Teacher’s trust
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Chapter 6

Conclusions & Discussion

Schools need committed employees who are willing to ‘go the extra mile’ to reach the school’s goals and objectives (e.g. Somech & Ron, 2007). As social exchange (Blau, 1964) may be an important trigger for such attitudes and behavior and trust may play a central role in social exchange, the aim of this dissertation was to contribute to the knowledge in four areas: the conceptualization of individual teacher’s trust, the ways a school’s management may foster teacher’s trust, the consequences teacher’s trust may have for desirable teacher outcomes, and the role of teacher’s trust in (agents of) the school in teachers’ social exchange relationship with (agents of) their school. Accordingly, the following research questions were addressed:

- How can individual teacher’s trust be conceptualized and measured?
- How do current organizational characteristics of VET schools relate to teacher’s trust?
- How does teacher’s trust relate to his/her self-efficacy, affective organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior?
- Which role does teacher’s trust play in the relationship between current organizational characteristics, which may be part of the teacher’s social exchange relationship with (agents of) the school, and teacher’s self-efficacy, affective organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior?

To find answers to these questions four studies were conducted that focused on the conceptualization and measurement of interpersonal trust, particularly in educational research (chapter 2), the relationship between a school’s high-commitment HRM, particularly structural teacher empowerment, and teacher’s trust (chapter 3), the relationship between the school’s structure and teacher’s psychological distance from management to teacher’s trust in management as well as the relationship between psychological distance and two aspects of the school’s HRM, specifically participation in decision making and top-down communication (chapter 4), and the relationship between the school’s climate and teacher’s trust and the social exchange relationship...
between teachers and their school (chapter 5). Further these studies focused on the relationship between teacher’s trust and desirable teacher outcomes, specifically self-efficacy (chapter 3), affective organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (chapter 4 and 5).

In the following the research questions are answered and discussed, based on the results of the four studies and findings from former research. Suggestions for future research are made. Further, implications for educational practice and methodological considerations are given.

**How can individual teacher’s trust be conceptualized and measured?**

Interpersonal trust is conceptualized and defined in many different ways. Nonetheless, organizational research is increasingly adopting the view that interpersonal trust includes two key elements, positive expectations of the intentions or behaviors of the other party and the willingness to be vulnerable/take a risk in the relationship with another party. Accordingly, the most cited definitions in organizational research include these two elements, such as the definition of Rousseau et al. (1998, p. 395), who define interpersonal trust as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability [to another] based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another”. Consensus is also lacking on which elements are part of trust and which are either antecedents or consequences. Although empirical evidence is scarce, in theory the antecedents of trust can be summarized in five different categories: the trustor’s propensity to trust, characteristics of the trust referent (trustee) that determine his/her trustworthiness, the quality and nature of the trustor-trustee relationship, macro-level cues, and domain- and situational factors. As most researchers seem to agree that trust is a psychological state or an attitude, interpersonal trust is separated from its behavioral consequences, such as risk-taking behaviors and voluntary extra-role behaviors. In educational studies, the conceptualization of teacher’s trust is less fragmented, as most studies relate to the definition of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999, p. 189), who define teachers’ trust as “an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open”. The main difference of this conceptualization to, for example, the one of Rousseau et al. is that it relates the willingness to be vulnerable
exclusively to (confidence about) characteristics of the trustee. This excludes other sources of trust, such as the trustor’s propensity to trust or the quality and nature of the trustor-trustee relationship. In accordance with the latest discussion on interpersonal trust, in this dissertation teacher’s trust is defined in line with Rousseau et al.’s definition of interpersonal trust. A clear distinction is made between trust itself and its sources and attitudinal and behavioral consequences.

In organizational research the measurement of interpersonal trust with psychometric techniques is very fragmented. A large number of different measurement instruments has been used. Two reviews of the measurement of interpersonal trust in organizational literature (cf. Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006; McEvily & Tortoriello, 2011) identified several shortcomings of most existing instruments, such as a lack of (evidence of) construct validity, the operationalization of trust as a one-dimensional construct and the wording of the items, often including the word ‘trust’. In educational research the measurement of teacher’s trust is less fragmented as most studies made use of the original or slightly adopted instrument of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999, 2003). This instrument has been shown to have good internal validity. However, as many trust instruments used in organizational studies, it (mainly) measures trust as the trustor’s perception of the trustee’s trustworthiness. This raises concerns about its construct validity as trust is usually conceptualized to include the willingness of the trustor to render him-/herself vulnerable. In addition, trust is a characteristic of the trustor and not, as trustworthiness, a characteristic of the trustee. Theoretically trustworthiness and trust are thus two different concepts. There are also some empirical indications that the two constructs are distinct regarding their outcomes. As the instrument of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran solely focuses on the trustworthiness of the trustee, other aspects that may influence the trustor’s willingness to be vulnerable to the trustee are neglected. Furthermore, in educational research teacher’s trust is mainly analyzed on a collective level as the instrument of Hoy and Tschannen-Moran measures faculty trust not trust of the individual teacher. Although collective levels of trust seem to exist (e.g. Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2009), when individual teacher’s attitudes and behaviors are the focus, as in this dissertation, it seems more appropriate to measure trust on individual level.

The reported findings called for the use of a different measurement instrument of teacher’s trust in this dissertation. Five additional trust measurement instrument used in educational studies were identified and analyzed. However, none of these
instruments was in line with the current conceptualization of trust as employed in this dissertation. Consequently, a high-quality interpersonal trust measurement instrument (cf. Gillespie, 2003) used in organizational research, that fitted this conceptualization was further developed and verified to measure Dutch VET school teacher’s trust in the teacher team and the immediate supervisor. It showed good reliability and theoretical as well as empirical construct validity. The measurement instrument measuring teacher’s trust in higher management was constructed differently, measuring the teacher’s perception of higher management’s trustworthiness. As teachers usually do not have interpersonal relationships with higher management, their possibilities to render themselves vulnerable to higher management are limited, making a different approach to measure teacher’s trust in higher management necessary. In line with theory about the conceptualization of interpersonal trust (e.g. Dietz & Den Hartog, 2006; Meyer et al., 1995) and findings from former research (e.g. Hoy et al., 2006; Hoy et al., 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998), the findings from this thesis show that teacher’s trust in different trust referents within the school seems to have different antecedents and consequences.

How do current organizational characteristics of VET schools relate to teacher’s trust?

The focus of this dissertation was on the relationship between (macro-level) organizational characteristics, particularly characteristics of Dutch VET school’s HRM, structure and culture, and teacher’s trust in (agents of) the school and teacher’s social exchange relationship (Blau, 1964) with (agents of) the school. Based on social exchange theory, it was argued that several organizational characteristics might feel as benefits to teachers and might signal to teacher’s that they are trusted and valued and that they may therefore enhance teacher’s trust and trigger teacher’s social exchange relationships. The findings of this dissertation indicate that several organizational characteristics indeed may relate to teacher’s trust and social exchange. Teacher’s trust in the different trust referents, specifically the teacher team, the immediate supervisor and higher management, corresponded with the organizational characteristics included in this study to different degrees.

Teacher’s trust in the teacher team seems to be positively related to teachers’ on-task and learning-oriented collaboration. This finding supports former research
results in educational research, which also indicate a positive relationship between teachers’ collaboration and their trust in colleagues (Demir, 2015; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; 2004), teacher’s professionalism, including that teachers work cooperatively with one another, and teachers’ trust in colleagues (e.g. Hoy et al., 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Tschannen-Moran, 2009) and a professional community, including reflective dialogue among teachers, joint problem-solving and “peer collaboration in which teachers engage in actual shared work”, and teachers’ trust in colleagues (Bryk et al., 1999, p. 753; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). As Hoy et al. (2002, p. 47) conclude, “open, supportive and cooperative teacher behaviors are the bedrock of faculty trust in colleagues”. As argued, trust and collaboration are likely to reinforce each other. Further, some aspects of structural teacher empowerment seem to enhance teacher’s trust in the teacher team, via enhanced collaboration. Particularly, participation in educational decisions and opportunities for professional growth seem to be positively related to teacher’s trust in the teacher team, via enhanced learning-oriented collaboration, whereas participation in educational and financial decisions, opportunities for professional growth and team autonomy about administrative tasks seem to be positively related to teacher’s trust in the teacher team, via enhanced on-task collaboration (chapter 3). In addition, a supportive climate seems to be positively related to teacher’s trust in the teacher team (chapter 5).

Teacher’s trust in the immediate supervisor also seems to positively relate to structural teacher empowerment, particularly to the teacher’s opportunities for professional development and the teacher team’s autonomy about administrative tasks (chapter 3). A supportive and fair climate as well as teachers’ on-task collaboration seem to affect teacher’s trust in the supervisor (chapter 3 and 5). On the contrary, having different work-related values than the supervisor (psychological distance) seems to reduce teacher’s trust in the supervisor. Participation in educational decisions and adequacy and openness of top-down communication seems to reduce teacher’s psychological distance to the supervisor (chapter 4).

Also teacher’s trust in higher management was positively related to several aspects of structural teacher empowerment, particularly to their participation in financial decisions, their opportunities for professional development and the teacher team’s autonomy about educational tasks (chapter 3). Further, a supportive and fair climate and teachers’ on-task collaboration corresponded positively with teacher’s
trust in higher management (chapter 3 and 5), whereas teacher’s perceived psychological distance from higher management seems to reduce teacher’s trust in higher management. Participation in financial and educational decisions and adequacy and openness of top-down communication seemed to reduce teacher’s psychological distance to higher management (chapter 4).

The findings indicate that commitment-oriented HR practices, particularly participation in decision making, professional autonomy and opportunities for professional development as well as a collaborative, supportive and fair climate indeed seem to enhance teachers trust in (agents) of the school. As argued, these organizational characteristics might signal to teachers that they are valued and trusted and by doing so, they might help to satisfy the employees’ basic needs, i.e. the need for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (e.g. Van den Broeck et al., 2008). This seems to enhance teacher’s positive attitudes towards (agents of) the school.

How does teacher’s trust relate to his/her self-efficacy, affective organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior?

The findings of this dissertation indicate that teacher’s trust is positively related to teacher’s self-efficacy, affective organizational commitment (AOC) as well as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). The teacher’s trust referent seems to be of particular importance as primarily teacher’s trust in the teacher team seems to relate to attitudes and behaviors of teachers included in this study. Teacher’s trust in the teacher team seems to relate to teacher’s self-efficacy, whereas teacher’s trust in the supervisor and higher management does not (chapter 3). Although teacher’s trust in the supervisor seems to relate positively to AOC, OCB towards colleagues and OCB regarding information, and teacher’s trust in higher management to AOC (chapter 4), this link seems to disappear when teacher’s trust in the teacher team is considered simultaneously (chapter 5). This indicates that teacher’s trust depends to some degree on sources that are independent from the trustee. In line with theory, these sources may be the trustor’s propensity to trust or macro-level cues. OCB regarding extra tasks did not correlate with teacher’s trust in any of the trust referents (chapter 4 and 5).
These findings partly contradict with former findings as former research found positive links between teachers' trust in the principle and their self-efficacy (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999) AOC and OCB (e.g. Zeinabadi & Salehi, 2011). Furthermore, former studies in other disciplines found a link between employees' trust in the supervisor and their OCB (e.g. Ayree et al., 2002; Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). These studies, however, did not include trust in colleagues. The findings underline the importance of being specific about the trust referent in research on trust and measuring trust in different trust referents simultaneously.

The significance of teacher’s trust in the teacher team may be related to the specific context of this research. As discussed, VET schools are team-based organizations with usually some decision making power granted to teacher teams and large spans of control (Groenenberg & Visser, 2011; Hermanussen & Thomsen, 2011). This puts management on a greater distance to teachers than in schools or organizations were (teams of) employees have less autonomy and spans of control are smaller. Accordingly, the influence of management on the daily work of VET teachers may be rather limited and, consequently, their impact on the teacher’s overall judgment of the school as well. Furthermore, team-based organizations are usually characterized by shared control and empowerment of employees (Seibert et al., 2011; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007). In such environments, employees are expected to work more collaboratively with each other, to be more self-directing and to be less reliant on the supervisor (Ford & Seers, 2006). This indicates that trust between teachers may be particularly important for teacher to feel committed to the organization and to ‘go the extra mile’. In addition, managers in VET do not always have competencies in teaching as they may come from different disciplines than teaching (Karsten, 2016). This might reduce their contribution to strengthening teachers’ teaching-related self-efficacy. The significant role the context may play for the consequences of teacher’s trust, highlights the need for paying sufficient attention to the context in which research is conducted.

Which role does teacher’s trust play in the relationship between current organizational characteristics, which may be part of the teacher’s social exchange relationship with (agents of) the school, and teacher’s self-efficacy, affective organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior?
As argued, interpersonal trust may play a key role in the social exchange relationship between teachers and (agents of) their school. The findings of this dissertation indicate that indeed teacher’s trust in the school plays a mediating role between several organizational characteristics and teacher outcomes. However, in relation to the teacher outcomes included in this study primarily teacher’s trust in the teacher team seems to matter. Teacher’s trust in the teacher team seems to play a mediating role between several organizational characteristics and teacher’s OCB, AOC and self-efficacy.

The findings show that the relationships between a supportive climate, conceptualized as perceived organizational support, and teacher’s OCB towards colleagues and OCB regarding information are mediated by trust in the teacher team. The relationship between a supportive climate and teacher’s AOC is (partly) mediated by trust in the teacher team (chapter 5). Furthermore, the relationships between elements of structural teacher empowerment and teacher’s self-efficacy seem to be mediated by trust in the teacher team. Particularly, participation in educational decisions and opportunities for professional growth seem to relate to teacher’s self-efficacy via teacher’s trust in the teacher team and enhanced learning-oriented and on-task collaboration. Participation in financial decision and team autonomy about administrative tasks seem to relate to teacher’s self-efficacy via trust in the teacher team and enhanced on-task collaboration (chapter 3).

The results of this dissertation indicate that organizational characteristics that might initiate the teacher’s social exchange relationship with (agents of) the school by providing possible benefits to the teacher and by signalizing that (agents of) the school trusts and cares for the teacher, seem to enhance the teacher’s trust in (agents of) the school. However, for the development of teacher’s affective commitment and his/her organizational citizenship behavior, predominantly trust in the teacher team seems to be important. This indicates that VET school teachers primarily have social exchange relationships with members of the teacher team. The supervisor as well as higher management seem less important for VET school teachers as partners in social exchange. As discussed, the organizational structure of Dutch VET schools, team-based and large spans of control, may be part of the explanation. Particularly in the case of higher management, absence of personal interaction may simply hinder social exchange relationships to develop. A more distant or even abstract entity is probably a much less significant exchange factor for
in-role and extra-role behaviors than the immediate colleagues (Tremblay, Cloutier, Simard, Chênevert, & Vandenberghe, 2010). In addition, the motivation for teachers to engage in social exchange relationships with management might be smaller than in other organizations. Differences in the fields of activity between teachers and managers, some decision making power granted to teacher teams as well as limited formal means for managers to appreciate extra effort, such as an increase in salary or promotion, might diminish the motivation of teachers for social exchange with management. However, as OCB in its aggregate promotes the functioning of the organization, the question arises whether it matters for the success of a school which particular social exchange relationship generates teacher’s OCB as long as teachers do engage in OCB?

Previous research suggests that the social exchange partner might matter for the type of OCB. Former research findings (cf. McAllister, 1995; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990) indicate that trust in the supervisor seems to be linked to OCB meant for the supervisor, such as altruism and professional conscience, and trust in colleagues to OCB meant for colleagues, such as helping colleagues. The findings of this dissertation support this suggestion, as, for example, the willingness of teachers to voluntarily carry out extra tasks, does not seem to be related to their social exchange relationships with other teachers. The implications of these findings for the management of schools, particularly Dutch VET schools, are discussed in the following section.

Although the findings of this dissertation indicate that it is predominantly the social exchange relationships Dutch VET school teachers have with members of their teacher team that relates to their AOC and OCB, this certainly does not mean that there is no social exchange between teachers and management. Perhaps teachers reciprocate with behavior that was not included in this study. Previous research (e.g. Bryk & Schneider, 1996; Geijsel et al., 2003) has, for example, indicated that the quality for teacher-manager relationship relates to teacher’s commitment to and effort for school reform. In addition, teacher’s trust in management may be one of the sources for teacher’s trust in the teacher team as it may serve as a macro-level cue to teachers that members of the school can be trusted. As discussed, macro-level cues may be one of the sources of interpersonal trust (e.g. Dietz & Den Hartog). More research would be helpful in this respect. An interesting direction would, for
example, be the role of teacher’s trust in higher management for the development of teacher’s trust in colleagues.

Implications for educational practice

As VET school teacher’s trust in the teacher team seems to be of particular importance, it is worthwhile to consider how trust among teachers can be stimulated by the school’s management. Very little is known about the possibilities of the school’s management to actually influence teacher’s trust in the teacher team as research on collegial trust is very limited, particularly research on the relation between teachers’ work context and their level of trust in colleagues (Lau & Liden, 2008; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). Based on theory, it can be assumed that interpersonal trust has several sources, specifically the trustor’s propensity to trust, characteristics of the trust referent (trustee) that determine his/her trustworthiness, the quality and nature of the trustor-trustee relationship, macro-level cues, and domain- and situational factors. Which of these sources is most influential is likely to depend on the specific context. However, the better teachers know each other, the more decisive the trustee’s trustworthiness and the trustor-trustee relationship is likely to be (e.g. Gill et al., 2005; Johnson-George & Swap, 1982). Former educational researchers (cf. Tarter et al., 1989; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998) concluded that trust between teachers “was most directly facilitated by the behavior and relationships between teachers” (Cosner, 2009, p. 256). Although these sources may be difficult to influence directly by the school’s management, the results of this dissertation indicate that management can create organizational conditions that may enhance teacher’s trust in the teacher team.

The results show that a supportive organizational climate seems to relate to teacher’s trust in the teacher team. The school’s management may have several means to contribute to the development of a supportive school climate. As the climate is shaped by the behavior of all members of the school (Hoy, 1990), supportive behavior of management, such as expressing appreciation for extra effort, being open for criticism, giving feedback on performance, and helping teachers to develop their skills, is likely to help to develop such a culture. Modeling such behavior is likely to trigger this behavior also in others. Management may also enhance supportive behavior between teachers by implementing, for example, codes of
conducted and expressing their appreciation for supportive behavior (Ghamrawi, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Next to the influence the climate may have on the behavior of the school’s members, it might serve as a macro-level cue for the trustworthiness of (the members of) the school.

A school’s management might also enhance teacher’s trust in the teacher team by stimulating teacher’s collaboration. The results of this dissertation indicate that collaboration between teachers and their level of trust in their teacher team are related. As discussed previously and based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) the relationship between collaboration and trust is likely to be mutually reinforcing. Thus, providing teacher’s with opportunities to collaborate may be an effective way to enhance teacher’s trust in the teacher team. The results of some qualitative studies in educational research (c.f. Cosner, 2009; Ghamrawi, 2011; Kochanek, 2005; Smylie & Hart, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2004) also emphasized the possibility for managers to support trust formation between teachers by providing them with opportunities to interact and cooperate. Possible ways could be implementing new interaction structures, increasing meeting times, scheduling work in a way that allows teachers to attend meetings, and arranging rooms for virtual interaction (Admiraal et al., 2016; Cosner, 2009). Further, to increase interaction between teachers, interdependent tasks could be introduced (Cosner, 2009).

The results of this dissertation show that the team-based structure of the organization and high-commitment HR practices may enhance teacher’s trust in the teacher team as structural teacher empowerment seems to relate positively to teacher’s collaboration and via collaboration to teacher’s trust in the teacher team. Teachers, who’s teams have (some) autonomy in administrative tasks and who perceive that they influence decision making, seem to work more collaboratively with one another in their on-task deeds, thus engage in joint activities to achieve common goals. When the decisions regard educational aspects, they additionally seem to increase their learning-oriented collaboration, thus engage in joint activities that provide one another with help and advice through open communication and free exchange of ideas. In addition, providing teachers with opportunities for their professional development seems to help enhance their collaboration.

As discussed, the results of this dissertation lead to the assumption that it is particularly the social exchange relationship VET school teachers have with members of their teacher team that generates their OCB. As indicated by the findings from this
dissertation and former research findings (McAllister, 1995; Podsakoff et al., 1990) the types of OCB seem to depend on the particular exchange partner. Weak social exchange relationships with management might thus hold back OCB that is particularly directed towards management. This indicates that management might have limited influence on the type of teachers’ OCB and whether teacher’s OCB is in line with the school’s goals and objectives. A way to increase social exchange relationships between teachers and management might be to increase the management’s influence on the daily work of teachers and to give management more means to reciprocate for teachers’ beneficial behavior. However, as discussed, the findings from this dissertation also indicate that the autonomy of teacher teams seems to be supportive to collaboration between and teacher’s trust in the teacher team. Thus, influencing the supervisor’s influence on the daily work of teachers and reducing teacher team’s autonomy may counteract in other ways. In addition, when new means to reciprocate for management include performance appraisal and reward systems that encourage competition between individual teachers, they might impede open, supportive and cooperative teacher behaviors. Accordingly, these practices might also jeopardize teacher’s trust in the teacher team. As Dutch VET schools have been focusing on the development performance appraisal and reward systems (Runhaar, Sanders, & Konermann, 2013), the tradeoffs need to be considered carefully.

Next to enhanced social exchange, there may be other ways to trigger teacher’s OCB. As the results of this study indicate, one of them might be teacher’s participation in decision making. Participation in educational decisions seems to enhance teachers’ OCB towards colleagues and the organization in general directly. In line with other studies (e.g. Bogler & Somech, 2005; Yukl, 2002; Yukl & Fu, 1999), these findings indicate that inclusion in formal decision making might widen teachers’ perceived roles and increase their impact on school life. This situation may increase teachers’ sense of responsibility for achieving the school’s objectives and may motivate them to ‘go the extra mile’ for the school. It may also strengthen teachers’ identification with the school’s goals and objectives and increase their motivation to achieve these goal. This is supported by the findings of this dissertation as they indicate that participation in decision making seems to reduce teacher’s psychological distance from management, thus reduces work-related value-differences.
As argued, it seems worthwhile for a school management to support teacher’s trust in other school members as trust seems to be an essential ingredient for social exchange relationships. A first step for a school management might be to enhance their awareness of the quality of teachers’ relationships within the school. This dissertation has generated a validated instrument to measure teacher’s interpersonal trust in surveys which is easy to use for school management. The use of this instrument might provide school management with valuable information, which may serve as basis for discussion and may signify directions for the improvement of the schools’ functioning.

Methodological considerations

This dissertation has some limitations which are related to its methodological design. As the design of the study is cross-sectional, the results do not provide indisputable evidence of causation. Although structural equation modelling revealed satisfactory fits of all models, conclusions about causal relations cannot be drawn from statistical results only. The results only show that causal relationships are possible and describe the data closely. The different possibilities of the directions of the anticipated relationships were discussed carefully based on theory and former research findings and many of the relationships are expected to be mutually reinforcing. Only a longitudinal research design could give more clarity about cause-and-effect relationships. Furthermore, possible sampling and common method biases should be considered when interpreting the results. To minimize common method bias, overlap between the different concepts was avoided. Principal component analysis at all concepts used within this dissertation showed that the items corresponded well with the intended concepts. However, common method bias might still inflate the strength of the relationships between concepts.

Finally, although the current instrument measuring teacher’s trust in the teacher team and the immediate supervisor reflects the common conceptualization of interpersonal trust and can be recommended as a high-quality instrument, at least one area for improvement remains. As discussed previously, the common conceptualization of trust consists of two core elements: the trustor’s positive expectations of the intentions or behaviors of the trustee and the trustor’s willingness to vulnerable to the trustee. The current instrument focuses particularly on the
second element. The first element can only be assumed to be present. Although unlikely, it is possible that the respondent does not hold positive expectations about the intentions or behaviors of the trustee, but is driven by other motivations. Consequently, the measurement instrument could be improved by covering the two elements of interpersonal trust equally. Further, a possible limitation of the measurement of trust in higher management is the aggregation of different trust referents. Higher management usually consists of several persons from two management layers (middle and top level). It might be possible that teachers differentiate between the two management layers regarding their level of trust towards them. In some cases, an interpersonal relationships might be more likely to develop, specifically between teachers and the middle level of management. Particularly, when the middle-level manager manages one of the schools’ locations and this location is rather small. Being more specific about the trust referent within higher management might have made more detailed conclusions possible.

To conclude

This study indicates that schools have several ways to increase teacher’s trust in (agents of) schools by implementing an organizational structure, culture and human resource practices, which signal to teachers that they are trusted and valued. Teacher’s trust in all school members is likely to be beneficial to the school. However, VET school teachers’ affective commitment to the school and organizational citizenship behavior seem to be predominantly influenced by their trust in the teacher team. Although many of the sources of trust between teachers are likely to be outside the school’s management influence, this study identified several ways to create organizational conditions that may enhance the development of teacher’s trust between and social exchange with other teachers, such as the promotion of collaboration though structural teacher empowerment and a supportive organizational climate. As Dutch VET schools have been implementing team-based structures with more authority granted to teacher teams and large spans of control, it seems that this development may be beneficial to social exchange with and trust between teachers. At the same time, and in combination with increased sizes and more business-oriented leadership of Dutch VET schools, it may have hampered the development of social exchange relationships between teachers and management.
Nonetheless, as long as teacher’s behavior is in line with the school’s goal and objectives this does not need to be a constraint. As indicated by the findings of this study, also participation in decision making might increase teachers’ sense of responsibility for achieving the school’s goals and objectives and may motivate them to ‘go the extra mile’ for the school.