su questo tema è in continuo sviluppo. In particolare, molti ricercatori hanno focalizzato la propria attenzione nell'analizzare antecedenti e conseguenze della fiducia tra dipendenti; lo studio della fiducia dei lavoratori verso l'organizzazione (impersonal trust), invece, sembra essere trattato in misura minore. Considerando l'importanza di questo fattore in grado di portare all'azienda benefici rilevanti, identificati dalla letteratura (ad es. soddisfazione sul lavoro e migliori performance), obiettivo dello studio è di identificare nuovi possibili antecedenti della fiducia verso l'impresa. Attraverso un modello statistico basato su un campione probabilistico di 6.000 dipendenti provenienti da sei paesi europei, si analizza il possibile impatto sull'impersonal trust della corporate sustainability, della propensity to trust e dell'interpersonal trust, distinguendo quest'ultima variabile in due costrutti differenti: trust in colleagues e trust in supervisor. Questa distinzione risulta molto rilevante, se si considera che la letteratura precedente ha solo in parte trattato le differenze tra queste due variabili nel rapporto con gli stessi antecedenti e conseguenze. Pertanto, il modello proposto considera gli antecedenti tradizionali dell'interpersonal trust (propensity to trust e trustworthiness) e il loro impatto su trust in colleagues e trust in supervisor. I risultati dimostrano come tutte le quattro variabili ipotizzate siano antecedenti significativi della fiducia verso l'organizzazione e come i due tipi di interpersonal trust siano effettivamente da considerare separatamente. Sono infine discusse le implicazioni teoriche e manageriali del modello, considerando altresì le limitazioni dello studio e i conseguenti spunti per ricerche future.*

# Executive Summary

## Introduzione

Un argomento che sta assumendo sempre una maggiore rilevanza in ambito lavorativo è sicuramente quello riguardante la fiducia all'interno dell'organizzazione. La globalizzazione, i cambiamenti nelle condizioni di lavoro, gli stili di management più partecipativi, la sempre maggiore importanza della giustizia organizzativa, l'aumento della diversity e del lavoro in team, sono alcuni degli elementi che stanno facendo sì che il concetto di fiducia stia assumendo un peso sempre più significativo nella vita organizzativa, poiché elemento in grado di superare i meccanismi di controllo. Per questo motivo, l'obiettivo della tesi è di identificare possibili leve utilizzabili per incrementare la fiducia dei dipendenti verso l'organizzazione. Il modello empirico, che prende in considerazione la *propensity to trust*, la *trustworthiness*, la *corporate sustainability* e i diversi tipi di trust, affianca alle principali relazioni studiate nella letteratura riguardante la fiducia, altri legami solo parzialmente trattati negli studi recenti. Il modello, testato su un esteso campione probabilistico, arricchisce la letteratura e indica al manager le più importanti leve su cui agire per ottenere tutti i vantaggi legati alla fiducia.

## Quadro Teorico

Lo sviluppo della letteratura riguardante la fiducia ha generato molto dibattito nel cercare di raggiungere una definizione univoca. Attualmente quella più utilizzata è stata proposta da Mayer et al. (1995): il trust è la disponibilità di un soggetto a rendersi vulnerabile alle azioni di un altro soggetto, aspettandosi che questo ponga in essere azioni che sono importanti per la parte che concede fiducia, indipendentemente dalla sua concreta

possibilità di monitorare o controllare l'altro soggetto. Da questa definizione è possibile identificare alcuni elementi chiave del concetto di fiducia. Innanzitutto, affinché vi sia fiducia occorre che ci siano almeno due parti in gioco, la parte che è disponibile a dare fiducia (trustor) e quella che ottiene fiducia (trustee); che le due parti siano in condizioni d'interdipendenza e le azioni di un soggetto producano effetti sull'altra e viceversa; che la situazione sia d'incertezza; che ci sia un rischio credibile di comportamenti opportunistici. Il soggetto di cui è rilevata la fiducia (trustor), in questo studio, è il singolo dipendente, mentre i trustees considerati nel modello sono tre: l'organizzazione nel suo complesso, i colleghi e il responsabile diretto.

Quando il trustee considerato è l'organizzazione nel suo complesso, si parla di *impersonal trust*. Con questo termine si fa riferimento sia al management di alto livello dell'impresa, sia agli aspetti impersonali dell'organizzazione come, per esempio, competitività dell'impresa ed efficacia della comunicazione interna. In letteratura gli antecedenti dell'*impersonal trust* sono stati studiati solo parzialmente: una rilevante eccezione è il lavoro di Vanhala e Ahteela (2011), in cui si è dimostrato come alcune pratiche di gestione delle Risorse Umane, quali ad esempio la formazione e i sistemi d'incentivazione, siano legate positivamente all'incremento di *impersonal trust*. Invece, per quanto riguarda gli effetti di questa variabile, essi sono stati largamente studiati in letteratura: soddisfazione sul lavoro (Cook e Wall 1980), attitudine al cambiamento (Kramer 1996), maggiore spirito collaborativo (Searle et al. 2011), migliori performance e maggiore facilità di apprendimento (Jones 2001), sono solo alcuni dei numerosi vantaggi legati direttamente all'*impersonal trust*.

Quando, invece, il trustee considerato è un soggetto con il quale il trustor interagisce e ha diretto contatto durante la vita lavorativa, in letteratura si parla di *interpersonal trust*. Con questa variabile si fa spesso riferimento sia alla fiducia nei colleghi sia nel responsabile diretto, le quali, per quanto

riguarda questo studio, saranno considerate separatamente. Facendo riferimento all'insieme dei colleghi con il quale il trustor lavora quotidianamente, con stessa autorità e stesso livello di potere, si parla di *trust in colleagues*. Mentre, quando il trustee considerato è il responsabile diretto del dipendente, si parla di *trust in supervisor*. Tradizionalmente, per entrambe le variabili, gli antecedenti considerati in letteratura sono *propensity to trust* e *trustworthiness* (Mayer et al. 1995), cui si aggiungono altri elementi specifici per ognuna delle due variabili. Considerando, invece, i principali vantaggi legati all'incremento dei due tipi di *interpersonal trust*, è possibile identificare per esempio: la preferenza per il lavoro di squadra (Kiffin-Petersen e Cordery 2003), maggiore attitudine all'impegno e comportamenti cooperativi (Costa 2003) per il *trust in colleagues*; l'accuratezza delle prestazioni, la riduzione dei costi di monitoraggio (Hammer et al. 2004) e la capacità innovativa dei dipendenti (Redman et al. 2011) per il *trust in supervisor*.

Come detto, i due antecedenti del trust più studiati, sono la *propensity to trust* e la *trustworthiness*. La prima si riferisce a una caratteristica individuale del trustor, ed è definita come il grado di fiducia che il soggetto riporrà in un generico trustee, senza possedere alcuna informazione preventiva riguardo a quest'ultimo. La seconda variabile, invece, è una qualità attribuita dal trustor al trustee. La *trustworthiness*, infatti, racchiude le competenze e il carattere del trustee attraverso i tre costrutti che la compongono (Mayer et al 1995): *ability*, la percezione dell'insieme di competenze e capacità del trustee, *benevolence*, la percezione dell'orientamento positivo del trustee verso il trustor, e *integrity*, la percezione che il trustee aderisca all'insieme di principi che il trustor trova accettabili. Le tre variabili che compongono la *trustworthiness*, hanno ognuna una relazione unica, significativa e diretta con il trust (Colquitt et al. 2007). Per quanto riguarda il rapporto di queste due variabili, nei più citati modelli riguardanti gli antecedenti dell'*interpersonal trust* (Mayer et al. 1995, Colquitt et al. 2007) viene anche considerato l'effetto

diretto della *propensity to trust* sulle tre componenti della *trustworthiness*. Di conseguenza, l'impatto della *propensity to trust* sull'*interpersonal trust* è considerato non solo direttamente, ma anche attraverso la mediazione di *ability*, *benevolence* e *integrity*.

Infine, l'ultima variabile che andremo a considerare è la *corporate sustainability*, definita come l'adozione da parte dell'organizzazione di modelli e pratiche manageriali coerenti con il concetto di sviluppo sostenibile, inteso come quello sviluppo che garantisce la possibilità di soddisfare i bisogni presenti senza compromettere la capacità delle generazioni future di soddisfare i propri (WCED 1987). Questo concetto implica sostenibilità di tipo economico, sociale e ambientale, poiché un'impresa considerata come sostenibile dovrebbe operare nel rispetto delle risorse naturali e dell'ambiente, e per servire il bene comune della società (Wu e Pagell 2011). Sono stati studiati molti antecedenti e conseguenze della *corporate sustainability*, recentemente considerati dalla review di Aguinis e Glava 2012, pubblicata dal Journal of Management. Tra essi è possibile identificare: l'equità del management di alto livello (Johnson e Greening 1999) e il senso di responsabilità e sicurezza (Bansal e Roth 2000) come antecedenti; l'aumento dei vantaggi competitivi (Greening e Turban 2000) e dell'attrattività verso gli investitori istituzionali (Graves e Waddock 1994) come conseguenze.

## **Ipotesi e Modello Generale**

Analizzando gli studi precedenti, abbiamo identificato due lacune empiriche, evidenziate dalla letteratura. In particolare, la prima riguarda lo scarso studio dei possibili antecedenti dell'*impersonal trust*, poiché la ricerca scientifica si è per lo più focalizzata su quelli dell'*interpersonal trust*, mentre la seconda concerne l'analisi di possibili differenze fra *trust in colleagues* e *trust in supervisor* e, quindi, la necessità di studiare i due costrutti separatamente. Il



modello si pone l'obiettivo di colmare queste lacune proponendo, da una parte, nuovi possibili antecedenti dell'*impersonal trust* (quali la *propensity to trust*, i due tipi di *interpersonal trust* e la *corporate sustainability*), dall'altra, uno studio separato di *trust in colleagues* e *trust in supervisor* e della loro relazione con gli antecedenti tradizionali (*propensity to trust* e *trustworthiness* nelle sue tre componenti).

Di seguito, per esigenze di sintesi, elenchiamo le ipotesi che sono giustificate, sulla base dalla letteratura, nel capitolo 2.

**Ipotesi 1A (H1A).** La *propensity to trust* è positivamente collegata alla *trustworthiness (ability, benevolence e integrity)* dei colleghi.

**Ipotesi 1B (H1B).** La *propensity to trust* è positivamente collegata alla *trustworthiness (ability, benevolence e integrity)* del responsabile diretto.

**Ipotesi 2A (H2A).** La *propensity to trust* è positivamente collegata al *trust in colleagues*.

**Ipotesi 2B (H2B).** La *propensity to trust* è positivamente collegata al *trust in supervisor*.

**Ipotesi 3 (H3).** La *propensity to trust* è positivamente collegata all'*impersonal trust*.

**Ipotesi 4A (H4A).** La *trustworthiness (ability, benevolence e integrity)* dei colleghi è positivamente collegata al *trust in colleagues*.

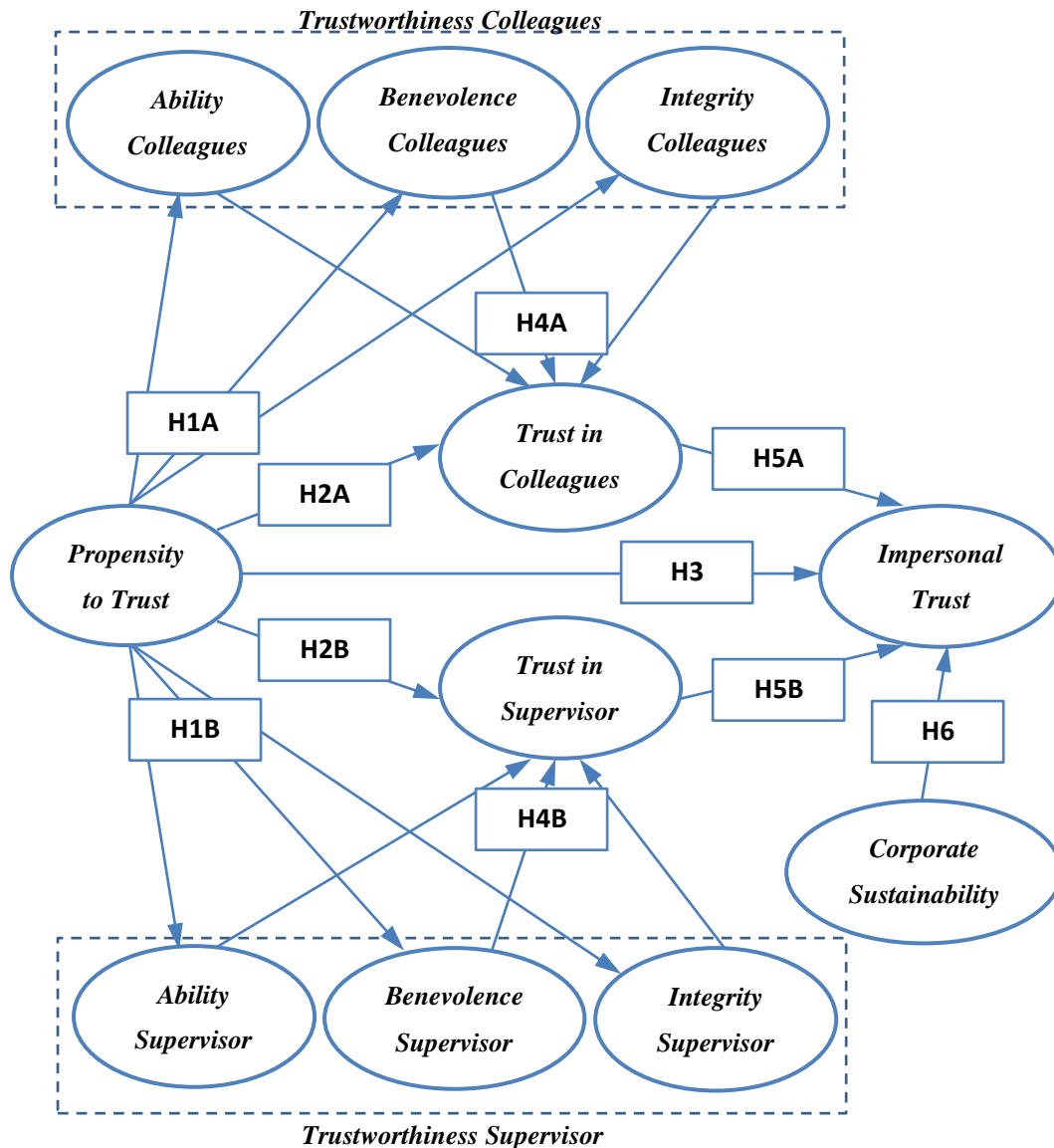
**Ipotesi 4B (H4B).** La *trustworthiness (ability, benevolence e integrity)* del responsabile diretto è positivamente collegata al *trust in supervisor*.

**Ipotesi 5A (H5A).** Il *trust in colleagues* è positivamente collegato all'*impersonal trust*.

**Ipotesi 5B (H5B).** Il *trust in supervisor* è positivamente collegato all'*impersonal trust*.

**Ipotesi 6 (H6).** La *corporate sustainability* è positivamente collegata all'*impersonal trust*.

Di seguito si riporta il modello globale, ottenuto a partire dalle ipotesi precedentemente elencate.



Per colmare la prima lacuna empirica evidenziata, è possibile osservare come siano stati ipotizzati quattro possibili antecedenti dell'*impersonal trust* (H3, H5A, H5B e H6). Se le relazioni proposte fossero confermate, saremmo in

grado di presentare al management informazioni rilevanti per sviluppare questa variabile. Per quanto riguarda la seconda lacuna empirica, è possibile notare come siano stati considerati separatamente *trust in colleagues* e *trust in supervisor*. Di conseguenza, i due costrutti sono stati posti in relazione, oltre che con la *propensity to trust*, con i propri elementi della *trustworthiness*.

## Campione, Metodologia e Analisi dei Dati

Il contributo empirico fornito dallo studio si basa su un questionario somministrato in sei diversi paesi europei: Italia, Francia, Germania, Spagna, Inghilterra e Polonia. Il questionario, a seguito della validazione attraverso un test pilota, è stato inviato a mille lavoratori per nazione per un totale di 6.000 rispondenti. Il campione è stato costruito in modo probabilistico in relazione alle seguenti variabili individuali e professionali: sesso, età, area geografica, settore e occupazione.

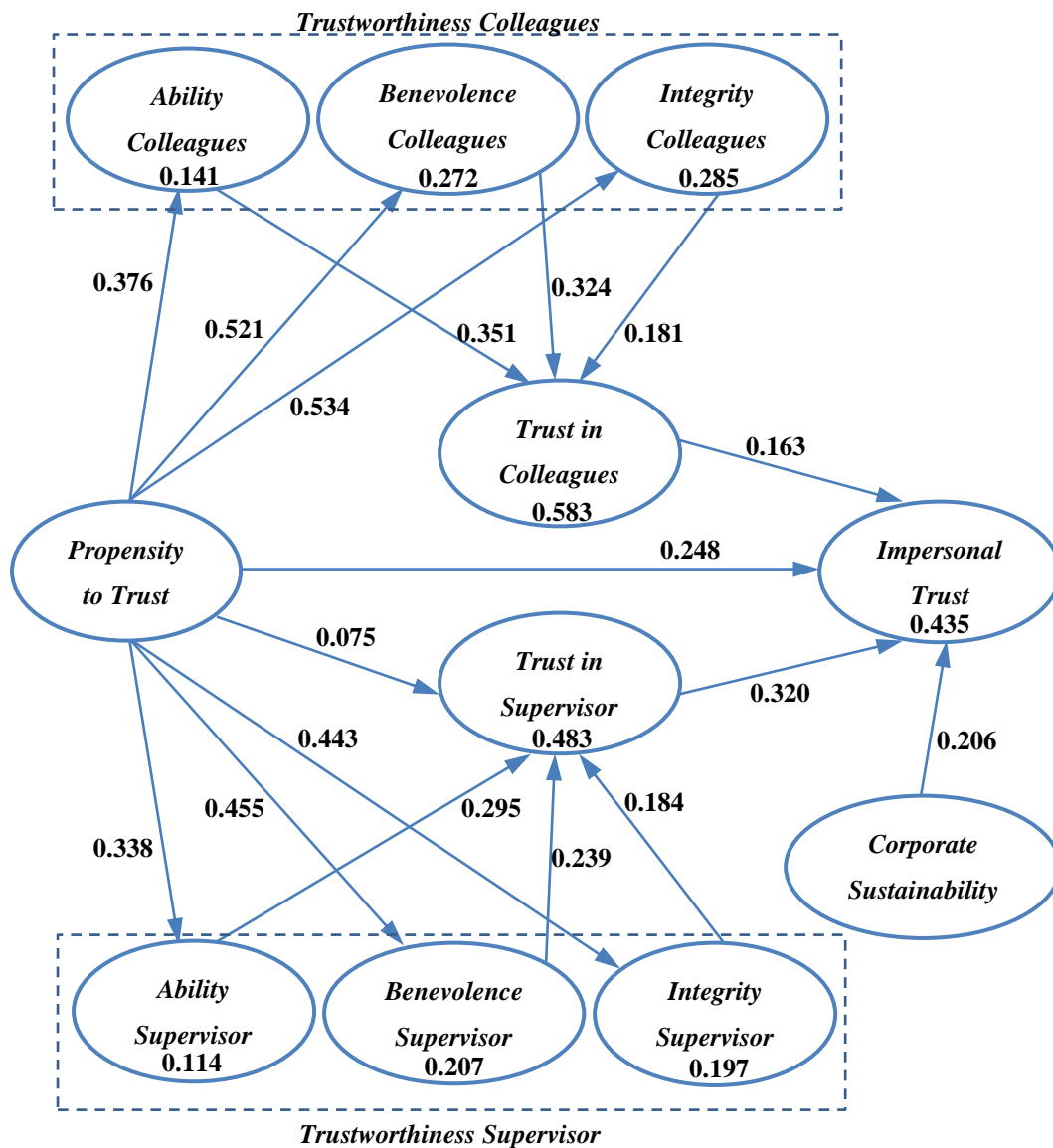
Con l'obiettivo di misurare le differenti variabili sono state utilizzate specifiche scale, sviluppate a partire dalla letteratura. Attraverso il metodo Likert, l'*impersonal trust* è stato misurato facendo riferimento alla scala di Vanhala et al. (2011), il *trust in colleagues* basandosi su quella di Gillespie (2003) e il *trust in supervisor* prendendo in considerazione quella di Mayer e Gavin (2005). Per misurare i tradizionali antecedenti dell'*interpersonal trust*, è stata utilizzata la scala di Paxton (1999) per la *propensity to trust*, e le scale di Mayer e Davis (1999) per le tre componenti della *trustworthiness*. Infine, per quanto riguarda la misura della *corporate sustainability*, sono state adattate tre domande dal MIT Sloan Management Review Research Report (2012), con l'obiettivo di valutare l'attenzione del management e gli investimenti legati alla sostenibilità.

Una volta raccolti, i dati sono stati elaborati attraverso il Partial Least Squares (PLS) path model. Il PLS (Wold 1982), è un insieme di algoritmi con

minimi quadrati alternati ed è stato introdotto nel contesto di modelli di regressione lineare multipla. Utilizzato da molti ricercatori in varie discipline, l'algoritmo PLS è stato adottato più di recente nei SEM-LV, modelli a equazioni strutturali con variabili latenti (Lohmöller 1989, Wold 1985).

## Risultati

Di seguito si riporta il grafico che mostra i risultati conseguiti attraverso l'analisi dei dati.



Osservando il modello strutturale è possibile notare come tutte le relazioni da noi ipotizzate siano state confermate, ad eccezione del rapporto diretto tra *propensity to trust* e *trust in colleagues*. Di seguito saranno discussi i risultati conseguiti attraverso l'analisi dei dati e le conseguenti implicazioni per la ricerca.

## Discussione e Implicazioni per la Ricerca

L'obiettivo dello studio è quello di contribuire ad aumentare le conoscenze relative agli antecedenti dell'*impersonal trust*. È sicuramente un tema di una certa rilevanza in quanto può consentire di trovare nuovi modi per poter sviluppare tale variabile, a sua volta connessa con molti vantaggi noti in letteratura. I precedenti studi si sono per lo più focalizzati sull'analisi di antecedenti e conseguenze delle forme interpersonali di fiducia, non sempre facendo una distinzione fra *trust in colleagues* e *trust in supervisor*. Invece, per quanto riguarda gli antecedenti dell'*impersonal trust*, la letteratura sembra non aver affrontato in modo strutturato e completo il tema, che merita sicuramente di essere ampliato.

Per questi motivi, cercheremo di chiarire il ruolo di *corporate sustainability*, *trust in colleagues*, *trust in supervisor* e *propensity to trust* nell'aumentare la fiducia verso l'organizzazione con l'obiettivo di colmare la prima lacuna empirica evidenziata.

I risultati mostrano come un dipendente che percepisca la propria impresa come sostenibile, si fidi maggiormente dell'organizzazione. Si tratta sicuramente di un risultato molto rilevante poiché fornisce al management e all'impresa un ulteriore motivo per essere o diventare sostenibile. Questo risultato diventa più significativo se consideriamo che negli ultimi anni il ruolo della sostenibilità è stato messo più volte in discussione. Si sono dimostrate essere importanti antecedenti dell'*impersonal trust* anche le due forme di

*interpersonal trust*. In particolare, per quanto riguarda il *trust in colleagues*, si è verificato che questa variabile, legata al più ampio concetto di ambiente di lavoro, giochi un ruolo importante nello sviluppo della fiducia verso l'organizzazione (Tan e Lim 2009). Considerando il *trust in supervisor*, invece, si evidenzia come il responsabile diretto sembri davvero rappresentare l'organizzazione agli occhi dei dipendenti, come proposto da Shamir e Lapidot (2003). Infine, i risultati mostrano come la *propensity to trust* sia un significativo antecedente dell'*impersonal trust*. Ciò conferma come la *propensity to trust* sia un predittore della fiducia molto importante.

Basandoci sui modelli di Mayer et al. (1995) e Colquitt et al. (2007), che propongono relazioni dirette fra *propensity to trust*, *trustworthiness* e *interpersonal trust*, ulteriore obiettivo di questo studio è stato testare tali relazioni in un contesto europeo e con un esteso campione probabilistico, considerando separatamente i due tipi di *interpersonal trust*. Con lo scopo di colmare la seconda lacuna empirica evidenziata, mostriamo ora le differenze fra *trust in colleagues* e *trust in supervisor*, focalizzandoci sulla valutazione distinta dei differenti legami con i propri diretti antecedenti e conseguenze.

Considerando i risultati ottenuti, tutte le relazioni proposte dalla letteratura precedente sono state confermate e si sono dimostrate molto significative (in generale di più per quanto riguarda i colleghi che per il responsabile), ad eccezione del rapporto diretto tra *propensity to trust* e *trust in colleagues*, la cui rilevanza non si è dimostrata significativa. Per entrambe le variabili considerate, l'impatto dell'*ability* percepita del trustee sul trust è risultato il più rilevante e può influenzare significativamente il livello di fiducia del trustor. Al contrario, l'*integrity* ha l'effetto più debole sul trust, e ciò dimostra che, in una relazione di lavoro, il trustor considera le competenze e conoscenze percepite del trustee molto più dell'integrità morale percepita di quest'ultimo. *Benevolence*, altro elemento della *trustworthiness*, sia per quanto riguarda l'impatto sul *trust in colleagues*, sia sul *trust in supervisor*, ha un

effetto intermedio rispetto a quello delle altre due componenti. È interessante notare come l'effetto sul *trust in colleagues* sia più importante di quello sul *trust in supervisor*, di conseguenza la percezione dell'orientamento positivo del trustee verso il trustor è più importante nel rapporto tra pari. Le relazioni tra *propensity to trust* e le tre componenti della *trustworthiness* sono risultate significative per entrambi i tipi di *interpersonal trust*, seppur con qualche differenza. Infatti, i risultati mostrano come l'*ability* del trustee sia meno influenzata dalla disposizione a fidarsi del trustor, poiché si fa riferimento a caratteristiche individuali del soggetto valutato, seppur si tratti solamente di percezioni.

Come detto precedentemente, l'impatto diretto della *propensity to trust* sul *trust in colleagues* non è risultato significativo, mentre quello sul *trust in supervisor* è confermato, seppur piuttosto debole. Benché questo risultato non sia in linea con quello ottenuto da Colquitt et al. (2007), molti suggerimenti in letteratura possono far pensare che la relazione diretta tra *propensity to trust* e le differenti forme di trust possa dipendere dal trustee considerato. Infatti, i risultati suggeriscono che, all'aumentare della distanza gerarchica fra trustor e trustee, e più ci si allontana dal contesto familiare, la *propensity to trust* gioca un ruolo sempre più rilevante. Questo accade perché la disposizione a fidarsi permette di superare la lacuna conoscitiva che caratterizza l'elemento d'incertezza nella relazione di fiducia e, più è importante questa lacuna, più diventa rilevante il ruolo della *propensity to trust*. Se, invece, esaminiamo l'effetto totale della *propensity to trust* sui due tipi di *interpersonal trust*, e quindi considerando l'effetto di mediazione della *trustworthiness* in questi rapporti, l'impatto della variabile legata alla disposizione a fidarsi è più rilevante per il *trust in colleagues* che per il *trust in supervisor*. Questo risultato è sicuramente in linea con le considerazioni precedenti poiché tutti gli effetti diretti tra *propensity to trust*, *trustworthiness* e trust, sono risultati più importanti per i colleghi rispetto a quelli riguardanti il responsabile diretto.

Queste considerazioni, sommate all'impatto molto differente delle due variabili interpersonali sull'*impersonal trust*, sono una conferma che *trust in colleagues* e *trust in supervisor* sono costrutti differenti, poiché hanno relazioni diverse con i medesimi antecedenti e conseguenze considerati. Pertanto, le due variabili dovranno essere considerate separatamente da successive ricerche.

## Implicazioni Manageriali dei Risultati

I risultati forniti da questa ricerca portano a importanti implicazioni manageriali da tenere in considerazione. Ricordiamo che l'obiettivo dello studio è di ottenere nuove leve utilizzabili dall'impresa per aumentare la fiducia verso l'organizzazione: ciò, implica l'ottenimento dei numerosi vantaggi a essa connessi, come ad esempio migliori performance organizzative e vantaggi competitivi rilevanti.

Nel modello proposto sono presenti quattro antecedenti diretti dell'*impersonal trust*, ma, sebbene siano tutti risultati predittori significativi, le loro relazioni hanno effetti differenti su questa variabile. In particolare, considerando l'effetto totale di ogni antecedente nell'influenzare l'*impersonal trust*, si può osservare come la leva che ha un maggiore impatto sia la *propensity to trust* (che influenza positivamente tutte le tre forme di trust), seguita dal *trust in supervisor*, dalla *corporate sustainability* e infine dal *trust in colleagues*. Per questo motivo, se il management dell'azienda dovesse decidere su quali leve investire risorse per incrementare il trust verso l'organizzazione, dovrebbe, per prima cosa, cercare di incrementare la *propensity to trust* dei propri dipendenti, anche se questa variabile risulta difficilmente controllabile poiché implica la capacità di valutare la disposizione a fidarsi durante la fase di selezione del personale. Di conseguenza, risulterà più facile per il management agire su una delle altre tre leve, attraverso i rispettivi antecedenti, per incrementare l'*impersonal trust*. Influenzando una di



queste leve è possibile ottenere non solo i vantaggi direttamente legati a esse, noti dalla letteratura, ma anche un incremento dell'*impersonal trust*, e quindi i numerosi vantaggi connessi a questa variabile. Per esempio, considerando un noto antecedente del *trust in supervisor*, se si riuscisse a rendere più chiara e trasparente la comunicazione tra responsabile diretto e i suoi subordinati, ciò incrementerebbe il livello di fiducia nei confronti del responsabile diretto e porterebbe a vantaggi quali una maggiore produzione d'idee utili per l'impresa da parte dei subordinati e la riduzione dei costi di controllo. Allo stesso tempo, si avrebbe un effetto positivo anche sull'*impersonal trust*, portando a numerosi benefici, identificati dalla letteratura disponibile, quali, ad esempio, un aumento della qualità delle performance lavorative e una diminuzione delle intenzioni di lasciare l'azienda.

Per incrementare le due forme di *interpersonal trust* si può agire, oltre che sulla *propensity to trust*, anche sulle componenti della *trustworthiness*, e in particolare si è dimostrato come l'*ability* sia la componente in grado di influenzare maggiormente le due forme di *interpersonal trust* (più per la fiducia nei colleghi che per quella nel responsabile diretto); allo stesso tempo è la componente che risulta meno influenzata dalla *propensity to trust*.

Per concludere, se il management è in grado di utilizzare positivamente una o più di queste leve, i benefici per l'organizzazione possono essere molto rilevanti e portare ad un incremento dei risultati complessivi dell'impresa.

## **Limitazioni e Spunti per Nuove Ricerche**

Come per tutti i lavori di ricerca, anche questo studio presenta alcune limitazioni da evidenziare, ciascuna delle quali, però, fornisce interessanti spunti e opportunità per la ricerca futura.

Innanzitutto bisogna considerare che tutti i dati sono stati ottenuti attraverso una singola fonte, nello stesso istante di tempo. Di conseguenza la

prima limitazione riguarda il cosiddetto common method variance, riferito all'utilizzo del medesimo questionario, il quale può aver alterato la forza delle relazioni tra i differenti costrutti. La seconda limitazione concerne il livello di analisi, nel caso di questo studio solamente individuale, poiché si ricorda che il soggetto di cui è rilevata la fiducia (trustor), in questo studio, è il singolo dipendente; di conseguenza i risultati potrebbero essere influenzati significativamente dalle percezioni individuali dei soggetti. Una terza limitazione dello studio può essere ricondotta al contesto di analisi, in questo caso europeo; non è da escludere che i risultati sarebbero potuti essere differenti nel caso di altri contesti e ambienti culturali. Infine, bisogna sottolineare come i precedenti studi, considerando l'*impersonal trust*, spesso studino anche la *trustworthiness* dell'organizzazione (*ability, benevolence e integrity*) come suo antecedente. Lo studio non prende in considerazione queste variabili che avrebbero potuto mediare in modo consistente il rapporto diretto tra *propensity to trust* e *impersonal trust*.

A partire dalle limitazioni presentate, vengono proposti alcuni spunti per possibili ricerche future.

Per quanto riguarda la prima limitazione, studi futuri potrebbero considerare il fattore tempo: in particolare, dopo aver analizzato i risultati del modello in un certo istante, si potrebbe valutare l'effetto della variazione di un antecedente del trust sulle altre variabili del modello. Inoltre, per superare il problema della singola sorgente informativa, studi futuri potrebbero considerare non solo gli impiegati, ma anche ulteriori stakeholder e fonti secondarie (come ad es. il "Report di sostenibilità") per ottenere dati meno influenzati dalle singole percezioni. Facendo riferimento alla seconda limitazione, per valutare l'applicabilità di questo studio ad altri livelli di analisi (oltre che a quello individuale), la ricerca futura potrebbe testare il modello proposto considerando, come unità di studio, il team. Considerando la terza limitazione, potrebbe essere opportuno studiare le relazioni da noi suggerite in

contesti extra-europei, per valutare l'impatto dei fattori culturali nel modello proposto. Per quanto riguarda la quarta limitazione, studi futuri potrebbero inserire nello studio degli antecedenti dell'*impersonal trust*, le tre componenti della *trustworthiness* dell'organizzazione. Infine, per arricchire le informazioni fornite dal modello proposto, si potrebbero inserire ulteriori moderatori (ad es. età, tipo di contratto e dimensioni d'impresa) e mediatori (ad es. reputazione dell'impresa e risorse intangibili dell'organizzazione) all'interno delle relazioni tra *impersonal trust* e i suoi antecedenti.

## Conclusioni

Per concludere, ricordando come lo scopo della tesi sia lo studio dei possibili antecedenti dell'*impersonal trust*, i risultati suggeriscono come la *corporate sustainability*, la *propensity to trust*, e le due forme di *interpersonal trust* siano fattori chiave che devono essere tenuti in considerazione dal management al fine di poter aumentare la fiducia verso l'organizzazione. Inoltre, con l'obiettivo di arricchire la letteratura riguardante le forme di *interpersonal trust*, si è dimostrato come il *trust in colleagues* e il *trust in supervisor* debbano essere considerati separatamente.

I risultati sono utili a comprendere possibili modi utilizzabili per migliorare il funzionamento interno delle organizzazioni e, quindi, riuscire ad aumentare le performance organizzative creando vantaggi competitivi.

# 1. Theoretical Background

It is becoming increasingly recognized that trust is a critical factor leading to improve organizational performance. Globalization, changes in working conditions, increasing importance of justice in workplace, information technologies, increase in workforce diversity, implementation of work teams, more participative management styles, and spread of decision making to all levels in organizations result in an increase importance of the concept of trust in organizational life (Shockley-Zalabak et al. 2000). For all these reasons, it is necessary to establish organizational processes not “on the basis of power” but “on the basis of trust” (Yilmaz and Atalay 2009).

As a result, the influence of trust in organizational settings has been recognised as an important factor in determining organizational success, organizational stability, and the well-being of employees (Cook and Wall 1980, Shaw 1997, Tyler and Kramer 1996).

It is acknowledged that trust works as a lubricant in economic transactions, reducing transaction costs, and working as a substitute to control (Williamson 1975, Powell 1990, Creed and Miles 1996). Studies have revealed that trust has been variously associated with increased efficiency and effectiveness (Culbert and McDonough 1986), lower employee turnover (Mishra and Morrissey 1990), organizational flexibility (Gibson and Birkinshaw 2004), organizational citizenship (Konovsky and Pugh 1994), organizational performance (Gould-Williams 2003), individual performance (Mayer and Gavin 2005), successful change management (Morgan and Zeffane 2003), and commitment (Cook and Wall 1980).

A lack of trust can also lead to cynicism, low motivation, low commitment, and lack of confidence in the organization (Kanter and Mirvis 1989, Carnevale and Wechsler 1992). It must also be considered that “when

trust declines, a reversal occurs and people become reluctant to take risks, demanding greater protections against the possibility of betrayal and increasingly insist on costly sanctioning mechanisms to defend their interests” (Tyler and Kramer 1996, p.4). Researchers have also indicated that employees prefer to work in organizations that promote trust (Pascale and Athos 1981, Hage 1980). For all these considerations developing trust is a critical managerial task (Nyhan 2000).

In this chapter the past literature about the variables of our model will be analysed. Firstly, it will be analysed the concept of trust and in particular the three forms of trust present in our model: impersonal trust, which is the trust in management and in organization as a whole, and two forms of interpersonal trust, trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor. After, the main antecedents of trust will be considered: propensity to trust (also known as dispositional trust) and trustworthiness (composed of ability, benevolence, and integrity) of colleagues and supervisor. Finally, the last variable of our study will be analysed: corporate sustainability, which means protection of natural resources, environment, and common good of society by the organization. In particular for each variable, we report the main definitions and the most important antecedents and outcomes of previous studies.

## **1.1. Trust**

The growth of the trust literature has generated much debate and divergence about what trust is; therefore there is not a unique definition. Rotter (1967, p.651) defined trust as “an expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal, or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon”. A common organizational definition describes trust as: “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based

upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviours of another” (Rousseau et al. 1998). According to Creed and Miles (1996): “trust is both the specific expectation that another’s actions will be beneficial rather than detrimental and the generalized ability to take for granted, to take under trust, a vast array of features of the social order”.

The trust’s definition that is used in this work is the definition by Mayer et al. (1995): trust is “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party”.

Whatever the definition, trust is needed only in situations where there is uncertainty about the actions that will be undertaken by others and when these actions are of consequence to those involved (Dasgupta 1988, Gambetta 1988, Larzelere and Huston 1980).

Summarizing, trusting is the inclination of a person “A” to believe that other persons “B” who are involved with a certain action will cooperate for A’s benefit and will not take advantage of A if an opportunity to do so arises. A, the trustor, must therefore be willing to show his or her vulnerability by taking the risk that B, the trustee, may act in a way that does not benefit A. The concept of trusting requires that the action hold the potential of a loss by the trustor. It does not require but is compatible with a potential gain and/or loss by the trustee. Trusting can vary from complete distrusting to complete or “blind” trusting (Ben-Ner and Halldorsson 2010).

Trust is a multi-component construct with several dimensions that vary in nature and importance according to the context, relationships, tasks, situations and people concerned (Hardy and McGrath 1989). We can distinguish trust based on the level of analysis of a study. Fulmer and Gelfand (2012) explained that there are three organizational levels: individual, team, and organizational. Trust at the individual level denotes an individual’s degree

of trust. Trust at the team level represents the aggregated degree of trust that is shared with sufficient consensus among members in a team. Trust at the organizational level involves the aggregated degree of trust shared with sufficient consensus among members in an organization. In our study, we will focus on the individual level of analysis. According to Redman et al. (2011), employees have multiple trust relationships in their working lives with different intra-organizational parties and entities. The trustee could be a colleague (McAllister 1995), colleagues (Langfred 2004); a direct supervisor (Dirks 2000, Den Hartog 2003) or an organizational constituency such as the senior management (Clark and Payne 1997, Mayer and Davis 1999). Additionally, Redman et al. (2011) assert that employees can have a specific trusting relationship with their employing organization as a whole (see Robinson 1996, Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis, and Winograd 2000). Whitener (1997) distinguishes between two main kinds of trust: one specific to individuals such as boss and co-workers, and the other to generalized representatives such as union and management.

In our study we use the distinction made by Whitener and we define two types of trust in the workplace: impersonal trust and interpersonal trust (Maguire and Phillips 2008). According to Vanhala and Ahteela (2011), impersonal trust is based on roles, systems and reputation, whereas interpersonal trust is based on interpersonal interaction between individuals within a particular relationship.

## **1.2. Impersonal Trust**

Trust in management/senior management and trust in organization as a whole are represented as a unique kind of trust with the name of trust in organization, systems trust, structural trust or, more recently, impersonal trust (Vanhala and Ahteela 2011). Luhmann (1979) proposes that trust is essentially

a dichotomous concept consisting of distinct interpersonal and systems components. According to Gould-Williams (2010), interpersonal trust reflects the relationship among employees, while systems trust reflects trust between employees and the entire organization. Vanhala and Ahteela (2011) show that impersonal trust refers to trust in impersonal organizational factors such as vision and strategy, top management, the management group's goals and capability, technological, and commercial competence, justice, fair processes, and structures, roles, technology, and reputation, and HRM policies (Costigan et al. 1998, McKnight et al. 1998, McCauley and Kuhnert 1992, Kramer 1999, Tan and Tan 2000, Atkinson and Butcher 2003). Impersonal trust is an individual employee's attitude based on his or her perception and evaluation of the employer organization, which thus operates on the individual level. Impersonal trust is defined as a psychological state comprising willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of an organization (Fulmer and Gelfand 2012). Vanhala et al. (2011) define impersonal trust as "an individual employee's expectations with regard to the employer organization's capability and fairness". The capability dimension is defined as the set of five components: organizing activities (the organization's ability to cope in exceptional situations and to exploit its resources), sustainability (changes in the operational environment of the organization and the employment outlook), top-management characteristics (capabilities and decision-making practices), technological reliability (individual capabilities and available assistance with technical problems), and competitiveness (how the organization compares with its competitors). The fairness dimension is defined as the set of three components: HRM practices (education and career progression), fair play (top management's behaviour, and internal competition and opportunism), and communication (trustworthiness and sufficiency of information).

In literature there are few studies about the antecedents of impersonal trust. Vanhala and Ahteela (2011) studied the influence of HRM practises on



impersonal trust and they found that employees' perceptions of how learning, development, communication, performance evaluation, the reward system, career development, participation, and job design function are positive related to impersonal trust. Propensity to trust is also hypothesized to be an antecedent of impersonal trust (Searle et al. 2011). A growing amount of research has focused on perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) and found that it increases stakeholders' trust in organizations (Bhattacharya, Korschun, and Sen 2009, Castaldo, Perrini, Misani, and Tencati 2009, Stanaland, Lwin, and Murphy 2011).

Many studies have identified positive outcomes related to the increase of impersonal trust, as shown by Albrecht (2002). Impersonal trust is positively associated with job satisfaction (Cook and Wall 1980), satisfaction with participation in decision making (Driscoll 1978), management by objectives (Scott 1980, Hollman 1976), satisfaction with autonomous work group membership (Ward 1997), employee attitudes to change (Rousseau and Tijoriwala 1999, Kramer 1996, Kanter and Mirvis 1989), and negatively associated with intention to voluntarily leave (Costigan et al. 1998). High levels of impersonal trust reinforce the organization's ability to remain competitive in globalized and competitive markets (Shaw 1997) and employees with high trust in organization are more willing to work in the organization longer, to put in more effort and to work more cooperatively (Searle et al. 2011). Jones (2001) asserted that impersonal trust has a positive influence on performance and learning. Impersonal trust facilitates open communication in organizations, sharing information and increasing productivity (Mishra and Morrissey 1990). Employees who do not trust in their organization may reduce the effectiveness of their work (Dirks and Ferrin 2001) and produce counterproductive behaviour (Bies and Tripp 1996).

## 1.3. Interpersonal Trust

Interpersonal trust is based on interpersonal interaction between individuals within a particular relationship. Interpersonal trust is the variable representing the trust that exists whenever the trustee is a person with whom you have a direct relationship (Fulmer and Gelfand 2012). In a workplace two different types of interpersonal trust can be identified, based on different trustees: trust in supervisor and trust in colleagues (Bagraim and Hime 2007).

### 1.3.1. Trust in Colleagues

Trust in colleagues can be defined as the willingness to be vulnerable to your colleagues in your firm (Fulmer and Gelfand 2012). This variable considers two different aspects: working relationships and personal relationships between peers.

In literature the most common antecedent of trust in colleagues are propensity to trust and trustworthiness (ability, benevolence, and integrity) of colleagues (see Mayer et al. 1995, Colquitt et al. 2007). Other known antecedents are perceived voluntary help from the trustee (De Jong et al. 2007), rapport demonstrated from the trustee in form of sympathy and cooperation (Jap, Robertson, and Hamilton 2011), perception that trustee is able to uphold commitments, particularly when the trustee has sufficient autonomy to do so (Perrone, Zaheer, and McEvily 2003), ethical conduct (Bews and Rossouw 2002), expectation of the trustee's loyalty (Rosanas and Velilla 2003), share cultural-ethnic similarity (Jiang, Chua, Kotabe, and Murray 2011), satisfying past relationships (Kerler and Killough 2009), sharing information (Nguyen and Rose 2009), being accessible (Cameron and Webster 2011, Lievens and De Corte 2008), referring back to others' points in previous conversations (Cameron and Webster 2011), and reputation (Salancik and Pfeffer 1978).

Trust in co-workers predicts employees' preference for teamwork (Kiffin-Petersen and Cordery 2003) and it is positively associated with

attitudinal commitment, co-operative behaviours, and perceived task performance (Costa 2003). Colquitt and colleagues (2007) have shown that trust in co-workers and leaders increases risk taking. Trust in colleagues has been found to promote knowledge exchange (Andrews and Delahaye 2000, Golden and Raghuram 2010) and to increase the creativity of both the trustor and the trustee (Ford and Gioia 2000, Madjar and Ortiz-Walters 2008).

### **1.3.2. Trust in Supervisor**

Trust in supervisor can be defined as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon expectations of positive intentions or behaviour by the supervisor (Podsakoff et al. 1990, Rousseau et al. 1998). Over the years, this was studied by many authors: Dirks and Ferrin (2002), Albrecht and Travaglione (2003), and Willemyns, Gallois, and Callan (2003).

In literature the most common antecedents of trust in supervisor are propensity to trust and trustworthiness (ability, benevolence, and integrity) of supervisor (see Mayer et al. 1995, Colquitt et al. 2007). Other known antecedents are long-term time perspective (Korczynski and Ott 2005), secure attachment style (Simmons et al. 2009), individualized support (Hernandez 2008, Korsgaard et al. 2002), customizing leadership through dyadic interaction between a leader and individual team members (Roussin 2008), ethical leadership (Brown, Trevino, and Harrison 2005, Kalshoven, Den Hartog, and De Hoogh 2011), ethical stewardship (Caldwell, Hayes, Bernal, and Karri 2008, Caldwell, Hayes, and Long 2010), distributive, procedural, and interactional justice perceptions of leaders (Ambrose and Schminke 2003, Aryee et al. 2002, Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001, Colquitt, LePine, Piccolo, Zapata, and Rich 2012, Khazanchi and Masterson 2011, Lee, Pillutla, and Law 2000, Li and Cropanzano 2009, Yang, Mossholder, and Peng 2009), subordinates perception similarity with the leader (Huang and Iun 2006),

identification with the leader through shared values (Gillespie and Mann 2004), engagement in positive and transparent communication have high levels of trust from followers (Norman, Avolio, and Luthans 2010), reputation (Salancik and Pfeffer 1978), improving civility at work (Leiter and Laschinger 2011), profit sharing with employees (Coyle-Shapiro, Morrow, Richardson, and Dunn 2002), and perceived organizational support (Dirks and Ferrin 2002, Treadway et al. 2004).

According to Ammeter et al. (2004), a high level of trust in supervisor increase the accuracy in performance and perception of fairness. Moreover it is a substitute of control and reduces the cost of monitoring. Redman et al. (2011) showed that trust in supervisor increases satisfaction with the supervisor and is positively associated with innovative employee behaviour such as the production or adoption of useful ideas (Tan and Tan 2000) and with task performance and organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs) (Aryee et al. 2002). Colquitt and colleagues (2007) have shown that trust in co-workers and leaders increases risk taking.

## **1.4. Propensity to Trust**

Propensity to trust has been defined as a “stable within-party factor that influences the degree of trust that a trustor will have on the trustee without any prior information or history of exchanges being available” (Mayer et al. 1995, p.715). The distinction between trust and propensity to trust is a key element of the analysis: trust is a situational variable while trust propensity is a personality variable. Due to the potential effect of propensity to trust on organizational trust scores, and considering that it is likely to be one the most relevant trust antecedents in contexts involving unfamiliar actors (Bigley and Pearce 1998), it has been proposed as an individual difference variable when exploring trust within work environments (Mayer et al. 1995). Propensity might be thought of

as the general willingness to trust others. It will influence how much trust one has for a trustee prior to data on that particular party being available (Mayer et al. 1995) and it will represent an individual inclination to believe that others will be prepared to act in the trustor's best interests (Kramer 1999). I must not be forgot that trust expectations are predicated on features of the trustor and the target (e.g., similar value orientation, Sitkin 1995), forces in the situation (e.g., social or cultural norms, Zucker 1986) and the disposition of the trustor (e.g., propensity to trust, Rotter 1971). So it is important to assess people's different propensity to trust as there is evidence to suggest that individual inclinations can vary a lot (Gurtman 1992). Finally, in order to fully understand the differences among people's dispositional trust, it is important to emphasize that propensity to trust should not only be seen as a personality trait but it can also be influenced by the trust inherent in a society, which is shaped by that specific society's culture (Fukuyama 1995).

Trust propensity depends on individual's different developmental experiences (particularly during their early socialization), personality types and cultural backgrounds (e.g., Hofstede 1980). In this area, Stack observed that "after many experiences with different agents in varying situations, an individual builds up generalized expectancies" (1978, p.568). These expectations are learned not only from a person's immediate experiences with their parents, teachers, and peers, but also from others with whom the person may have little direct contact, such as the news media, politicians, repairpersons, judiciary, salespersons, and people in general (Rotter 1967, 1971). Rotter (1967) was one of the first to discuss trust as a form of personality. In fact, during his studies, he defined interpersonal trust as "a generalized expectancy that the words or promises of others can be relied on" (Rosenberg 1956, Rotter 1971, Rotter 1980). Other scholars defined this type of personality-based form as "dispositional trust" (Kramer 1999), "generalized trust" (Stack 1978) and "trust propensity" (Mayer et al. 1995).

According to Mayer et al. (1995), Colquitt et al. (2007) and many other authors, propensity to trust is strictly related to trustworthiness and to interpersonal trust. As a consequence, high trust propensity can lead to high perceptions of colleagues' or supervisor's ability, benevolence or integrity. Moreover, high propensity to trust can lead, as a direct link, to a higher level of interpersonal trust.

## 1.5. Trustworthiness

“Trustworthiness is a quality that the trustee has, while trusting is something that the trustor does. Although A may consider B to be trustworthy this does not necessarily mean that A will actually trust B” (Dietz and Hartog 2006). We can start from this definition in order to understand what trustworthiness is and what is not, with particular regards to differences between trust and trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is a multifaceted construct that captures the competence and character of the trustee (Gabarro 1978); it represents the willingness of a person B to act favourably towards a person A, when A has placed an implicit or explicit demand or expectation for action on B (Ben-Ner and Halldorsson 2010). According to Mayer et al., trustworthiness is divided into three characteristics: ability, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer et al. 1995). Each of these characteristics contributes a single perceptual perspective from which to consider the trustee, while the entire set offers an important basis in order to study trust for another party. Ability reflects context-specific concepts such as competence, efficiency, skills, and dedication in the domain of interests. Benevolence is the trustor's (e.g., the trusting party's) perception that the trustee cares about the trustor and includes concepts such as being helpful and open. Finally, integrity reflects an adherence to a set of principles or a set of shared values that the trustor finds acceptable. The combination of these three factors into trustworthiness is idiosyncratic, both

between individuals and between situations. According to Mayer et al. (1995), over time the trustor evaluate how positive the outcomes of previous vulnerability are. This process of evaluation can carry out to two different results: the trustor's vulnerability leads to outcomes that the trustor believes are favourable; in this case the trustor will positively reassess some combination of the three elements of the trustee's trustworthiness. Contrariwise the trustor allows vulnerability to the trustee and perceives getting "let down" by the trustee; in this second case the trustor will reassess some combination of trustworthiness characteristics as being lower than previously believed (Mayer and Davis 1999).

Considering trustworthiness' antecedents, Colquitt et al. (2007) found that trust propensity is positively related to trustworthiness, as it remained a significant predictor of trust even when the trustworthiness forms were considered simultaneously.

In order to understand the relation between trustworthiness and its most important outcome (interpersonal trust), it is important to emphasize that we cannot consider trustworthiness as a unique variable: the effects of each feature on trust can vary significantly as each element of trustworthiness derives from different types of past experiences. In particular, "ability and integrity capture rational reasons to trust rooted in past success and consistency between words, deeds, and values. In contrast, benevolence reflects a more emotional reason to trust rooted in past instances of caring and concern" (Colquitt et al. 2011). Relying on these definitions, we want to discover the differences between trust and trustworthiness. For this reason, according to Lewis and Weigert (1985) it can be observed that "trust is based on a cognitive process which discriminates among persons and institutions that are trustworthy, distrusted and unknown". Therefore, people choose whom they will trust in which respects and under which circumstances, and base their choices on what they take to be good reasons, constituting evidence of trustworthiness. Using the words of Flores

and Solomon (1998), “in the ideal case, one trusts someone as he/she is trustworthy, and one’s trustworthiness inspires trust”. Under this definition, it is clear that the concept of trustworthiness is a key element to understanding and predicting trust levels.

Finally, we can consider the vulnerability aspect of the trust. Mayer et al.’s (1995) defined trust as a unitary construct reflecting a willingness to be vulnerable. It is important to highlight that this willingness is driven by the three aforementioned factors of trustworthiness, which will be explained explain in detail in the following paragraphs.

### **1.5.1. Ability**

“Ability is that group of skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain” (Mayer et al. 1995). It captures the knowledge and skills needed to do a specific job along with the interpersonal skills and general wisdom needed to succeed in an organization (Gabarro 1978). It is important to notice that the domain of the ability is purely specific (Zand 1972): it is clear that the trustee may be highly competent in some technical area and not in others. Consequently a person trusts another one on tasks related to that particular purview.

Ability (or competence) refers to the other party’s capabilities to carry out her/his obligations in terms of skills and knowledge (Dietz and Hartog 2006) and, for a supervisor, it is an important element which can improve both the formal and the informal influence perceived in the organization, as well as its perceived competence and skills (Mayer and Davis 1999).

As regards to co-workers, in an organizational setting, people often pass on pieces of information or pieces of completed work to peers. For this reason, they can depend on others and the perceived ability of individuals meaningfully affects the work of co-workers in a positive way. As it is



common to think about, trust increases when people are perceived as competent, according to Sonnenberg (1994).

In the years, ability has become one of the more commonly discussed components of trustworthiness; a high number of theorists have argued similar constructs as affecting trust, using numerous synonyms. Deutsch (1960), Jones, James, and Bruni (1975), Cook and Wall (1980), Sitkin and Roth (1993) and Mayer et al. (1995) all considered ability as an essential element of trust. Others (e.g., Kee and Knox 1970, Rosen and Jerdee 1977, Lieberman 1981, Butler and Cantrell 1984, Butler 1991) used the word competence but the construct analysed is very similar. In the Yale studies, perceived expertise was recognised as a fundamental characteristic of the trustee. Giffin (1967) suggested that expertness could be an important factor that leads to trust and Gabarro (1978) identified nine bases of trust, all similar to ability in the modern conceptualization.

### **1.5.2. Benevolence**

The second element of trustworthiness is benevolence, which represents “the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor aside from an egocentric profit motive” (Mayer et al. 1995, p.718). So benevolence can be viewed as the perception of a positive orientation of the trustee towards the trustor. These definitions suggest that the trustee has some kind of important attachment to the trustor. In an organizational setting, if a worker considers a supervisor cares about the employee's interests, this supervisor will be seen as having benevolence for that employee (Mayer and Davis 1999).

Benevolence, which synonyms include loyalty, openness, caring, and supportiveness, is one of the two elements of trustworthiness strictly connected to character (the second one is integrity). This latest element can be defined as a “multifaceted construct that subsumes concepts like honesty, fairness,

openness, caring motives, and intentions and predictability” (Colquitt et al. 2007).

Benevolence has a good relevance inside organizations, as it can develop the human side of the relationship. In particular, it can create an emotional attachment to the trustee and, with care and support, it is possible to create and raise a sense of positive affection (Colquitt et al. 2007). In addition, according to Dietz and Hartog (2006) “benevolence reflects benign motives and a personal degree of kindness toward the other party, and a genuine concern for their welfare”. Finally it is important to consider that, for the act of benevolence to be relevant, the more or less noble intentions of the trustee must be pertinent to the needs and desires of the trustor (Tan and Lim 2009). In fact, a person trusts another one in a directly proportional way according to the considerations showed to the trustors (and their needs). It is evident that trust decreases when the trustee does not show this type of considerations (e.g., Korsgaard, Schweiger, and Sapienza 1995). For all these reasons the typical example of attachment between trustor and trustee is the relationship, identified by Mayer et al. (1995), between mentor (trustee) and protégé (trustor). In fact, the mentor wants to help the protégé, even though he is not required to be helpful and there is not extrinsic reward for him.

During the last years, a very high number of authors used the term benevolence in their analysis of trust and many others used one of the several synonyms related to the same concept. In particular, a portion of authors focused on the specific relationship with the trustor (Strickland 1958, Solomon 1960, Larzelere and Huston 1980). Others have considered intentions or motives as important to trust (e.g., Deutsch 1960, Giffin 1967, Kee and Knox 1970, Cook and Wall 1980). A particular vision of benevolence (and trustworthiness) is given by Hovland and colleagues (1953); they described trustworthiness in terms of the trustee's motivation to lie. We know that perceived benevolence plays an important role in the assessment of

trustworthiness and, according to this definition, in a relationship it would be inversely related to motivation to lie. Other definitions of benevolence have been developed by Jones, James, and Bruni (1975). They suggested that confidence and trust in a leader are partially influenced by the level to which the leader's behaviour is relevant to the individual's needs and desires. Rosen and Jerdee (1977) considered the likelihood with whom the trustee would put organizational goals ahead of individual goals. Frost, Stimpson, and Maughan (1978) proposed altruism as a key element for the level of trust. Butler and Cantrell (1984) recognized loyalty among their determinants of dyadic trust.

### **1.5.3. Integrity**

Integrity is defined as “the perception that the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable” (Mayer et al. 1995, p.719); it includes other elements like honesty, fair treatment and the avoidance of hypocrisy (Dietz and Hartog 2006) and synonyms include fairness, justice, consistency, and promise fulfilment (Colquitt et al. 2007). Lind (2001) defined integrity as a rational reason to trust someone as it can be viewed as a way to face the uncertainty. This manner can be facilitated by the kind of long-term predictability, provided by the sense of fairness or moral character.

According to Tan and Lim (2009), the key to understand the concept of integrity lies in two of its components: adherence and acceptability. McFall (1987) suggested that personal integrity is defined as following a certain set of principles. However, if that set of values is not considered acceptable by the trustor, the trustee would not be considered to have integrity (McFall called this moral integrity). Important elements which can maximize the perceived integrity of the trustee are: consistency of the party's past actions, credible communications about the trustee from other parties, belief that the trustee has a strong sense of justice and the extent to which the party's actions are congruent with his or her words (Mayer et al. 1995). It is important to note that

that there are differentiable reasons why the integrity of a trustee could be perceived as higher or lower.

According to Mayer et al., in the evaluation of trustworthiness it is the perceived level of integrity that is important rather than the reasons why the perception is formed. According to Lim et al. (2001), in a relationship, the trustor will be more willing to accept the influence of the trustee if the values of the trustee are acceptable to him/her. Trust in co-workers is higher in peers who are perceived to have integrity, as these co-workers can be expected to act with honesty, consistency, and justice. As regards to supervisors and managers, integrity does not only mean that the espoused values are viewed as positive by the employee, but also that the supervisor/manager acts in a way that is consistent with these espoused values (Mayer and Davis 1999).

Over the years, integrity or similar constructs have been discussed as antecedent to trust by a number of theorists. Gabarro (1978) suggested that three bases of trust were commonly mentioned by their interviewees, one of which was the character. He contended that character includes integrity. Lieberman (1981) included integrity per se as an important trust factor. Integrity and consistency were trust determinants in Butler and Cantrell's (1984) model. Hart, Capps, Cangemi, and Caillouet's (1986) analysis of 24 survey items revealed three factors; one of which was openness/congruity (e.g., the integrity, fairness and openness of management). Butler (1991) included consistency, integrity and fairness as conditions of trust. Sitkin and Roth's (1993, p.368) approach utilizes a similar but more constrained construct of value congruence, which they defined as "the compatibility of an employee's beliefs and values with the organization's cultural values." Their approach compares the trustee's values with those of an organizational referent, rather than a judgment of the acceptability of the trustee's values to the trustor.

Lastly, it is important to consider that trustworthiness should be thought of as a continuum. A trustee cannot be considered only trustworthy or not trustworthy. Each of the three factors described above can vary along a continuum. In order to understand the extent to which a person is willing to trust another person, both the trustor's propensity to trust and the trustor's perceptions of the trustee's ability, benevolence, and integrity must be discerned (Mayer et al. 1995).

## **1.6. Corporate Sustainability**

Sustainability has become a crucial concept in global public and organizational discussions in recent years. It embodies the promise of societal evolution towards a more equitable and wealthy world, in which the natural environment and our cultural achievements are preserved for generations to come (Dyllick and Hockerts 2002). The World Commission on Economic Development describes a sustainable business as one “that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987). Sustainability means that business activities should also protect natural resources and the environment, and serve the common good of society (Wu and Pagell 2011). Sustainability is the dynamic state of becoming sustainable, a process founded on conscious efforts to create new opportunities for existence in multiple domains and at multiple levels, now and in the future (Docherty et al. 2008). Holling (2001) argued that the ability to create, test and maintain adaptive capability is at the core of the sustainability concept. When transposing this idea to the business level, corporate sustainability can accordingly be defined as meeting the needs of a firm’s direct and indirect stakeholders (such as shareholders, employees, clients, pressure groups, communities etc.), without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well (Dyllick and Hockerts 2002).

Sustainability represents a revitalization of the firm's strategy, processes, and activities based on the direct engagement of senior managers in a process of change (Reynolds et al. 2006).

Aguinis and Glavas (2012) analysed the main antecedents of corporate sustainability. These main antecedents are the perception that corporate sustainability is good for business and likely to lead to increased competitiveness (Bansal and Roth 2000) and legitimacy (Sharma 2000), normative reasons such as a sense of responsibility and duty (Bansal and Roth 2000), following a higher order or morals (Aguilera et al. 2007), and a sense of stewardship (Davis, Schoorman, and Donaldson 1997). An alignment of sustainability with firm mission and values is an important predictor of CSR (Bansal 2003, Marcus and Anderson 2006), as well as long-term institutional ownership (Neubaum and Zahra 2006) and top management equity (Johnson and Greening 1999). Firms are more likely to engage in sustainability when their structures are more open to relationships with society. For example, Johnson and Greening (1999) found that corporate governance structures such as the inclusion of outside directors broadened the focus of the firm to go beyond the exclusive interest of shareholders.

Aguinis and Glavas (2012) also analysed the main outcomes of corporate sustainability. These are financial outcomes, especially when reputation was used as a proxy for corporate social and environmental responsibility (Orlitzky et al. 2003), an improvement of competitive advantage (Greening and Turban 2000), and attractiveness to institutional investors (Graves and Waddock 1994). There are also some firm capabilities which are positively related to an increase of corporate sustainability, such as management practices (Waddock and Graves 1997), operational efficiencies (Sharma and Vredenburg 1998), product quality (Agle et al. 1999), and perceived quality of management (Waddock and Graves 1997). Increasing their sustainability helps firms to develop positive ethical identities and/or

relationships with key stakeholders of the firm such as customers and investors (Balmer et al. 2007, Castaldo et al. 2009, Fukukawa et al. 2007). Therefore, sustainability is not only a key factor to improve the organizational reputation, but it is also a variable that can directly affects economic performance by creating opportunities to increase revenues and reduce costs (Ambec and Lanoie 2008). Moreover the employee's sustainability perception is positively related to employee organizational citizenship behaviour and negatively related to employee turnover intentions.

## 2. Study Hypotheses

After analysing the literature about the elements present in our model, in this chapter we will discuss more specifically the relations among the different variables of our model. In particular, in the first part of this chapter we will focus on the main knowledge gaps and lacking points of the past studies, mainly connected to impersonal trust (our dependent variable) and its antecedents. In the second part, we will make explicit the model's hypotheses, that connect the different variables of the study, and the reasons that led to generate them. Lastly, in the third part, we will show our global model, its contribution to research, and its most relevant implications for practice.

### 2.1. Knowledge Gaps

First of all, we have to remember that we can distinguish trust according to the level of analysis: the trustor, which is the entity that trusts another one, can be considered at the individual level, team level, or organizational level. According to the referent (trustee), which is the party to be trusted, it is possible to define three different types of trust: trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor (interpersonal forms of trust), and impersonal trust (Fulmer and Gelfand 2012). Trust in colleagues is the willingness to be vulnerable to co-workers inside the same firm (Mayer et al. 1995); trust in supervisor is the intention to accept vulnerability based upon expectations of positive intentions or behaviour by the supervisor (Podsakoff et al. 1990, Rousseau et al. 1998); impersonal trust corresponds to trust in management and in organization as a whole, composed of capability and fairness (Vanhala et al. 2011). Regarding to the level, we will treat only the individual one. Therefore in our model, the trustor will be always an individual employee.



In literature we can observe that, in the most of the studies, trust is considered as a general interpersonal construct of trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor/manager and the trustee is not specified. Indeed, despite the trust being theorized in terms of multiple foci, there is a dearth of literature that reports empirical studies about the different role of different types of trust (Redman et al. 2011). Even when the trustee is specified and so it is not a general interpersonal construct, there are only few rare examples of studies that include more forms of trust (Bagrami and Hime 2007, Colquitt et al. 2011, Redman et al. 2011, Shamir and Lapidot 2003).

As we have seen in the previous chapter, impersonal trust, also called in literature institutional trust or trust in organization, has a lot of positive outcomes which are essential for the proper functioning of the company. These positive outcomes include job satisfaction (Cook and Wall 1980), employee attitudes to change (Rousseau and Tijoriwala 1999), learning (Jones 2001), open communication in organizations, sharing information, and increasing productivity (Mishra and Morrissey 1990). Although the importance of impersonal trust is recognised, there are only few studies that analysed the possible antecedents of this form of trust (Vanhala and Ahteela 2011, Fulmer and Gelfand 2012).

For all these reasons, we have identified that there are two important lacking points in trust literature.

First, it might be argued that the topic of impersonal trust's antecedents is underrepresented. This is probably due to the fact that is a quite new research topic, and the most of literature has focused on the interpersonal form of trust. The only rare exceptions include the study of Vanhala and Ahteela (2011) regarding "the effects of various human resource management (HRM) practices on the impersonal dimensions of organizational trust". Furthermore, "employees' propensity to trust is proposed to relate positively to institutional trust" (Hassan and Semercioz 2010). Propensity to trust is defined as a "stable

within-party factor that influences the degree of trust that a trustor will have on the trustee without any prior information or history of exchanges being available” (Mayer et al. 1995). However the possible correlation between trust propensity and impersonal trust seems not to be demonstrated by many studies. One of the rare exceptions is the work of Searle et al. (2011) whose objective is to empirically identify this positive relation. Another possible impersonal trust’s antecedent is the interpersonal form of trust. There are only few studies about possible links among impersonal and the interpersonal forms of trust, but their results need to be generalized and studied in deep. In particular, some scholars have hypothesized that impersonal trust has positive influences on the interpersonal trust. For example, McEvily, Perrone, and Zaheer (2003) suggested that “at an individual level, two people who have little or no knowledge of each other can develop trust for each other relatively quickly when they share trust in a common third party”. Krackhardt (1992) supposed that trust in the third party serves as a proxy for trust in the unknown counterpart. In addition, Wintrobe and Breton (1986) hypothesized that there is a potential conflict between trust between organization and employees, and trust among employees: they argued that when employees do not trust their management, they band together for collective action. On the contrary, in the latest years, some scholars have suggested that interpersonal trust could have a positive influences on the impersonal trust. For example, Shamir and Lapidot (2003) argued that “trust in particular leaders might influence systemic trust”, as “such leaders represent the organization in the eyes of their subordinates”. Starting from this consideration, Redman et al. (2011) demonstrated that “trust in the organization will mediate the relationship between trust to specific foci and related outcomes in the case of those foci and outcomes which are relatively closely identified with the organization”. However, according to the authors, “this finding may be specific to this particular research setting”, as the study considered a very specific context (Omani military personnel).

Therefore, this relation needs to be generalized for understanding the links between different forms of trust. It may be important in order to comprehend the managerial implications and, in particular, it is useful to figure out if the increase of a specific form of trust can have also an effect on another type of trust. As a consequence, the positive outcomes of the trust, we directly improve, are not the only advantage: we also have to consider all the other positive outcomes connected to the other types of trust improved. A further impersonal trust's antecedent could be the corporate sustainability, which it means protection of natural resources, of the environment and of common good of society by the organization. Even though trust research has recently extended available knowledge on the phenomenon and, at the same time, research in the field of sustainability has grown fast in the last few years, the two streams of research seem to develop parallel and to be barely related. In this context, it appears beneficial to cross-fertilize trust and sustainability literatures in order to explore to what extent these two topics are related. Fulmer and Gelfand (2012) reported that a growing amount of research has focused on perceived sustainability (or corporate social responsibility) and the possible relation with stakeholders' trust in organizations (e.g., Hansen et al. 2011, Bhattacharya, Korschun, and Sen 2009, Lin et al. 2011, Stanaland, Lwin, and Murphy 2011). Employees can be viewed as part of stakeholders, though these studies are mainly focused on external stakeholders (e.g., customers). A study worked out by Hansen et al. (2011) specifically hypothesized that employees, when perceiving that their organizations are socially responsible, develop trust in their organizations. It is surely an important starting point in order to understand which managerial actions, aimed at developing organization sustainability, have impact on organizational trust. It is clear how to bridge this gap may provide new tools to managers, so they are able to improve impersonal trust in company and to produce in this way all the positive correlated outcomes.

Second, there are few studies which consider more types of interpersonal trust separately; the open point is the possibility of evaluating these different types of trust individually, as diverse constructs, taking into account their relative antecedents and outcomes. The objective is to understand if trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor, relatively to the same antecedents and same outcomes, behave in different ways or not. Indeed, if these behaviours are different, it is possible to assume that the two constructs are dissimilar and have to be evaluated separately. In order to understand if it is possible to consider this distinction, Redman et al. (2011) demonstrated that “employees distinguish between multiple foci of trust within the organization: their organization in general; their direct boss and their co-workers”. A further support to this suggestion is provided by the different relation among trust in co-workers and three outcomes, and trust in direct boss and these same three outcomes. For example, although trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor are both positively associated with affective organizational commitment and negatively related to quit intentions, trust in direct boss is positively associated with job satisfaction whereas trust in co-workers is not related to it. Therefore, it becomes relevant studying the two interpersonal forms of trust separately. In particular, understanding if there is a differentiation also between the relations with the two interpersonal forms of trust’ antecedents and the two constructs could be important. In this scenario, it becomes necessary to study how the trust’s generations behave in the two cases, considering, both for trust in colleagues and in supervisor, the effect of the two most important traditional interpersonal trust’s antecedents: propensity to trust and trustworthiness’ dimensions (ability, benevolence, and integrity). An important empirical model which considers this two traditional trust’ antecedents is that of Colquitt et al. (2007), but, in that case, the differentiation between trust in colleagues and in supervisor is not stressed and there is only a generic construct, which comprehends the two interpersonal trust.

## **2.2. Our Hypothesis**

In this section, we will consider the relations between the variables analysed in our model. In particular, we will show a reminder of the definitions of the variables involved, the previous theoretical and empirical studies about every relation examined, and our suggested hypotheses based on the literature research.

### **2.2.1. The impact of Propensity to Trust on Trustworthiness**

In this first section, we will focus on the relation between propensity to trust and trustworthiness (ability, benevolence, and integrity). Propensity to trust is defined as “stable within-party factor that influences the degree of trust that a trustor will have on the trustee without any prior information or history of exchanges being available” (Mayer et al. 1995). Therefore, propensity is the general willingness to trust others and his effect is valid for all the interpersonal trustees. People with different developmental experiences, cultural backgrounds, and personality types vary in their propensity to trust (e.g., Hofstede 1980). Instead, trustworthiness is “a quality that the trustee has, while trusting is something that the trustor does. Although A may consider B to be trustworthy this does not necessarily mean that A will actually trust B” (Dietz and Hartog 2006). Trustworthiness is a multifaceted construct that captures the competence and character of the trustee (Gabarro 1978). In summary, in an individual trust’s relation, propensity to trust and trustworthiness are respectively the most important characteristics of trustor and trustee. Recent studies show that trustworthiness is not a single variable and cannot be considered as a single construct. In past, authors identified a single trustee characteristic that is responsible for trust (e.g., Strickland 1958), whereas other authors identified as many as ten characteristics (e.g., Butler 1991). Mayer et al. (1995) identified three characteristics of a trustee that often

appear in the literature: ability, benevolence, and integrity, and these three seem to explain a major portion of trustworthiness. Ability, or competence, explains the knowledge and skills needed to do a specific job together with the interpersonal skills and general wisdom needed to succeed in an organization (Gabarro 1978). Benevolence is defined as “the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good for the trustor, apart from any profit motives” (Mayer et al. 1995). Integrity is defined as “the extent to which a trustee is believed to adhere to sound moral and ethical principles” (Colquitt et al. 2007). Ability, benevolence, and integrity are important to trust, and each may vary independently of the others (Mayer et al. 1995). In our study, we comply with the theoretical implications of Mayer et al.’s work, and, consequently, we do not consider trustworthiness as a single construct, but we will analyse separately ability, benevolence, and integrity.

In literature, propensity to trust has been found to have a direct impact not only on trust, but also on trustworthiness of a generic trustee, evaluated according to his ability, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer et al. 1995). Propensity can enhance the effect of these factors, thereby producing a moderating effect on trust (Mayer et al. 1995). In fact, propensity to trust creates a filter that alters interpretations of others’ actions (Govier 1994). This relation between propensity to trust and the trustworthiness’ components was studied by Colquitt et al. (2007). This study analysed how propensity to trust affects a trustor perception of the others’ behaviours and influences the perception of ability, benevolence, and integrity of the trustee.

There are no many empirical studies that demonstrated the relation between propensity to trust of the trustor and the trustworthiness’ components of the trustee. An example is the aforementioned Colquitt et al.’s (2007) study, in which there is the empirical demonstration of the relation between propensity to trust and ability, benevolence, and integrity, both considering the colleagues and the supervisor as the trustees. These six different relations seem

to be all significant, and consequently propensity to trust can be considered as an important antecedent of all three dimensions of trustworthiness, both considering the colleagues and the supervisor. Another study that considers the positive impact of propensity to trust on trustworthiness is that of Yakovleva et al. (2010). In this case, the colleagues are considered as object of analysis and the positive relation between the two variables is confirmed.

In this theoretical and empirical framework, we consider two different interpersonal trustees (colleagues and supervisor), and, for this reason, we suggest two different groups of hypotheses. On the one hand, we propose the direct impact of propensity to trust on colleagues' ability, benevolence, and integrity; on the other hand, we hypothesize the direct impact of propensity to trust on supervisor's ability, benevolence, and integrity:

**Hypothesis 1A (H1A).** *Propensity to trust will be positively related to the trustworthiness (ability, benevolence, and integrity) of colleagues.*

**Hypothesis 1B (H1B).** *Propensity to trust will be positively related to the trustworthiness (ability, benevolence, and integrity) of supervisor.*

### **2.2.2. The impact of Propensity to Trust on Interpersonal Trust**

After analysing the role of propensity to trust on perceived trustworthiness of colleagues and supervisor, we want to understand the direct relation between propensity to trust and interpersonal trust. As said previously, propensity to trust is a dispositional variable that concerns a person's general willingness to trust others (Mayer et al. 1995), while interpersonal trust is based on interpersonal interaction between individuals within a particular and direct relationship (Bagraim and Hime 2007). Trust in a referent refers to the target of the trust (the trustee), and interpersonal trust, according to Fulmer and Gelfand (2012) refers to a specific other or others such as a leader, a

negotiation partner, a stranger, or a co-worker or co-workers. According to Fulmer and Gelfand (2012), it is important to understand that interpersonal trust is differentiated from the disposition of trust or trust propensity (Goldberg 1999, Mayer et al. 1995, Yamagishi and Yamagishi 1994) in that “the former is directed toward a specific target whereas generalized trust is about people in general”.

Propensity to trust has been found to enable interpersonal trust, owing to willingness to form new relationships and to give others a second chance (Dirks and Ferrin 2002, Rotter 1980). According to Hassan and Semerciöz (2010), “individuals with a high propensity to trust believe that most people are sincere, fair, and have good intentions, while on the other hand, people who have a low propensity to trust, see others as self-centered, cunning, and potentially dangerous” (Chughtai and Buckley 2008). Mayer et al. (1995) argued that the higher the trustor's propensity to trust, the higher the trust for a trustee prior to availability of information about the trustee. Trust propensity is likely to be the most relevant trust antecedent in contexts involving unfamiliar actors (Bigley and Pearce 1998) and, in addition, the effect of propensity to trust has been found to be stronger in virtual than face-to-face environment (Yakovleva, Reilly, and Werko 2010). According to Mayer et al. (1995), to fully understand the extent to which a person is willing to trust another person, the trustor's propensity must be considered. Studies demonstrated propensity to trust has a significant and independent impact on trust even in the presence of trustworthiness information (Colquitt et al. 2007) and it should contribute to the explanation of variance in trust if used as a part of a more complete set of variables (Mayer et al. 1995).

In our model, the two interpersonal referents considered are colleagues and supervisor. For this reason, the relation between propensity to trust and interpersonal trust will be divided into the two variables analysed. The issue on which we focus is the possible or not differentiation among the role of



propensity on trust in colleagues and the role of propensity on trust in supervisor. According to Colquitt et al. (2007), past research has drawn a distinction between trust in leaders and trust in co-workers (Dirks and Ferrin 2002), yet Mayer et al.'s (1995) model is claimed to be equally applicable to every form of interpersonal trust referents. Dirks and Ferrin's review focused on trust in leaders, leaving open the possibility that the antecedents and outcomes of trust differ from co-worker referents to leader referents.

In order to present our hypotheses, we will show the variable definition and the theoretical and empirical justification of the relationship suggested.

As regards to the impact of propensity to trust on trust in colleagues, we start defining this second element. Following the definition that Mayer et al. (1995) provided, trust in colleagues is "the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of fellow co-workers whose behaviour and actions that person cannot control". This variable, referred to members of an organization who hold quite level of authority or equal power and with whom an employee interacts during the workday (Tan and Lim 2009), considers two different aspects: working relationships and personal relationships between peers. According to Hassan and Semerciöz (2010), trust in co-workers refers to the confidence that one's colleagues are competent and will act in a fair, ethical, and reliable manner. This definition implies that co-workers will support their peers and will not take advantage of them by hiding information, consequently co-worker trust also leads employees to act on the basis that they have faith in the words and actions of their peers (Ferres et al. 2004).

The relation between propensity to trust and trust in colleagues is theoretically based on the same elements which connect trust propensity and interpersonal trust, but, according to Dirks and Ferrin (2002), this propensity might have little or no effect on trust in specific partners due to the unique experiences in each relationship that overcome the effects of the personal characteristic.

Only few studies tested the direct impact of trust propensity on trust in colleagues (e.g., Colquitt et al. 2011, Kiffin and Cordery 2003) but it is important to notice that in these studies this positive relation was confirmed, though with a low level of statistical significance.

For these reasons, we want to assess the relation between propensity to trust and trust in colleagues, suggesting this following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2A (H2A).** *Propensity to trust will be positively related to the trust in colleagues.*

Subsequently, we have to consider the impact of propensity to trust on trust in supervisor, which is a psychological state comprising the purpose to accept vulnerability. This intention is founded upon expectations of positive intentions or actions by the supervisor (Podsakoff et al. 1990, Rousseau et al. 1998).

With regard to employee attribute, employees' propensity to trust people in general, affects their level of trust for their supervisor (Poon, Rahid, and Othman 2006). According to Dirks and Ferrin (2002), propensity might affect how individuals initially perceive and interact with their leaders, and this first approach might impact the ultimate level of trust in the relationship.

There are not several empirical studies supporting the above assertions (e.g., Colquitt et al. 2007, Payne and Clark 2003), but the positive relation between propensity to trust and trust in supervisor seems to be validated.

Accordingly, we believe that employees' general inclination to trust others will influence their level of trust in their supervisor and we suggest this following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2B (H2B).** *Propensity to trust will be positively related to the trust in supervisor.*

### **2.2.3. The impact of Propensity to Trust on Impersonal Trust**

In this section, we analyse the relation between propensity to trust and impersonal trust. As seen in previous sections, propensity to trust is defined as a “stable within-party factor that influences the degree of trust that a trustor will have on the trustee without any prior information or history of exchanges being available” (Mayer et al. 1995). We can distinguish between two general forms of trust according to different trustee: interpersonal trust and impersonal trust (Maguire and Phillips 2008). Interpersonal trust is a form of trust where the trustee is an individual. In our study we have seen two kind of interpersonal trust: trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor. Instead, impersonal trust, also known as trust in organization (e.g., Fulmer and Gelfand 2012), is defined as an individual employee’s expectations with regard to the employer organization’s capability and fairness of organization (Vanhala et al. 2011). The capability dimension is defined as the set of five components: organizing activities, sustainability, top-management characteristics, technological reliability, and competitiveness. The fairness dimension is defined as the set of three components: HRM practices, fair play, and communication. The trustee of this form of trust is both organization as a whole and management (Whitener 1997).

We have just hypothesized in the previous section that propensity to trust is an antecedent of interpersonal forms of trust; both trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor. Moreover, we know that it is likely to be one the most relevant trust antecedents in contexts involving unfamiliar actors (Bigley and Pearce 1998). Propensity to trust is hypothesized to be an important factor influencing trust in institutions (Johnson-George and Swap 1982) and it becomes even a more important antecedent in ambiguous situations, when the amount of information about the trustee are not relevant (Gill, Boies, Finegan, and McNally 2005). Kee and Knox (1970) argued that trusting beliefs are

molded by propensity to trust even in situations where previous experiences are available. Propensity to trust creates a filter altering interpretations of others' actions (Govier 1994) and, for this reason, it affects the level of trust in the trustee.

Empirically, there are few data supporting the specific relation between propensity to trust and impersonal trust. Searle et al. (2011) hypothesized that employees' disposition to trust is positively related to employees' trust in their organization and demonstrated that "employees who are more trusting in nature tend to trust their employer more".

For all these considerations, we hypothesize that propensity to trust is an important antecedent of impersonal trust:

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *Propensity to trust will be positively related to impersonal trust.*

#### **2.2.4. The impact of Trustworthiness on Interpersonal Trust**

In this section we consider the role of trustworthiness, "a multifaceted construct that captures the competence and character of the trustee" (Gabarro 1978), on interpersonal trust, "the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of a specific individual whose behaviour and actions that person cannot control" (Mayer et al. 1995). As previously mentioned, trustworthiness is divided into three characteristics, ability, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer et al. 1995) and, in our model, is referred to the two elements composing the interpersonal trust (trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor). So, we have to take into account ability, benevolence, and integrity of colleagues, and ability, benevolence, and integrity of supervisor. Our purpose is to understand the impact of each of these six characteristics on the two constructs composing the interpersonal trust.

Whatever the trustee considered, the trustors are concerned about vulnerability associated with the potential loss from trusting (e.g., Ozer, Zhen, and Chen 2011). According to Fulmer and Gelfand (2012), to the level that the trustee can produce positive perceptions in the trustor, a trusting relationship is more probable to take place. Overall, all the three trustworthiness dimensions have unique, significant, and combined influence on trust (Mayer et al. 1995, Colquitt et al. 2007) and its relative importance largely depends on the referents and situations. One explanation for those unique relationships may be that the three trustworthiness dimensions reflect, on the one hand, the cognition-based sources of trust, and, on the other hand, the affect-based sources of trust (Flores and Solomon 1998, Lewicki and Bunker 1996, Lewis and Weigert 1985, McAllister 1995, 1997, Rousseau et al. 1998, Shapiro et al. 1992). According to Colquitt et al. (2007), “a cognitive calculation of the skills, capabilities, values, and principles of the trustee (in the forms of ability and integrity) may be supplemented by a more affective acknowledgment of the mutual concern inherent in the relationship (in the form of benevolence)”.

Considering the previous empirical studies, Davis et al. (2000) found all three factors correlated to trust, but only benevolence and integrity, in a regression analysis, were significant. The authors attributed this finding to possible effects of multicollinearity. Other studies, instead, have failed to demonstrate significant and single effects for all three dimensions when predicting trust (Jarvenpaa et al. 1998, Mayer and Gavin 2005). In addition, Gabarro (1978), combined benevolence and integrity into a unique character variable as he suggested that these two elements of trustworthiness might be highly connected. On the contrary, Colquitt et al. (2007), and Mayer and Gavin’s (2005) results empirically support that each of the three trustworthiness dimensions has significant and unique relationships with trust.

In detail, considering the colleagues as the trustee, all three elements composing the trustworthiness seem to be statistically significant. According to

Tan and Lim (2009), frequently, co-workers relay information or parts of finished work to one another. So, the competence, skills, and knowledge of individuals might affect the work of peers; set of characteristics defined by Mayer et al. (1995) as ability. According to Sonnenberg (1994), trust increases when people are perceived as competent. If employees believe that they can depend on their co-workers to produce a quality piece of work that would affect their job in a positive way, they will be willing to trust the judgment of those competent colleagues (Tan and Lim 2009).

Benevolence, defined as “the extent to which the trustee is perceived to want to do good to the trustor”, highlights a relationship marked by good intentions and positive orientation on the part of the trustee (Mayer et al. 1995). Trust is higher for trustees who showed consideration to the trustors as opposed to those who did not (e.g., Korsgaard, Schweiger, and Sapienza 1995). For this reasons, when single employees perceive their colleagues as careful and concerned about their interests and well-being, they will more easily trust co-workers, as these benevolent colleagues are unlikely to act maliciously against the individual employees (Tan and Lim 2009).

Considering the integrity of colleagues, which refers to “the extent to which a trustor perceives the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable” (Mayer et al. 1995), researchers believe that trust in co-workers is higher in colleagues who are perceived to have this characteristic, as these co-workers can be expected to act with honesty, consistency, and justice (Tan and Lim 2009).

Only few and recent studies tested the separated impact of the three characteristics of colleagues’ trustworthiness on trust in colleagues (e.g., Tan and Lim 2009, Colquitt et al. 2007), but it is important to emphasize that in these empirical studies this positive relation was confirmed as significant.

For all these reasons, we suggest this following hypothesis, considering separately the three characteristics of the colleagues' trustworthiness and their distinct impact on trust:

**Hypothesis 4A (H4A).** *Trustworthiness (ability, benevolence, and integrity) of colleagues will be positively related to the trust in colleagues.*

As regards to the link between the three characteristics of supervisor's trustworthiness and trust in supervisor, a number of scholars have argued that employees trust in their managers if they perceive the ability of their managers to make a difference for them in a positive manner (Butler 1991, Conger 1990, Davis et al. 2000). According to Poon, Rahid, and Othman (2006), when employees believe that the managers are incompetent, their expectations of a capable and trustworthy role model are unmet, and these unsatisfied expectations lead to perceptions of employees' cynicism (Andersson, 1996). If the followers perceive high competence of their leaders, their trust in leaders will be higher (Dirks and Ferrin 2002), and, according to Fulmer and Gelfand (2012), the behaviours of competent leaders (e.g., communicating a collective vision), also have been linked to high levels of trust in leaders (Gillespie and Mann 2004).

Considering the benevolence dimension, "the extent to which the trustee is perceived to want to do good to the trustor" (Mayer et al. 1995), if the supervisor care about the well-being of its employees, they would be willing to trust their supervisor (Davis et al. 2000). Benevolence has been found to be a key predictor of general interpersonal trust (Colquitt et al. 2007, Dirks and Ferrin 2002). According to Fulmer and Gelfand (2012), in mentor-protégé relationships, support actions which indicate benevolence are positively linked to trust in supervisor. For the leader referent, the behaviour of demonstrating individualized support has been related to high levels of trust in leaders

(Hernandez 2008, Korsgaard, Sapienza, and Schweiger 2002). In addition, a one-to-one relationship with the leader seems to be particularly important in creating followers' trust in leaders (Fulmer and Gelfand 2012). According to Roussin (2008), if the leader is able to customize his leadership through specific interactions with individual team members, and differentiate it when he interact with the whole group, the individual trust in leaders increase.

Finally, as seen previously as regards to trust in colleagues, employees in order to rely on their supervisor, must be able to count not only on the supervisor's competence and benevolence, but also on integrity (Poon, Rahid, and Othman 2006). According to Mayer et al. (1995), factors such as adherence to sound principles and having a strong sense of justice affect the level to which a person is judged to have integrity. Leaders can gain trust by being principled, honest, consistent, and fair (Kirkpatrick and Locke 1991), as supervisors who possess these attributes are unlikely to act in an opportunistic way and employees will be less likely to feel the need to monitor the behaviours of their supervisors (Poon, Rahid, and Othman 2006). According to Fulmer and Gelfand (2012) research also has found that distributive, interactional, and procedural justice perceptions of supervisors relate to trust in direct supervisors (Ambrose and Schminke 2003, Aryee et al. 2002, Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001, Colquitt, LePine, Piccolo, Zapata, and Rich 2012, Khazanchi and Masterson 2011, Lee, Pillutla, and Law 2000, Li and Cropanzano 2009, Yang, Mossholder, and Peng 2009).

There is some research evidence to support the tight relation between leader's trustworthiness and trust in supervisor. Some studies indicate that leader's competence and integrity are valued more than benevolence, particularly when followers are vulnerable (Lapidot, Kark, and Shamir 2007). On the contrary, all the other studies examined, found that all the attributes of trustworthiness (ability, benevolence, and integrity) are positively associated with trust in supervisor (e.g., Colquitt et al. 2007, Poon, Rahid, and Othman



2006, Sherwood and DePaolo 2005, Tan and Tan 2000), or in a plant manager (Mayer and Gavin 2005), or in a business unit's general manager (e.g., Davis et al. 2000).

Considering all the reasons previously shown, as in the case of trust in colleagues, we suggest the following hypothesis, considering separately the three characteristics of the supervisor's trustworthiness and their unique and direct impact on trust:

**Hypothesis 4B (H4B).** *Trustworthiness (ability, benevolence, and integrity) of supervisor will be positively related to the trust in supervisor.*

### 2.2.5. The impact of Interpersonal Trust on Impersonal Trust

In this section, we analyse the relation between the two interpersonal forms of trust considered in our model, trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor, and impersonal trust.

We start to focus on the relation between trust in colleagues and impersonal trust. Trust in colleagues can be defined as “the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of fellow co-workers whose behaviour and actions that person cannot control” (Mayer et al. 1995). Impersonal trust is defined as “an individual employee's expectations with regard to the employer organization's capability and fairness of organization” (Vanhala et al. 2011).

As explained by Tan and Lim (2009), impersonal trust involves employees' willingness to be vulnerable to organization's actions. This willingness can be obtained when an organization is able to clearly communicate its behaviours to its employees through formal and informal networks. The most important source of information is the employee's immediate social environment (Salancik and Pfeffer 1978). When an employee receives information from an individual source, which is similar to him, this

information becomes relevant (Festinger 1954). Then, individual general employees' impressions (and, also, about the company) can be influenced by behaviours and attitudes of those co-workers whom they perceive as similar to themselves (Tan and Lim 2009). This happens as an employee regards the attitudes of his colleagues as socially acceptable and models its beliefs according to those of their co-workers (Salancik and Pfeffer 1978). Summarizing, it is reasonable to hypothesize that trust in colleagues might influence impersonal trust, as employee who trusts in his/her colleagues is willing to consider his/her co-workers' perceptions as important. If these perceptions implied high impersonal trust, also the employee will be inclined to trust its company.

Empirically, there are studies showing that colleagues who communicate with each other frequently share similar views on the organization (Schmitz and Fulk 1991). We found only a study (Tan and Lim 2009) that hypothesize the relation between trust in co-workers and trust in organization, but the data used in this work cover only the context of the insurance industry; in addition, their sample consisted of Chinese respondents in Singapore and for these reasons this result needs to be generalized.

According to all the previous considerations, our hypothesis regarding the relation between trust in colleagues and impersonal trust is the following:

**Hypothesis 5A (H5A).** *Trust in colleagues will be positively related to impersonal trust.*

Now, we focus on the relation between trust in supervisor and impersonal trust. Trust in supervisor can be defined as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon expectations of positive intentions or behaviour by the supervisor (Rousseau et al. 1998).

As argued by Shamir and Lapidot (2003), leaders/supervisors represent the organization in the eyes of their employees and trust in particular leader might influence systemic trust. This happens as an employee considers its supervisor as the agent of the organization and also a formal link between the organization and its front-line employees (Strutton, Toma, and Pelton 1993). Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997) suggested that, frequently, employees generalize their experiences with their supervisors to the whole organization. As a consequence, if their trust in the supervisor increases, their favourable perceptions of the organization also enhance (Pearce 1993).

Although there are a lot of suggestions that lead us to believe that the relation between trust in supervisor and impersonal trust exists, as in the case of trust in colleagues, there is a shortage of empirical data about it. For example, Wong, Ngo, and Wong (2003) observed that employees' trust in supervisors is associated with their trust in the organization. Tan and Tan (2000) demonstrated that trust in supervisor and trust in organization are positively related, but this result has to be generalized with a more significant data sample.

For all these reasons, we suggest that trust in supervisor can be considered as an important antecedent of impersonal trust:

**Hypothesis 5B (H5B).** *Trust in supervisor will be positively related to impersonal trust.*

### **2.2.6. The impact of Corporate Sustainability on Impersonal Trust**

In this latest section concerning the study hypotheses, we focus on the relation between corporate sustainability and impersonal trust. This second construct has already been defined in the previous sections as “an individual employee’s expectations with regard to the employer organization’s capability

and fairness of organization” (Vanhala et al. 2011) and involves employees’ willingness to be vulnerable to organization’s actions (Tan and Lim 2009). Corporate sustainability, otherwise, is defined “as the dynamic state of becoming sustainable, a process founded on conscious efforts to create new opportunities for existence in multiple domains and at multiple levels, now and in the future” (Docherty et al. 2008). Sustainability means that business activities should also protect natural resources and the environment, and serve the common good of society (Wu and Pagell 2011). According to Hansen et al. (2011), examples of sustainable initiatives include reducing environmental impact, efforts to improve employee diversity, community outreach programs, donations to charities etc. (Albinger and Freeman 2000).

The theme of sustainability connected with trust is in the first early stages of studies, but it is an emerging theme and continues to gain attention atop the corporate agenda. In particular, organizational behaviour’s theorists have suggested that employer sustainability activities show the company’s ethics and values and the degree to which it can be trusted (Rupp et al. 2006). According to Hansen et al. (2011), trust is the “first result of a firm’s corporate social responsibility activities” (Pivato et al. 2008) as the organizations, which actions are sustainable, act as “trustees” for the interests of all stakeholders, including employees (Balmer et al. 2007), as these internal stakeholders are sensitive to the ethics-related actions of their employer (Dirks and Ferrin 2001). In addition, the employees not only care about the relationship between them and their organization (Colquitt et al. 2001), but also how all the other stakeholders are treated by their company (Cropanzano et al. 2001). Therefore, an employee develops trust in his organization if he perceives that his firm is sustainable, and subsequently, this employee will adopt positive behaviours in order to improve his organizations’ overall performance: corporate sustainability can be viewed as “a tool capable of winning the hearts and minds of employees” (Hansen et al. 2011). Summarizing, the impersonal form of trust

is an immediate outcome of the corporate sustainability perceptions which can determine the employee's behaviours.

Considering the undoubted importance of this issue, we analysed the literature in order to comprehend the possible contribution given by the sustainability to the impersonal form of trust. In the previous studies, the positive relation between corporate sustainability and impersonal trust can be found and it is significant, but the focus is mostly on external company's stakeholders and, in particular, company's customers (e.g., Vlachos et al. 2009, Stanaland, Lwin, and Murphy 2011). Unfortunately, just a few empirical researches have directly examined sustainability from an employee perspective. Recently, a study by Hansen et al. (2011) demonstrated that employees, when perceiving that their organizations are socially responsible, develop trust in their organizations, which in turn influences their attitudes and behaviour.

For all these reasons, in order to achieve our aim, we hypothesize that corporate sustainability has a positive impact on impersonal trust in the eyes of employees.

**Hypothesis 6 (H6).** *Corporate sustainability will be positively related to impersonal trust.*

## 2.3. Our Model

The set of the hypotheses listed in the previous paragraphs allows us to create the global model representing the total of the assumptions of this study. In particular, the following figure shows all the variables analysed and the relations between them, identified through the different hypotheses proposed.

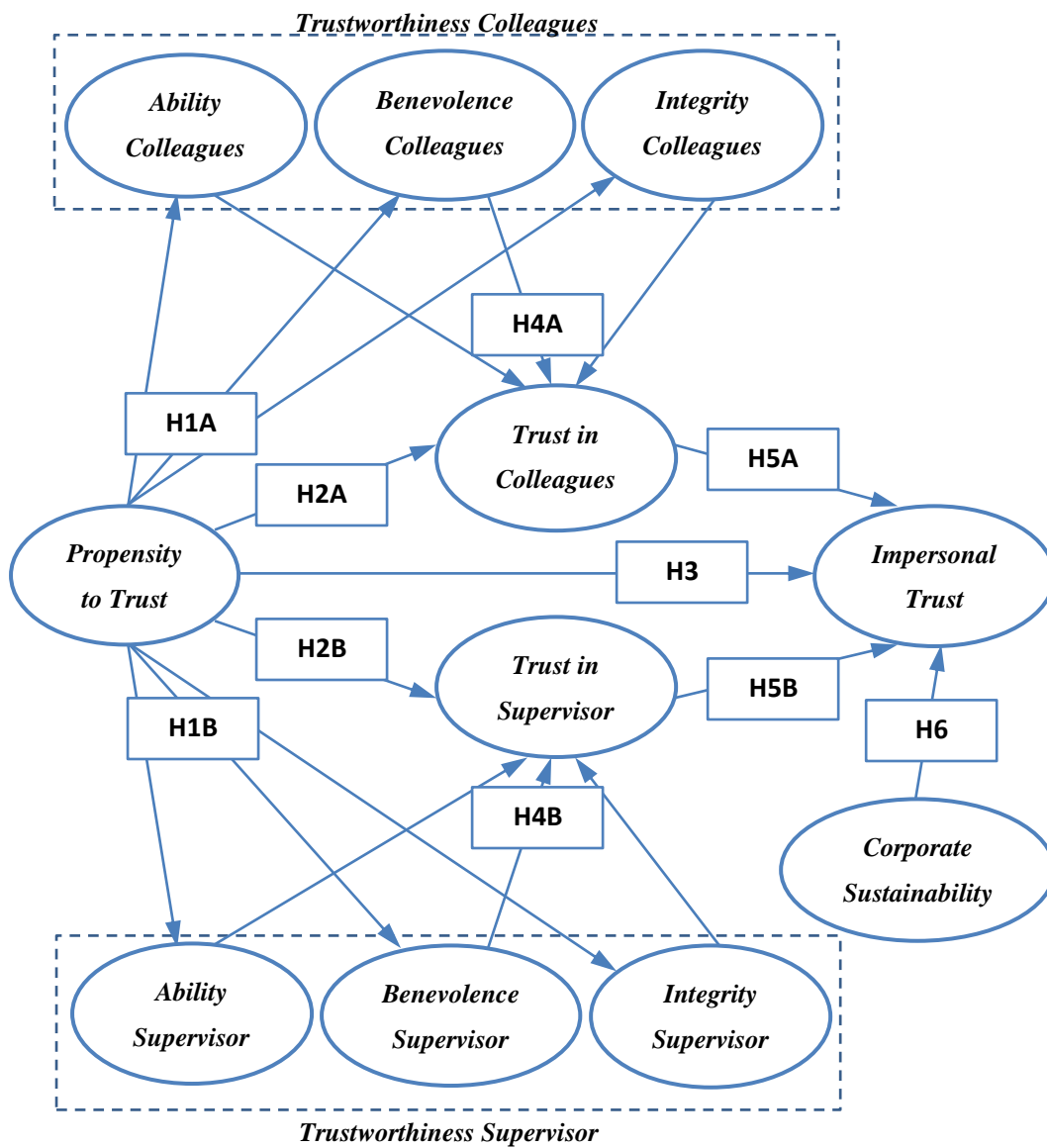


Figure 1: The global model

In order to comprehend the model's contributions to the trust's research, always focusing on the individual level of the analysis (in which the trustor is an employee of the organization), it is possible to emphasize the main implications of the different hypothesis proposed and the potential knowledge gaps' reduction.

In particular, as shown at the beginning of this chapter, we identified two important knowledge gaps in trust's literature. The first regards the possible impersonal trust's antecedents and the underrepresentation of this topic. The second concerns the possibility of considering separately the two different types of interpersonal trust, contrary to what is done in the most of previous studies. The purpose of our model is to bridge these gaps, through the analysis of the results of an empirical study, and provide useful tools to managers so they can improve trust inside organization, and, specifically, the impersonal form of trust.

As regards to the first knowledge gap identified, it is possible to recognise in the model four impersonal trust's antecedents. The problem of the impersonal trust antecedents' underrepresentation is important, and, if reduced, may lead relevant information to management in order to develop impersonal trust. If the effect of corporate sustainability on impersonal trust (H6) is confirmed, it will be an important support to the managerial implications of this study: on the one hand, it contributes to enrich both the trust and the corporate sustainability's literature; on the other hand, gives the company a valid reason for being or becoming sustainable, whose numerous benefits go well beyond the sole trust's issue. The possible positive relation between the interpersonal forms of trust (trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor) and the impersonal one, identified by H5A and H5B, can bring a relevant contribution. If these two forms of interpersonal trust demonstrate a positive relation with the impersonal trust, the managers can use important levers in order to increase trust inside organization and specifically the impersonal form of trust. In that

case, high interpersonal trust would also mean high impersonal trust, and if the objective of an investment is the increase of interpersonal trust, it would have a double benefit, also improving the impersonal form of trust. As regards to hypothesis concerning propensity to trust (H3), we have to consider that the tools related to this impersonal trust's antecedent are not easy to use, as trust propensity is defined as an individual's inclination hardly modifiable. In fact, the managerial implication concerns mainly the hiring of people willing to trust, but this lever implies the ability of assess people's propensity to trust during the recruitment phase.

Considering the second knowledge gap identified, our model considers separately the two interpersonal forms of trust. In particular, it is possible to identify trust in colleagues and its antecedents and outcomes, and trust in supervisor and its antecedents and outcomes. Since one aim of the study is to clarify if these two forms of trust can be considered separately, the antecedents and the outcomes are the same for the two constructs, but, if our suggestions are confirmed, we may find different importance in the diverse relations analysed. For these reasons, among the hypotheses, we can find traditional relations concerning the impact of colleagues' ability, benevolence, and integrity on trust in colleagues (H4A) and the impact of supervisor' ability, benevolence, and integrity on trust in supervisor (H4B), the effect of trust propensity on trust in colleagues (H2A) and on trust in supervisor (H2B), and the role of trust propensity on colleagues' trustworthiness (H1A) and supervisor's trustworthiness (H1B). If these hypotheses are confirmed, they allow us to clarify the organizational antecedents of the two different interpersonal forms of trust and the consequent managerial actions which can be carried out in order to increase trust in colleagues and in supervisor.



## 3. Study Design & Methodology

In this chapter, we will illustrate the study design and methodology of our research. First, we will show the sample used in order to test our model: 6,000 employees in six different EU countries. Second, we will explain the procedures applied to collect data: first pilot test of 20 employees for each country and the subsequent full survey. Then, we will illustrate the scales used to measure all the variables, together with the construct validity for each one. In the end, we will show the structural equation modelling technique, the Partial Least Squares (PLS), chosen to analyse the relations considered in our model.

### 3.1. Sample

For this study an online questionnaire was administered to 6,000 employees in six different EU countries: Italy, Germany, Poland, U.K., Spain, and France. It was build a probabilistic sample, based on gender, age, area, industry, and occupation. Questionnaires were administered until each country collected 1,000 observations that were consistent with the probabilistic sample. Each delivered questionnaire was accompanied with a cover web-page in which the purpose of the study and respondents' rights for anonymity were stated explicitly.

The overall sample is composed by employees that work for at least 1 month in the present company and includes 55,8% of male respondents, 52,4% of the respondents were between 35 and 55 years old (9,7% were instead between 15-24 years old and 2,0 % over 65). The minimum sample of Small-firms (35,6%) was 10 employees, for the Medium ones (23,9%) was 20 employees and for Big-firms (40,5%) was 40 employees. In terms of occupation, observations are almost evenly distributed between professionals

(18,9% of the total), technicians (16,2%), clerical support workers (10,2%), services and sales workers (17,6%), craft trades work (11,8%), elementary occupations (10,0%), managers (7,4%), and plant and machine operators (7.3%).

It is important to emphasize that the sample reflects carefully the universe of workers in the six countries involved in our research. Considering this aspect and the high number of respondents, this survey is hopefully going to fill the already appointed gap between theoretical and empirical constructs.

### **3.2. Procedures**

In this study, instruments in English were translated into Italian, French, Polish, German and Spanish, then back-translated to ensure the accuracy of the translated scales. A pilot test of 20 employees for each country was run prior to the full survey.

During the pilot test, participants were encouraged to ask questions so that the “national” version of the questionnaire could be amended where there was the risk of any ambiguity. The results of the pilot test indicated that respondents had no problems in understanding the questions, and the items included in the questionnaire were then back-translated into English by a professional translator. Three English-speaking experts checked that the back-translation corresponded to the original. The survey was then extended to the entire sample of employees.

## 3.3. Variable Definitions and Construct Validity

### 3.3.1. Impersonal Trust

The impersonal (organizational) trust questions' model has been developed by Vanhala et al. (2011) and includes 31 items ( $\alpha = 0.953$ ). In particular, it was found that impersonal trust in the organizational context consists of two dimensions: capability (18 items) and fairness (13 items).

### 3.3.2. Trust in Colleagues

Trust in colleagues was assessed with the ten-item measure ( $\alpha = 0.887$ ) developed by Gillespie (2003). It evaluates the willingness to trust the peers through a scale ranging from 1, "not at all willing", to 5, "completely willing".

### 3.3.3. Trust in Supervisor

We assessed trust in supervisor with the five-item measure ( $\alpha = 0.605$ ) developed by Mayer and Gavin (2005), an update of Mayer and Davis's (1999) measure.

As we can observe, the value of  $\alpha$  it is not so high, but however it remains statistically significant. In fact, consistently with Hair et al. (2006), "when the Cronbach's alpha was 0.6 or above, the value was considered a good indicator of internal reliability". In literature, the problem of this low internal reliability of the scale utilized is known: for example, Seppälä et al. (2011) found an  $\alpha = 0.69$  and accepted the internal consistency of the measure. As it is possible to understand, the purpose of this work is not to deal with the specific theme of trust in supervisor and we used a common method adopted in the previous literature and considered as acceptable.

Extent of agreement was assessed on scale ranging from 1, “strongly disagree,” to 5, “strongly agree.” These items were designed to capture participants’ willingness to be vulnerable to their supervisor.

#### **3.3.4. Propensity to Trust**

As regards to propensity to trust, a five-point Likert-type scale has been used. The three questions which compose the scale ( $\alpha = 0.833$ ) were first formulated by Rosenberg (1956) and developed by Paxton (1999). Every item is settled in order to assess the three different dimensions of propensity to trust in strangers: helpful, fair and trust.

#### **3.3.5. Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness facets were measured using scales designed by Mayer and Davis (1999) to assess the ability of colleagues (6 items,  $\alpha = 0.918$ ), benevolence of colleagues (5 items,  $\alpha = 0.909$ ), integrity of colleagues (6 items,  $\alpha = 0.816$ ), ability of supervisor (6 items,  $\alpha = 0.938$ ), benevolence of supervisor (5 items,  $\alpha = 0.934$ ), and integrity of supervisor (6 items,  $\alpha = 0.854$ ). Individuals used a scale ranging from 1, “strongly disagree,” to 5, “strongly agree,” to assess the extent to which they agreed with the statements in each scale.

#### **3.3.6. Corporate Sustainability**

The three sustainability questions ( $\alpha = 0.796$ ) are adapted from the 2012 MIT Sloan Management Review Research Report (Haanaes et al. 2012). The questions were selected for the study as they implicitly assume that sustainability is a continuous process flowing from the past, through the present, to the future. Before listing the specific questions, the respondents were given the following definition of sustainability: “The dynamic balancing of economic performances, social performances, and environmental performances”. Employees were asked to rate the status of their company’s

corporate sustainability, in terms of management attention and investment, today, how has the organization's commitment towards corporate sustainability changed in the past three years, and how they expect their organization's commitment towards corporate sustainability to change over the next three years. The list of questions used is given in Appendix.

### **3.4. Analysis**

We chose a structural equation modelling technique, the Partial Least Squares (PLS), in order to analyse the research model and to study the relationships between different variables and the weight that each of them plays on the others (Wold 1985). PLS, which was first introduced in the context of linear multiple regression models, uses a combination of principal components analysis, path analysis, and regression to simultaneously evaluate theory and data (Wold 1985). More recently (Lohmöller 1989, Wold 1985) the PLS estimation algorithm has been adopted in the SEM-LV (Structural Equation Models with Latent Variables).

This framework is an alternative method to the so-called covariance structure estimation procedures (Bollen 1989), the latter ones making use of the celebrated procedure called LISREL (Linear Structural Relationships). Barclay et al. (1995) provided a detailed discussion of the implementation of PLS in an information systems context, moreover it was made a comparison between PLS and LISREL. PLS has been used by a growing number of researchers from a variety of disciplines, such as strategic management (Hulland 1999), management information system (Dibbern et al. 2004), e-Business (Pavlou and Chai 2002), organizational behaviour (Higgins et al. 1992), marketing (Reinartz et al. 2004) and consumer behaviour (Fornell and Robinson 1983).

These models are characterized by a dual structure: a measurement model, which analyses the relationship among latent variables and manifest

variables associated with them, and a structural model, which describes the path of relation between latent variables, as formulated by the theory. In a PLS structural model the path coefficients are similar to standardized regression coefficients, while the loadings can be interpreted as factor loadings. The explanative power of the model is tested by examining the sign, size, and statistical significance of the path coefficients between constructs in the model (Davies 1994). The statistics for the paths are generated using a bootstrap technique. The predictive capacity of a PLS model can also be assessed by the examination of the variance explained (e.g.,  $R^2$ ) in the dependent or endogenous constructs.

In our study the relationships between latent and manifest variables were defined by using reflective measure specification. In a reflective model, the latent construct exists independent of the measure, the causality flows from the construct to the indicators and change in the latent variable must precede variation in the indicators, so the indicators all share a common theme and are interchangeable. The analysis was developed by software Smart PLS 2.0 (<http://www.smartpls.de/>). The algorithm for missing value imputation is the mean replacement, with path weighting scheme; results were similar if the procedure of case wise replacement are applied. To assess the indicator reliability the loadings of all the PLS analysis reflective indicators were examined.

## 4. Results

In this chapter we will analyse the main statistical results of our model. First, we will illustrate the measurement model results, including the means, reliabilities, and the correlations between the constructs studied. Then, we will illustrate the results of PLS analysis, which tested the relations hypothesized in the model.

### 4.1. Measurement Model

The sets of exclusive proxy variables linked to the latent variables included in the model should possess a high level of reliability, also called the “internal consistency” of the scale. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient can be used for this kind of measurement, obtained as an average of the correlations between every proxy variable pair (Cronbach 1951). As Cronbach’s alpha tends to provide a severe underestimation of the internal consistency reliability of latent variables in PLS path models, it is more appropriate to apply a different measure, the composite reliability  $\rho_c$  (Henseler et al. 2009). The composite reliability takes into account that indicators have different loading, and can be interpreted in the same way as Cronbach’s alpha: a value below 0.6 indicates a lack of reliability.

Establishing convergent and discriminant validity in PLS requires an appropriate AVE (Average Variance Extracted) analysis. The values of AVE indices, which are used to measure the percentage of variance explained by each factor and which are applied within each latent construct, must be greater than 0.5 to confirm convergent validity and the goodness of the model (Henseler et al. 2009). For discriminant validity the square root of the AVE and the correlations are compared.

In Table 1 the measurement model results including: means, standard deviations, reliabilities ( $\alpha, \rho_c$ ), AVE, and correlations between latent variables.

Variables	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\alpha$	$\rho_c$	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Ability Colleagues	3.70	0.97	0.92	0.94	0.71	1										
2. Ability Supervisor	3.64	1.09	0.94	0.95	0.76	0.56	1									
3. Benevolence Colleagues	3.21	1.11	0.91	0.93	0.73	0.61	0.44	1								
4. Benevolence Supervisor	3.25	1.16	0.93	0.95	0.79	0.44	0.70	0.62	1							
5. Impersonal Trust	3.33	1.12	0.95	0.97	0.51	0.52	0.64	0.56	0.66	1						
6. Integrity Colleagues	3.30	1.07	0.82	0.93	0.71	0.68	0.51	0.83	0.59	0.60	1					
7. Integrity Supervisor	3.29	1.16	0.85	0.94	0.76	0.46	0.75	0.55	0.86	0.68	0.60	1				
8. Propensity to Trust	2.99	1.12	0.83	0.90	0.75	0.38	0.34	0.52	0.46	0.48	0.53	0.44	1			
9. Corporate Sustainability	3.35	1.08	0.80	0.90	0.74	0.17	0.19	0.20	0.20	0.35	0.22	0.23	0.24	1		
10. Trust in Colleagues	3.40	1.07	0.89	0.91	0.50	0.67	0.45	0.69	0.46	0.46	0.69	0.45	0.42	0.17	1	
11. Trust in Supervisor	3.12	1.12	0.61	0.84	0.64	0.46	0.63	0.49	0.64	0.53	0.51	0.65	0.36	0.18	0.49	1

Table 1: mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE, and correlations.

Examining the values of  $\alpha$  and  $\rho_c$ , reported in previous table, we conclude that all the measures have a good “internal consistency”. All the values of AVE indices are at least over 0.5, thus confirming convergent validity and the goodness of the model (Henseler et al. 2009).

Discriminant validity is satisfied with the square root of the AVE of each construct larger than the correlation of the specific construct with any of the other constructs in the model.

## 4.2. Hypotheses and Model Testing

The relationships among propensity to trust, trust in colleagues or in supervisor, and impersonal trust, with the mediating role of ability,



benevolence, and integrity (of colleagues or of supervisor), is now considered, as well as the relationship between corporate sustainability and impersonal trust.

Applying the hypothesized model, with a step-by-step procedure, to gradually eliminate the least significant links and running the model for re-estimation of its parameters, the following model is formulated (Figure 2).

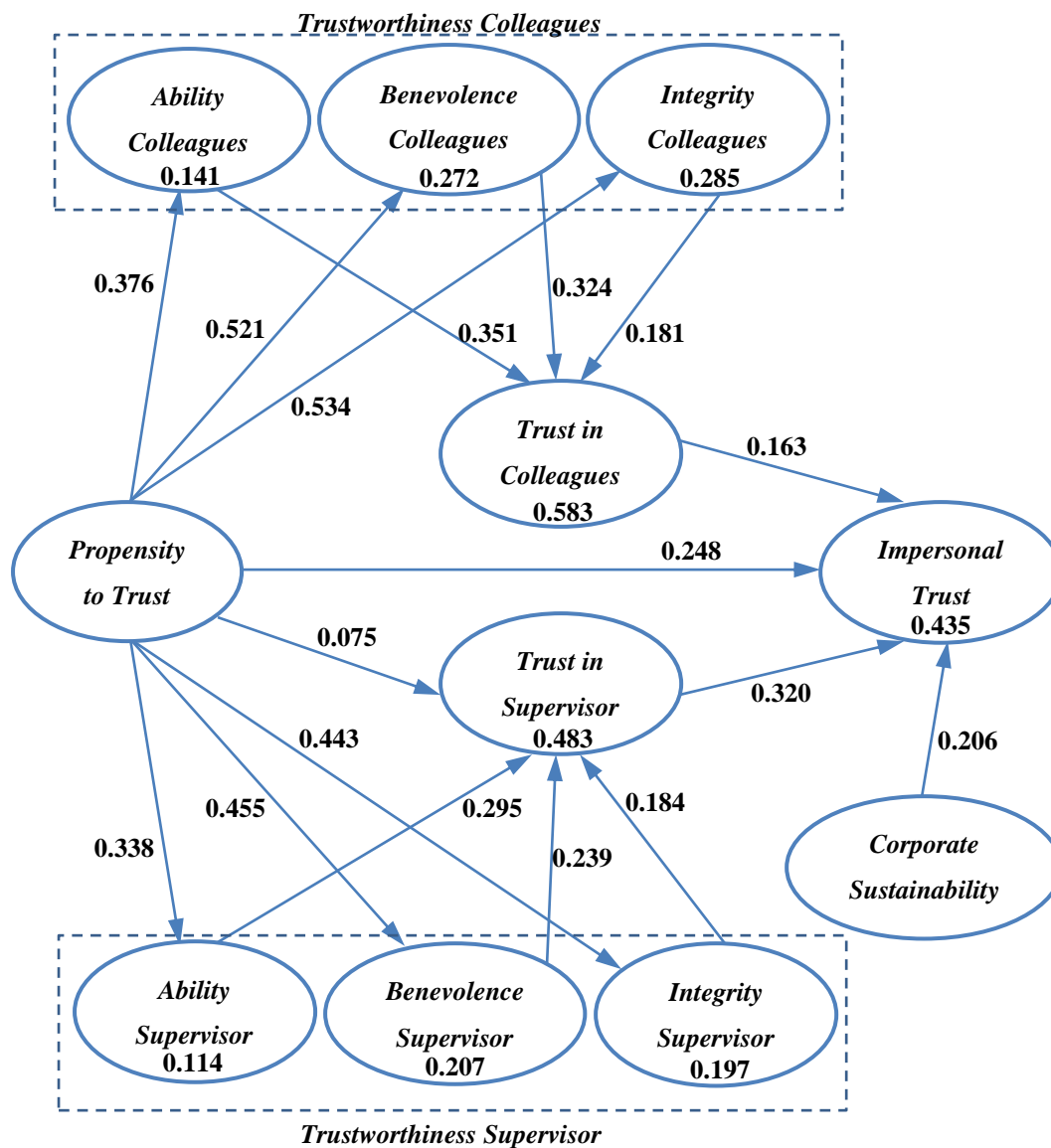


Figure 2: The structural model

Path coefficients presented in Figure 2 represent, as usual, standardized regression coefficients, which connect latent variables and quantify the direct impact of each explanatory variable on the concepts to which it is linked by causality constrained.

	$R^2$	$\beta$	$t$ - statistic	Total effect
	0.142			
Propensity to Trust → Ability Colleagues		0.376	21.26	
	0.273			
Propensity to Trust → Benevolence Colleagues		0.521	34.11	
	0.285			
Propensity to Trust → Integrity Colleagues		0.534	34.00	
	0.583			
Ability Colleagues → Trust in Colleagues		0.351	18.22	
Benevolence Colleagues → Trust in Colleagues		0.324	12.75	
Integrity Colleagues → Trust in Colleagues		0.181	6.63	
Propensity to Trust → Trust in Colleagues				0.398 ( $t = 28.09^*$ )
	0.114			
Propensity to Trust → Ability Supervisor		0.338	19.39	
	0.207			
Propensity to Trust → Benevolence Supervisor		0.455	28.25	
	0.197			
Propensity to Trust → Integrity Supervisor		0.443	26.50	
	0.483			
Ability Supervisor → Trust in Supervisor		0.295	12.90	
Benevolence Supervisor → Trust in Supervisor		0.239	8.93	
Integrity Supervisor → Trust in Supervisor		0.184	5.48	
Propensity to Trust → Trust in Supervisor		0.075	4.63	0.365 ( $t = 20.88^*$ )
	0.435			
Trust in Colleagues → Impersonal Trust		0.163	7.94	
Trust in Supervisor → Impersonal Trust		0.320	15.96	
Propensity to Trust → Impersonal Trust		0.248	13.56	0.430 ( $t = 25.38^*$ )
Corporate Sustainability → Impersonal Trust		0.206	12.66	

Table 2: PLS estimates for the model

The evaluation of obtained path coefficients, with their significance, as well as the  $R^2$  and the total effects, allows us to confirm or reject the hypotheses previously formulated (Table 2).

H1A is supported, in particular propensity to trust is positively related to ability (0.376,  $t = 21.26$ ), benevolence (0.521,  $t = 34.11$ ), and integrity (0.534,  $t = 34$ ) of colleagues, and the three latent variables are well explained with  $R^2$  respectively equal to 0.141, 0.272, 0.285. H1B is also supported, in particular propensity to trust is positively related to ability (0.338,  $t = 13.39$ ), benevolence (0.455,  $t = 28.25$ ), and integrity (0.443,  $t = 26.5$ ) of supervisor, and the three latent variables are well explained with  $R^2$  respectively equal to 0.114, 0.207, 0.197. These important findings confirm the suggestions proposed by Mayer et al. (1995): propensity to trust has an important and differentiated impact on the three dimensions of a generic trustee's trustworthiness. In fact, the relations between trust propensity and colleagues' ability, benevolence, and integrity, and between trust propensity and supervisor's ability, benevolence, and integrity, are all significant.

H2A is not supported, as the relation between propensity to trust and trust in colleagues in saturated model was not significant ( $t = 1.93$ ). On the contrary, H2B, which regards the relation between propensity to trust and trust in supervisor, is supported (0.075,  $t = 4.62$ ). These findings seem not to be consistent with the previous research studies (e.g., Colquitt et al. 2007, Mayer et al. 1995), indeed, in the analysed context and especially with regards to colleagues, propensity to trust has not a significant direct impact on trust when trustworthiness information is available. Considering the direct relation between propensity to trust and trust in supervisor, we can observe that it is certainly higher than that involving trust in colleagues, but, although statistically significant, seems to be quite weak.

H3 is supported, propensity to trust is positively related to impersonal trust (0.248,  $t = 13.56$ ); furthermore, the total effect of propensity to trust to

impersonal trust is equal to 0.43 ( $t = 25.38$ ). This result confirms our hypothesis and empirically demonstrates that, when the amount of information about the trustee are not relevant, as in this case, trust propensity become a significant trust antecedent (Gill, Boies, Finegan, and McNally 2005).

H4A is supported, in particular ability (0.351,  $t = 18.22$ ), benevolence (0.324,  $t = 12.75$ ), and integrity (0.181,  $t = 6.63$ ) of colleagues are positively related to trust in colleagues.  $R^2$  of this last latent variable is equal to 0.583, this value represents the power of the relation between propensity to trust and trust in colleagues only mediated by ability, benevolence, and integrity of colleagues. The total effect of propensity to trust on trust in colleagues is equal to 0.398 ( $t = 28.09$ ). H4B is also supported, in particular ability (0.295,  $t = 12.90$ ), benevolence (0.239,  $t = 8.93$ ), and integrity (0.184,  $t = 5.48$ ) of supervisor are positively related to trust in supervisor.  $R^2$  of this last latent variable is equal to 0.483, this value represents the power of the relation between propensity to trust and trust in supervisor both direct that mediated by ability, benevolence, and integrity of supervisor. The total effect of propensity to trust on trust in supervisor is equal to 0.365 ( $t = 20.88$ ). All these findings confirmed the previous theoretical and empirical studies: in fact, all the three trustworthiness dimensions have unique, important, and combined influence on interpersonal trust (Mayer et al. 1995, Colquitt et al. 2007), both considering colleagues' trustworthiness and supervisor's trustworthiness and their direct impact respectively on trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor. In addition, the total effects of propensity to trust on trust in colleagues (fully mediation) and on trust in supervisor (partial mediation) are statistically significant.

H5A is supported, trust in colleagues is positively related to impersonal trust (0.163,  $t = 7.94$ ). H5B is also supported, trust in supervisor is positively related to impersonal trust (0.32,  $t = 15.96$ ). These findings clearly confirm our initial hypothesis as the direct impacts of the interpersonal forms of trust (trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor) on impersonal trust are significant. On the

one hand, it is confirmed that an employee who trusts in his/her colleagues is willing to consider the co-workers' perceptions as relevant and comply with them, and this helps to have an higher level of impersonal trust. On the other hand, supervisors really seem to represent the organization in the eyes of their employee (Shamir and Lapidot 2003) and high trust in supervisor can lead to higher impersonal trust.

H6 is supported, corporate sustainability is positively related to impersonal trust (0.206,  $t = 12.66$ ). This result emphasizes the role of corporate sustainability in order to predict the impersonal form of trust. In particular, the suggestion of Balmer et al. (2007) is confirmed as clearly relevant: the organizations, which actions are perceived as sustainable, act as "trustees" for the interests of all stakeholders, including employees.

The  $R^2$  of impersonal trust, that represents its relations with the propensity to trust, the trust in colleagues or in supervisor, and corporate sustainability, is equal to 0.435. Since the aim of the proposed model is to explain impersonal trust, this index could be considered as the  $R^2$  of the overall model.

An index of overall goodness of fit, suggested by Amato et al. (2004) and by Tenenhaus et al. (2005), which takes into account both measure that structure side, is the GoF. In the proposed model this index is equal to 0.434. According to the classification of Wetzels et al. (2009), all the previous  $R^2$  and the GoF values are largely acceptable.

## 5. Discussion

In this last chapter, we will analyse the results of our model shown in the previous sections. First, we will illustrate the role of our study, in the context of scientific research, in improving the knowledge about the impersonal trust's antecedent and the differentiation between trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor, considering the different impacts of the relations with their antecedents and outcomes. In this way, we will seek to fill the two knowledge gaps identified in chapter two and also we will analyse the consistency of the previous theoretical and empirical findings with our results. Subsequently, we will show the main managerial implications of our study, linked with the improvement of impersonal trust inside organization. Finally, on the one hand, we will discuss about the principal limitations of our study, on the other hand, we will suggest some open issues which might be studied in the future researches.

### 5.1. Theoretical Implications

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of the main antecedents of impersonal trust. It is surely a relevant issue as it would help to find new ways to increase this variable and then achieve the several positive outcomes connected to it (e.g., job satisfaction, increasing productivity, sharing information, employees' attitude to change, and management by objectives, performance and learning). In particular, the aim is to clarify the role of corporate sustainability, propensity to trust, and trust in colleagues and in supervisor in improving the impersonal form of trust inside the organization. Secondly, the suggested model wants to generalise the previous empirical findings, relying on an extensive probabilistic sample in the European context. For this reason, the relations between propensity to trust,

trustworthiness, and the interpersonal forms of trust are considered, and, as a consequence, Mayer et al. (1995) and Colquitt et al.'s (2007) models are tested.

Prior studies of trust have largely focussed on the antecedents of interpersonal trust (e.g., De Jong et al. 2007, Perrone, Zaheer, and McEvily 2003, Korsgaard et al. 2002, Roussin 2008), and its outcomes (e.g., Redman et al. 2011, Ammeter 2004, Costa 2003, Tan and Tan 2000), not always making a distinction between trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor. As regards to impersonal trust, the large focus of the previous studies is about its outcomes (e.g., Costigan et al. 1998, Kramer 1996, Dirks and Ferrin 2001, Albrecht 2002), while there are few studies about its antecedents. As a consequence, finding new impersonal trust's antecedents is an important knowledge gap to fill.

For this reason, we assessed the positive impact of corporate sustainability, trust in colleagues, trust in supervisor, and propensity to trust on impersonal trust, the role of propensity to trust and trustworthiness (ability, benevolence, and integrity) in predicting the interpersonal forms of trust (trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor), and the impact of trust propensity on perceived trustworthiness.

In this paragraph, the main findings of the study will be discussed, trying to fill the two knowledge gaps identified in chapter two. In particular, we will divide the discussion in two sections: the first one will concern the antecedents of the impersonal trust, the second one will refer to the possibility of considering separately the two types of interpersonal trust.

### **5.1.1. Impersonal Trust's Antecedents**

We remind that the first knowledge gap identified concerns the possible impersonal trust's antecedents and it emphasizes the underrepresentation of this topic.

As seen previously an important impersonal trust's antecedent is the interpersonal trust. In particular, the interpersonal forms of trust, in colleagues and in supervisor, are considered separately and it is important to notice that the positive impact on impersonal trust is confirmed in both the two cases. This important finding contributes to fill the knowledge gap about the possible relation between different kinds of trust, and, on the other hand, allows us to identify new outcomes for the interpersonal forms of trust. Improving interpersonal trust produces a double effect: first, the increase of the traditional outcomes of trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor; second, through the improvement of impersonal trust, thanks to the positive impact of interpersonal trust on it, the rise of the impersonal trust's outcomes.

Considering the direct impact of trust in colleagues on impersonal trust, we can observe that the hypothesis suggested is confirmed as significant. Employees, who trust their co-workers, are willing to trust their organization. As hypothesized by Tan and Lim (2009), the working environment, and subsequently the trust in colleagues, plays an important role in developing impersonal trust. Therefore, this type of interpersonal trust can be considered as a significant impersonal trust's antecedent, as well as an important element if we take into account its traditional organizational outcomes (e.g., co-operative behaviour, knowledge exchanges, creativity).

Another important finding is the positive relation between trust in supervisor and impersonal trust. This is an important confirmation of the suggestion proposed by Shamir and Lapidot (2003) as the supervisor really seems to represent the organization in the eyes of the employees. Considering our results, the experience with the supervisor, seen as the agent of the organization (Strutton, Toma, and Pelton 1993), may be generalized to the whole organization by the employees (Wayne, Shore, and Liden 1997). Therefore, the increase of this type of interpersonal trust is linked to higher impersonal trust. Even in this case, improving the trust in supervisor lead not



only to its traditional positive outcomes (e.g., innovative employee behaviour, task performance, organizational citizenship behaviour), but also to the positive several outcomes of the impersonal form of trust.

Then we analyse the positive impact of corporate sustainability on impersonal trust. Our results show that employee's perceptions of organizational sustainability lead to impersonal trust, and this positive relation seems to be statistically significant. This finding involves two important implications: on the one hand, it contributes to enrich both the trust and the corporate sustainability's literature; on the other hand, it gives the company (and the management) a valid reason for being or becoming sustainable, whose numerous benefits go well beyond the sole trust's issue. In addition, this positive result becomes even more significant if we consider that recently the role of corporate sustainability has often been questioned. In particular, there is a recent stream of literature arguing that sustainability should be considered only as a fad or a catch phrase (e.g., Burritt and Schaltegger 2010). As showed by our results, at least concerning the trust topic, sustainability can't be considered only a fad as it is significantly related to impersonal trust and therefore it help to reach the organizational benefits connected to this form of trust.

Our results also show that another important impersonal trust's antecedent is propensity to trust, generally considered and studied as an important antecedent of the interpersonal form of trust. This trustor's characteristic, and its positive relation with impersonal trust, confirms our hypothesis. In particular, propensity to trust seems to be an important trust's predictor when the context considered is unfamiliar (Bigley and Pearce 1998), as in this case, as it involves the impersonal elements of the organization. These findings are a further confirmation of the importance of trust propensity in improving trust inside the organization and, in addition, our empirical results are consistent with those of the previous studies. For example, Searle et al.

(2011) demonstrated that “employees, who are more trusting in nature, tend to trust their employer more”.

In conclusion, as regards to the first knowledge gap identified, we can analyse the direct impacts of each impersonal trust’s antecedent, compared to the others.

As it is possible to see in the structural model through the path coefficients, the greater direct effect on impersonal trust is that of trust in supervisor (0.320), followed by propensity to trust (0.248), corporate sustainability (0.206), and trust in colleagues (0.163). This empirical evidences show that the different positive relations, although all statistically significant, do not have the same impact on impersonal trust. As a consequence, if we had to choose a single lever available in order to improve the impersonal form of trust, first of all we should select the one concerning the trust in supervisor. The last lever on which to act, among the four considered, is the trust in colleagues, whose impact on impersonal trust is lower than that of trust in supervisor. This is a first demonstration of the relevance of considering separately the two interpersonal forms of trust, as if the effects on the same outcomes are different, the two constructs are clearly different. A reasonable explanation of this result can be found starting from the previous considerations: if the supervisor represents the whole organization in the eyes of employees (Shamir and Lapidot 2003), it is clear how the effect of the colleagues in symbolising the organization is weaker, even if significant. Considering the other two variables, propensity to trust has surely a significant effect on impersonal trust but, at the same time, it is difficult to act on this individual characteristic; on the other hand, corporate sustainability has a slightly lower impact, but it is certainly a variable easier to improve. It is important to emphasize that, if we consider the total effect of propensity to trust on impersonal trust, and not only the direct one, trust propensity will become the most important impersonal trust’s antecedent. The total effect of

propensity on impersonal trust corresponds to 0.430, which is stronger than that of trust in supervisor.

### **5.1.2. The Two Interpersonal Forms of Trust**

After analysing the different direct impacts of corporate sustainability, propensity to trust, trust in colleagues and in supervisor, on impersonal trust, now we focus on the second knowledge gap identified. We remember that it concerns the possibility of considering separately the two different types of interpersonal trust. In particular, our objective is to test the Mayer et al. (1995) and Colquitt et al.'s (2007) models, in the European context and through an extensive data sample, making a distinction between trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor. For these reasons, with these results we will try to fill the second knowledge gap identified.

Considering our results, all the relations suggested by the scholars aforementioned are confirmed; the only exception is the direct impact of trust in colleagues on impersonal trust, whose relevance is not significant and, for this reason, the relation has been eliminated from the model.

In particular, the positive impact of the three trustworthiness' dimensions on the two interpersonal forms of trust, suggested in our hypotheses, has been confirmed: ability, benevolence, and integrity, have unique, significant, and combined influence (Mayer et al. 1995, Colquitt et al. 2007) both on trust in colleagues and on trust in supervisor. Considering our results, it is possible to notice that the element whose impact is the most important is ability (competence), both for trust in colleagues (0.351) and trust in supervisor (0.295). This finding demonstrates that trustee's ability, which implies a cognitive calculation of competence, skills and knowledge (Colquitt et al. 2007), is the most important trustworthiness' feature which can influence the trustor's level of trust inside the organization. On the contrary, our results show that the integrity, which corresponds to the perception that the trustee

adheres to a set of principles acceptable by the trustor (Mayer et al. 1995), has the weakest effect on interpersonal trust, both for trust in colleagues (0.181) and trust in supervisor (0.184). It is surely an important result if we consider the difference between the impact of ability and that of integrity on the interpersonal forms of trust. This finding suggests that, in a working relation, the trustor take into account the perceived trustee's competences and skills much more than the perceived trustee's moral integrity. Benevolence, the perception of a positive orientation of the trustee toward the trustor (Mayer et al. 1995), has an intermediate effect on trust, between those of ability and integrity. In this case, the impacts on the two interpersonal forms of trust are different: in fact, the effect of colleagues' perceived benevolence on trust in colleagues (0.324) is stronger than that of supervisor's perceived benevolence on trust in supervisor (0.239). At least with regard to our sample and considering the three trustworthiness' dimensions, benevolence proves to be the most trustee-specific element. It is important to emphasize that the relevance of the impact of trustworthiness' dimensions on trust cannot be generalised in every situation, country, and, specially, cultural context. Indeed, as we said previously, our results are specific for the European context, very different, for example, from the Chinese cultural context analysed by Tan and Lim (2009). Their results show that the impact of ability on trust in colleagues is not significant, but this finding is not consistent with our and Colquitt et al.'s (2007) results: the importance of ability in predicting trust is very significant in a western context, albeit with the differences between the European context and the North American one.

Now we take into account the relation between propensity to trust and the three components of trustworthiness, considering both the colleagues and the supervisor. Our results show that all the relations hypothesised are proved: propensity to trust, the trustor's general disposition to trust other without any prior information about the trustee (Mayer et al. 1995), is confirmed to be an

important antecedent of all the trustworthiness' dimensions. In particular, it is important to notice that the direct impacts of propensity to trust on benevolence (0.521 for the colleagues and 0.455 for the supervisor) and on integrity (0.534 for the colleagues and 0.443 for the supervisor) are similar and rather stronger than the effect of trust propensity on ability, both for colleagues (0.376) and supervisor (0.338). This finding shows how the ability, although it corresponds to a trustor's perception, is less conditioned by the individual dispositional characteristics of the trustor as it is a trustee's element attributed by the trustor. Instead, the perceptions of benevolence and integrity are strictly connected to the character of the trustor, and, therefore, to his propensity to trust: on the one hand, as the assessment of benevolence, and consequently the trustee's behaviour towards the trustor, is influenced by the disposition of the trustor; on the other hand, as integrity involves that the trustee's set of values should be consistent with those of the trustor.

Finally we analyse the direct impact of propensity to trust on the two interpersonal forms of trust. As seen in the previous sections, the direct relation between propensity to trust and trust in colleagues is the only one which does not result significant. Moreover, we have to consider that also the relation between trust propensity and trust in supervisor is weak (0.075). This result is not consistent with that of Colquitt et al. (2007) but many suggestions in the literature let us think that the direct relation between propensity and the different forms of trust might depend on the type of trustee. In particular, propensity to trust becomes an important trust antecedent when trustees are unfamiliar. If we also consider the direct impact of trust propensity on impersonal trust, we can observe that the relevance of trustor's propensity to trust, as a direct trust antecedent, grows when the distance between trustor and trustee increases. In fact, the direct impact of trust propensity on trust in colleagues is not significant, on trust in supervisor is 0.075 and on impersonal trust is 0.248. This finding is a generalisation of the study of Payne (2003),

where it is demonstrated that general disposition to trust has a stronger relation to trust in senior managers in the industry than that to trust in line managers, as the direct experience and the expectations which people have of their line manager strongly influences trust and overrides the dispositional factors. This effect is probably even stronger with the colleagues with whom a trustor has a direct, more informal, and “familiar” relation. In a familiar context, as that concerning the trustor and its co-workers, the knowledge of the trustees seems to make irrelevant the direct effect of trust propensity. Summarizing, the direct relation between propensity to trust and trust become increasingly strong as the distance between trustor and trustee increases. This happens as trust propensity may be the key driver of the form and shape of the cognitive leap that characterized the cognitive element which is present in trust (Lewis and Weigert 1985, Colquitt et al. 2007) and the larger this leap becomes, the more important will be the role of propensity to trust for facing this leap. The previous considerations change significantly if it is considered the total effect of propensity to trust on the two interpersonal forms of trust, and not only the direct effect. Although the direct positive relation between propensity to trust and trust in colleagues is not significant, the total effect, fully mediated by the three trustworthiness’ dimensions, is greater (0.398) than the total effect of the relation between trust propensity and trust in supervisor (0.365), partial mediated by trustworthiness. Since the relations between trust propensity and colleagues’ trustworthiness, and this second variable and trust in colleagues, are greater than those concerning the supervisor, it is reasonable to expect the aforementioned finding. For these reasons, as regards to colleagues, the only direct effect that we have to consider, is that of the trustworthiness’ dimensions which fully mediate the trust propensity. While, considering the supervisor, the direct effect of trustworthiness’ dimensions is not the only one, as the trust propensity has also a direct effect on trust in supervisor. Whatever the effect considered (direct or total), these findings represent another confirmation that

trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor are different constructs and have diverse relations with their antecedents. As a consequence, the two variables have to be always considered separately: this finding seems to fill the second knowledge gap identified.

## **5.2. Managerial Implications**

After analysing the main results and findings of the study, in this section we will suggest the principal managerial implications of our model.

Initially, we analyse the main implications concerning the first knowledge gap identified. For this reason, our aim is to suggest the main levers usable in order to improve the impersonal form of trust.

We remind that increasing the impersonal trust is surely a relevant issue inside the organization as its positive outcomes are several: for example, high level of impersonal trust leads to employees' attitude to change, increasing productivity, job satisfaction, management by objectives, performance and learning, and sharing information. Since this study wants to contribute to understand new ways to improve the impersonal trust, we analysed the relations between the different types of trust (impersonal and interpersonal), the role of sustainability and the impact of the more traditional antecedents. It is important to emphasize that acting on propensity to trust, differently from the other three antecedents, influences not only the impersonal trust, but also trust in supervisor and trust in colleagues. If we consider the total effect (direct, and mediated by the other variables), propensity to trust becomes the most important antecedent of impersonal trust. Starting from our results, we list the main managerial implications and actions according to their importance.

Firstly, in order to improve the impersonal trust it is possible to act on propensity to trust. But we have to remind that trust propensity is a trustor's personal characteristic and it cannot be easily controlled by the management.

This lever implies the ability of assess people's propensity to trust in recruitment. Despite this consideration, it is important to emphasize that hiring employees who have a high propensity to trust may become a key driver in order to increase the general level of trust in organization, considering the effect both on interpersonal and impersonal trust.

Secondly, we found that the relation between trust in supervisor and impersonal trust is statistically significant and the first variable has a direct positive impact on the second one. If the aim is to improve the impersonal trust, managers can act on the antecedents of trust in supervisor, such as the three trustworthiness' dimensions, the propensity to trust etc. For example, the rise of the engagement in positive and transparent communication (an important antecedent of trust in supervisor) produces a multiple effect: on the one hand, the increase of trust in leader and its positive outcomes (e.g., accuracy in performances, reduce the cost of monitoring, innovative employees' behaviours); on the other hand, due to the direct impact of trust in supervisor on impersonal trust, the rise of this second variable and its several positive outcomes.

Thirdly, it is confirmed that the impact of corporate sustainability on impersonal trust is statistically significant, even when the trustor is an internal stakeholder as an employee. From a managerial point of view, it is surely a considerable finding as it gives the company a further valid reason to pay close attention to the sustainability topic. Our results show that the investments on corporate sustainability lead to trust inside the organization and, as a consequence, they become increasingly important in order to create and develop better inner workings. For example, taking into account the environmental ratings (an important antecedent of sustainability), if the organization is able to improve this element, the perception of the corporate sustainability clearly will increase together with its outcomes (e.g., attractiveness to institutional investors, operational efficiencies, organizational



reputation), but that's not all. In addition, also impersonal trust will increase, leading to the improvement of one or more of its outcomes.

Lastly, the relation between trust in colleagues and impersonal trust suggests that the first variable has a direct and positive impact on the second one. Also in this case, in order to improve the impersonal trust, it is possible to act on the antecedents of the element connected to it. In particular, for example, the increase of one of the three dimensions of the colleagues' trustworthiness produces a multiple effect: on the one hand, the rise of trust in colleagues and its positive outcomes (e.g., attitudinal commitment, co-operative behaviours, perceived task performance); on the other hand, due to the relation between trust in co-workers and impersonal trust, the increase of impersonal trust and its several positive outcomes.

Summarizing, if the management is able to use one or more of these levers, the benefits for its organization may be very useful in order to improve the overall results of the company.

Now we analyse the main implications concerning the second knowledge gap identified. For this reason, our aim is to suggest the different levers usable in order to improve the two diverse interpersonal forms of trust.

The first direct effect on interpersonal trust is that of the three trustworthiness' dimensions. In particular, trustworthiness is more important in predicting trust in colleagues than predicting trust in supervisor. As a consequence, improving the trustworthiness' dimensions becomes a key factor for managers, mainly for increasing trust in colleagues.

Also taking into account the total effect of propensity to trust on the two interpersonal forms of trust, if the managers are able to improve the trust propensity, the positive impact will be higher on trust in colleagues. However, the effect on trust in supervisor (direct and mediated) will be also important.

We remind that, in addition to the antecedents studied in our model, other managerial levers can be considered. For example, it is possible to

improve trust in colleagues encouraging shared information and cooperation, and increase trust in supervisor through the profit sharing with employees and long-term time perspective.

### **5.3. Limitations and Future Research**

It is important to mention certain limitations of this study, in order to understand the main open issues which should be studied in the future research.

First of all, we have to consider that all the data are obtained from a single questionnaire; therefore, it is possible that the true relationships between the antecedents and outcomes could be overestimated by the common method variance, which is a result of the utilization of the same measure's method for the assessment of different trustees' trust perceptions. This is an important limitation of the research as it is a self-reported survey from one source and at one point in time.

As a consequence, the second limitation concerns the level of analysis which is only individual. Therefore, the results of the survey may be affected by the singular perceptions of the individuals and, maybe, considering the team (or a group of colleagues) as the level of analysis, the results obtained might have been different and the suggested hypothesis could have not been confirmed.

Another important limitation concerns the characteristic of our data sample. We have to remember that the context of analysis is the European one and so the results might have been different if we had considered other contexts, such as the Asian or the American one, as the cultural environment can have an important influence on the individuals' perceptions, and therefore on the proposed model.

Previous studies, when considering the impersonal trust, have often considered the organization's trustworthiness (ability, benevolence, and

integrity) as impersonal trust's antecedent. Our survey does not investigate these three dimensions and this lack could be considered as a further limitation of our study, especially taking into account the direct relation between propensity to trust and impersonal trust. If we had considered the three elements of organization's trustworthiness, this relation would have been moderated by them.

On the basis of the limitations presented above, we will advance specific ideas for future research.

As regards to the first limitation identified, we remember that in our study all the variables are evaluated in a particular instant and the impact of changes has not been considered. Future researches should take into account the time factor: in particular, after analysing the results of the model in a certain instant, the effect of the change of one of the trust's antecedents on the entire model, and especially on impersonal trust, should be evaluated, after a certain period of time. Moreover, in order to overcome the problem of the single source (especially for the corporate sustainability and for the impersonal form of trust), future studies could consider not only the employees, but also other stakeholders, inside and outside the organization, and secondary sources, such as the "sustainability report". This type of research can lead to results less influenced by the perceptions of a single individual and, therefore, more reliable.

As said previously, in this study the level of analysis is only individual. Due to this fact, future studies should test our model considering the team (increasingly relevant inside the organization) as the level of analysis, in order to understand the differences between the perceptions of a group of colleagues and the individual perceptions. These variances could be discovered as not significant, and consequently our findings could be generalised to another level of study, or maybe considerable, and in this case the model would be valid only for the individual level of analysis.

One of the limitations suggested concerns the nationality of the population examined. Since our data sample considers only the European population, future research should analyse other countries in order to understand the impact of the cultural background in the relations between the different forms of trust, the roles of propensity and corporate sustainability in predicting trust.

As highlighted previously, our survey does not investigate the role of organization's ability, benevolence, and integrity. For this reason, future research should investigate the role of these variables as impersonal trust's antecedents. In particular, it should be considered the direct impact of propensity to trust on impersonal trust, also with the mediation of the three trustworthiness' dimensions.

Finally, we do not consider possible moderators or mediators among the relations between impersonal trust's antecedents and the impersonal form of trust. As regards to the interpersonal trust, its relation with the impersonal trust should be further analysed, considering some moderators such as employee's age, gender, qualification, type of employment contract, placement, and organizations' size, business area and other contextual elements. Instead, considering corporate sustainability, future research should introduce some moderators in the relation concerning the impersonal trust, such as financial performance, firm size and relationship with the public, and some mediators, such as firm's reputation, firm's intangible resources and organizational pride. Finally, this study is surely a starting point in evaluating the corporate sustainability and its positive relation with impersonal trust, but this relation has to be generalised in other contexts and tested in different specific business areas.

## 5.4. Conclusions

Our thesis' purpose was to study the antecedents of impersonal trust and enrich the literature concerning the differences between diverse forms of interpersonal trust. Results suggest that corporate sustainability, propensity to trust, and the interpersonal forms of trust are key factors which should be considered by the manager in order to increase the impersonal trust. In addition, we found that trust in colleagues and trust in supervisor have always to be considered separately. These are important topics in order to understand how improving the inner workings of the organizations and, consequently, to increase organizational performance and create competitive advantages. Our findings are very relevant and, contributing to the enrichment of the trust literature, they give manager important tools useful in order to create and develop trust inside the organization.

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# Appendix

## Questionnaire on Employee perception of Corporate Sustainability

*“We would like to ask you some questions about to what extent you think your company is moving toward sustainability, intended as the dynamic balancing of economic performances, social performances, and environmental performances. Please answer the following in terms of how it really is in your company, not how you would prefer it to be.”*

What do you believe is the status of sustainability in your companies' agenda, in terms of management attention and investment, today?	Never considered for the agenda (1)	Excluded from the agenda, because viewed as a passing fad (2)	Temporarily on the agenda, but not core (3)	On the agenda permanently, but not core (4)	Already permanent fixture and core strategic consideration (5)
How has your organization's commitment towards sustainability, in terms of management attention and investment, changed in the past three years?	Significantly decreased (1)	Somewhat decreased (2)	No changes (3)	Somewhat increased (4)	Significantly increased (5)
How do you expect your organization's commitment towards sustainability, in terms of management attention and investment, to change over the next three years?	Will decrease significantly (1)	Will decrease somewhat (2)	No changes (3)	Will increase somewhat (4)	Will increase significantly (5)

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