

# Trust and Cooperation Between Companies and Public Administration Institutions in Poland



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**Abstract** The aim of this article is to determine the level of cooperation and trust between Polish enterprises and public institutions both governmental and self-government ones. In particular, the factors that most affect the companies' low trust in the public sector are analyzed and how the changes in various factors may improve this trust in the future. The critical analysis of literature and statistical analysis of the results of the survey carried out in 381 Polish companies with their headquarters in the Podlaskie Province (Poland) were used in this article. Spearman's correlations ranks were used as a part of the statistical analysis to determine the dependency of the level of trust on cooperation between companies and public institutions. The study found a fairly low level of companies' trust in public administration institutions in Poland. The existing level of cooperation with these institutions was assessed very low by the respondents. In particular, the respondents indicated the low level of trust and cooperation with government institutions. Among the factors affecting the existing cooperation between enterprises and public institutions the ones assessed lowest were: the offer prepared by the administration, the image of administration and previous experience of cooperation.

**Keywords** Trust · Cooperation · Public administration institutions · Poland

## 1 Introduction

Companies operating in the contemporary environment, competing for limited resources can more effectively achieve their goals by working with organizations outside the commercial sector such as for example universities, business environment institutions or public administration organizations. In recent years the partnership between the private and public sectors in terms of implementing public tasks has been instrumental in a number of countries including the United States, Great

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229

Britain, Germany, France and Italy (Dobrowolski 2014). Polish experience in the field of cooperation between the two sectors has been scarce although the legal basis defining its principles appeared more than 10 years ago (the first public-private partnership law was passed in Poland in 2005). The necessary condition for public-private interaction is in particular the trust between a private entity and its public partner. It determines the willingness of stakeholders to cooperate and willingness to share risk. Public actors should create public trust through their activities. In the future it may become the basis for better cooperation with the commercial sector in implementation of public tasks. The public sector must ensure transparency of activities, assess joint actions not only through the prism of the economy, but also from the point of view of the public interest and accountability of decision-makers for decision-making. The indicated factors are sine qua non conditions of creating inter-organizational trust and intensified cooperation of both sectors.

The issue of trust and cooperation between organizations has recently been considered from many points of view, in the perspective of one organization and workers employed in it as well as organizations trusting one another. Ansell and Gash (2008), Gray and Stites (2013), Sloan and Oliver (2013) have noticed that the lowered trust between partners reduces possibilities of implementing common objectives and the restoration of confidence requires a long time.

Researchers discuss the issues of trust and cooperation of companies with public institutions more and more frequently since many innovative projects require cooperation between business, science and administration. The tendency to bestow trust in public institutions by entities from the commercial sector is an individual feature (some are more trusting, others more suspicious), but it also depends to a large extent on previous experiences with such cooperation.

The aim of this article is to determine the level of cooperation and trust between Polish companies and public institutions of both central and local government. In particular the following aspects were analyzed: what factors have the greatest impact on the low trust of companies in the public sector and how do positive changes in particular factors can improve their trust in the future. Critical literary analysis and statistical analysis of research conducted among 381 Polish companies based in the Podlaskie Province (Poland) have been used in this paper. Spearman's rank correlations have been used in the statistical analysis to determine the relationship between the level of companies' trust in public administration institutions, cooperation with them and the potential for its strengthening in the future.

## 2 Trust and Cooperation in Theory

For many years the subject of trust has been researched by authors representing various scientific disciplines such as: management, economics, sociology, administration science and psychology. Trust can be seen from many perspectives: at macro level (e.g. general trust in the context of economic growth) (Beugelsdijk et al. 2004), mezo (trust in organizations, inter-organizational trust) (Zaheer et al. 1998; Currall

and Inkpen 2002) and micro at individual level (Bigley and Pearce 1998; Kramer and Tyler 1996).

In management science the trust is discussed *inter alia* as (Lewicka et al. 2016):

- interpersonal trust between superiors and subordinates and between co-workers within the organization,
- institutional internal trust of employees in the organization,
- trust in inter-organizational relationships;
- in marketing, customers' trust in the organization, also for online shopping.

Mayer et al. (1995) claim there are some key factors that build trust: the perception of partner's competence based on his or her knowledge, experience and certifications; the assessment of partner's success, kindness (loyalty, fairness) and honesty (following the principles, keeping the commitments). It is noteworthy that all these factors affect trust in inter-organizational relationships, but friendliness applies to personal relationships only and the other factors shape impersonal relationships.

Most researchers also claim that trust is gradual and grows over time. At the beginning there is a stage of trust development (trustworthiness estimation), then trust is based on knowledge (when assumptions turn into positive expectations related to the partner) and finally there is relational trust which reflects the relationship quality (Lewicki and Bunker 1996).

Researchers also point to the relationship between GDP and development of trust, and emphasize that countries with a high GDP show a higher level of trust in general (Durlauf and Fafchamps 2004; Zak and Knack 2001; Beugelsdijk et al. 2004; Knack and Keefer 1997; Steijn and Lancee 2011; Algan and Cahuc 2010).

Therefore, trust is a diverse and multidimensional construct, dynamic and changing over time, depending on the level of development and wealth of the nation. It is shaped on the basis of the history of mutual contacts. It seems to be a resource that grows with the intensity of its use and weakens if it is not used. An essential feature of trust is its graduality, which allows the possibility to develop trust in time but also its return to a lower level in mutual relations (Atkinson and Butcher 2003). Multitude of definitions of trust and measurement models makes it difficult to compare the results of work by different authors. Such a state of affairs also points to the limits in regard to the tools available to measure trust. The difficulty in studying trust also arises due to dealing with a phenomenon that is not factual, but felt or perceived only (DeVellis 1991).

Lewicki et al. (1998) define trust in the context of inter-organizational cooperation and perceive it in categories of some positive expectations related to the partner's behavior, while they perceive distrust as certain negative expectations about the conduct of the other party. Trust is undoubtedly a prerequisite for initiating cooperation between organizations. Increasingly promoted in the literature as a prerequisite for initiating joint projects the model of cooperation between companies and institutions outside the sector requires elimination of the phenomena that threaten trust building (for example corruption, lack of clear administrative procedures, poor image of administration institutions). There are three basic factors that

make an entity credible and thus affect trust in it and willingness to cooperate with it. These are: (1) ability to carry out specific activities; (2) kindness that entails acting in the best interests of the party and (3) honesty that results from the consequences and observance of certain principles (Sankowska 2012).

Trust is a factor that stabilizes the organization's functioning over a long period of time and build reputation (Wierzbiński and Potocki 2012). In terms of establishing cooperation between companies it is actually one of its foundations. Relationships between companies based on cooperation and trust give a better chance for success. Trust between partners can exist only if there is mutual certainty that the benefits of cooperation between companies outweigh the benefits that these companies could achieve by acting on their own. Trust between partners contributes to sharing key information, reduces opportunism and accelerates cooperation between them (Wasiluk 2013).

It is said that the need to achieve organizational goals in a turbulent environment is the cause of inter-organizational cooperation generation. Researchers note that organizations work together because of the lack of specific resources they cannot get at the specific time and place (Selsky and Parker 2005) and also to gain a competitive advantage. Disturbance in relationships based on trust and credibility do not allow for the full benefit of cooperation, including inter-organizational and cross-sectoral cooperation. Today functioning and development of organizations in each sector increasingly depends not only on them but also on their relationship with the environment. Among the determinants of organizational development and innovation growth trust is identified as a key pillar of partnership and cooperation (Surówka-Marszałek 2010).

In modern public management, two distinct tendencies are noticeable. The first is to give up repetition and multiplication of activities and follow the instructions to focus on creativity and effectiveness in problem-solving. The second is to create partnership relationships not only within the public sector but also cooperation with other sectors, including the commercial sector. A motive that is the reason for collaboration is necessary to establish cooperation between organizations. The mutual benefits achieved through cooperation contribute to the creation of a certain level of trust between the parties, which then translates into a degree of engagement that is an important factor influencing co-operation. It is difficult to say clearly which is the cause and which is the consequence and whether the low level of trust is the result of lack of cooperation or the lack of cooperation is the result of low trust in potential partners.

### 3 Methodology

The aim of this article is to present the selected results of the study conducted to determine the level of trust as well as the degree of cooperation between companies in Podlaskie Province (Poland) and public institutions of both central and local government and willingness to strengthen it. The study was carried out as part of

an international research project “Business Readiness for Cross-border Networking” implemented under an agreement between the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Belarusian State Academy of Sciences in the years 2014–2016.<sup>1</sup>

Respondents were asked, inter alia, to assess their level of trust in institutions of central and local government taking into account such variables as: corruption among officials, cooperation offers prepared for companies, information on the results of administration activities, existing administrative procedures, image of administration in society, political influences in offices. The studied companies assessed also the level of cooperation with local and central authorities (Likert scale 1–7). In terms of the area of companies’ cooperation with public administration institutions (of central and local government) the following variables were assessed: transparency of administration activities, financial and organizational support for entrepreneurship development, cooperation offer prepared by administration, level of fiscal and organizational barriers to start-up a business, level of corruption, image of administration in society, previous experience of cooperation. Respondents assessed not only how much each factor influences the level of cooperation, but also to what extent the positive changes in the various factors could influence improving the level of cooperation in the future (Likert scale 1–7).

The above-mentioned factors determining the level of trust and cooperation between companies and public administration institutions were selected on the basis of critical analysis of the literature and discussions with representatives of business and academic environment.

The method of a survey was used for collecting primary information, partial results of which are presented in this article. The following statistical measures were used to interpret the study results: scattering measures—coefficient of variation ( $V$ ) and measures of central tendency—mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), median ( $Me$ ), dominant ( $D$ ), as well as standard deviation ( $s$ ). Spearman’s rank correlations were used for statistical analysis to determine the relationship between the level of companies’ trust in the public sector, their cooperation and possibilities for its future strengthening.

## 4 Discussion on the Study Results

The main aim of the article is to assess the level of trust and cooperation between companies in Podlaskie Province and public administration institutions. The studied companies were asked to assess their level of trust to administration institutions of both central and local government and to evaluate their cooperation with the indicated entities (Table 1). Respondents rated very low both trust and cooperation with institutions outside the sector. In particular, the low level of cooperation

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<sup>1</sup>Representatives of companies (management staff) from both Polish and Belarusian side participated in the complex study. This article focuses on the research results on Polish enterprises only (the research sample included 381 entities).

**Table 1** Trust and cooperation between the studied companies and administration institutions (central and local government), (N = 381)

Specification	Mean	Median	Dominant	The size of the dominant range	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
Level of trust						
(a) Central government institutions	2.89	3.00	3	150	1.18	40.93
(b) Local government institutions	3.38	3.00	4	122	1.26	37.29
Level of cooperation						
(a) Central government institutions	2.34	2	1	153	1.48	63.2
(b) Local government institutions	3.29	3	4	91	1.53	46.2
The degree of interest in strengthening cooperation in the next 2-3 years						
(a) Central government institutions	2.92	3	1	101	1.66	56.93
(b) Local government institutions	3.75	4	4	91	1.75	46.77
Correlation of Spearman's rank ( $p < 0.05$ )						
Assessment of the level of trust and cooperation						
(a) Central government					0.331	
(b) Local government					0.735	
Assessment of the current level of cooperation and possibilities of its strengthening in future						
(a) Central government					0.638	
(b) Local government					0.615	

Source: own studies

(2.34) and therefore trust (2.89) was assessed in relation to central government organizations. Taking into account the respondents' attitudes on the studied issues it should be noted that the indications did not exceed 4.0 (1–7 scale), even to the question of future cooperation (average indication 3.75). Such a situation may constitute the evidence of constantly low trust and weak relations of these two worlds in Poland: business and administration. In general, respondents rated higher their cooperation with local government than central government, which is in line with conducted in Poland public opinion surveys regarding confidence in public institutions (Public Opinion Research Center 2016). The regional scale research results discussed in this paper correspond to the results of nationwide studies which show that Poles trust less the central government than local authorities (of cities or municipalities). A positive quite strong correlation was also found in respondents' ratings by means of Spearman's rank correlations in the case of assessments of the

level of trust and companies' cooperation with local government institutions. Those companies that showed a higher level of trust in local administration institutions assessed higher also the level of cooperation with these organizations, which may be confirmed by the fact that greater trust encourages greater inter-organizational cooperation.

Considering the current level of companies' cooperation with public administration institutions and the desire to strengthen this cooperation in the future it turned out that companies would restrainedly like to cooperate more closely in subsequent years (Spearman's rank correlation of 0.6). Such situation may be due to the still too little awareness of officials about the impact of enterprises on economic development of the city or municipality and initiation of projects for cooperation. Mutual unwillingness to undertake joint activities means that potential partners not only have limited knowledge of each other problems and limitations, but also of possible scenarios for collaboration. The dialogue in this case is possible if it is substantive and essential. The mode of communication should be open and based on mutual trust. This is a lack of goodwill, initiative and willingness to talk that constitutes the most limiting factor in building a common communication platform between business and administration.

On the basis of literature analysis a list of factors influencing the level of companies' trust to public institutions has been identified. Among the factors mentioned are the following variables: corruption among officials, cooperation offer prepared for enterprises, information on the effects of administration activities, existing administrative procedures, image of administration in society and political influences at the office (Table 2).

Most respondents for the majority of variables gave similar answers oscillating around 4.0. The highest rating was assessed to: offer of cooperation prepared for enterprises by local government institutions (average rating 4.44), which is in principle in line with the theory that trust is based on experiences of existing cooperation, which should first be proposed and then implemented with the interested parties (companies). Local authorities have far more potential than government institutions to initiate cooperation and involve companies in various projects, such as joint local projects, outsourcing public or private tasks, joint development of strategic documents, initiating clusters in the region, etc. The other higher rated variable influencing the level of trust in local government institutions was: the existing administrative procedures (average rating 4.26). Undoubtedly, transparent and simple administrative procedures can greatly increase the trust of companies in administration institutions. For many years entrepreneurs have claimed that running a business in Poland is not easy due to intricate administrative procedures, inconsistent tax system and high non-wage labor costs. In this area however, the central administration institutions have the most to say due to their competence to set the legislative process. Local administration operates basically on the basis of procedures developed at the governmental level.

The lowest influence on the companies' trust in administration institutions according to the respondents was the variation: political influences at the office (mean rating 2.9), which may be translated into the conclusion that the often

**Table 2** Assessment of the influence of individual factors on the current level of trust between businesses and central and local government institutions, N = 381

Factors influencing the current level of trust	Mean	Median	Dominant	The size of the dominant range	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
<b>Corruption among officials</b>						
(a) Central government institutions	3.91	4.0	4.0	87	2.1	54.1
(b) Local government institutions	4.01	4.0	4.0	108	2.02	50.31
<b>Offer of support and cooperation for entrepreneurs</b>						
(a) Central government institutions	4.31	5.0	5.0	101	1.74	40.37
(b) Local government institutions	4.44	5.0	5.0	108	1.64	37.07
<b>Information about the effects of administration activities</b>						
(a) Central government institutions	3.62	3.0	3.0	150	1.50	41.44
(b) Local government institutions	3.74	3.0	3.0	139	1.47	39.4
<b>Administrative procedures</b>						
(a) Central government institutions	4.12	4.0	3.0	102	1.70	41.2
(b) Local government institutions	4.26	4.0	3.0	98	1.67	39.3
<b>Administration image in society</b>						
(a) Central government institutions	3.6	3.0	3.0	115	1.57	43.8
(b) Local government institutions	3.8	4.0	3.0	98	1.61	42.6
<b>Political influences at the office</b>						
(a) Central government institutions	3.6	3.0	3.0	109	1.62	45.4
(b) Local government institutions	2.9	3.0	4.0	112	2.11	73.3

Source: own study

emphasized politicization of public offices does not significantly influence the assessment of trust in administration. Trust is mainly based on personal experience of cooperation.

In addition, respondents once again gave higher ratings to variables related to local government, which may be due to the greater impact of local institutions on functioning of companies and their actual impact on possible cooperation. The studied companies were also expected to assess the impact of the listed factors on current cooperation with public administration institutions. The analysis of variables was selected on the basis of literature review and after consultation with business and science experts. Among the factors influencing the initiation of cooperation between



**Table 3** Assessment of the influence of individual factors on the current cooperation between businesses and central (C) or local (L) government institutions

Factors	Mean	Median	Dominant	The size of the dominant range	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
Transparency of administration activities (C/L)	3.09	3	1	105	1.82	59.13
	3.45	3	1	75	1.85	53.56
Financial and organizational support for entrepreneurship development (C/L)	3.33	3	1	84	1.80	54
	3.54	4	4	78	1.78	50.2
Cooperation offer prepared by administration (C/L)	2.99	3	1	116	1.82	60.72
	3.36	3	3	75	1.74	51.6
Level of fiscal and organizational barriers to start up a business (C/L)	3.43	3	1	83	1.89	54.97
	3.64	4	3	81	1.78	48.97
Level of corruption (C/L)	3.02	3	1	140	2.03	67.07
	3.18	3	1	124	2.05	64.51
Administration image in society (C/L)	3.02	3	1	99	1.73	57.68
	3.40	3	3	81	1.77	52.2
Previous experience of cooperation (C/L)	3.08	3	3	104	1.78	57.2
	2.79	3	1	83	2.12	76

Source: own study

sectors are the following: transparency of administration activities, financial and organizational support for entrepreneurship development, cooperation offer prepared by administration, level of organizational and fiscal barriers, level of corruption, previous experience of cooperation.

The respondents generally assessed lower all the variables influencing sector cooperation in relation to the variables of trust in administration institutions (Table 3). In principle, the median of responses for each variable did not exceed the mean of 4.0 (on a scale of 1–7), which may prove, for example, the lack of experience in undertaking such cross-sectoral cooperation. As in previous analyzes, the respondents rated slightly higher the variables influencing the level of cooperation with local administration institutions.

Relevant to the analysis of this part of the study was the answer to the question: How can positive changes in particular factors contribute to closer cooperation between companies and administration institutions in the future? In this part of the study respondents gave more optimistic answers. Among the most desirable changes the respondents indicated the following: financial and organizational support for entrepreneurship development (4.53), prepared cooperation offer (4.33), increased transparency of administrative activities (4.25). Lower ratings were for: previous experience of cooperation (3.01) and level of corruption (3.63). (See Table 4). In the

**Table 4** Assessment of the influence of positive changes in particular factors contributing closer cooperation between companies and central (C) and local (L) government institutions

Factors	Mean	Median	Dominant	The size of the dominant range	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
Transparency of administration activities (C/L)	4.09	4	6	64	1.92	46.95
	4.25	4	7	67	1.98	46.61
Financial and organizational support for entrepreneurship development (C/L)	4.49	5	6	1.93	1.93	43
	4.53	5	7	1.96	1.96	43.3
Cooperation offer prepared by administration (C/L)	4.25	4	5	72	1.91	45.05
	4.33	5	5	83	1.85	42.8
Level of fiscal and organizational barriers to start up a business (C/L)	4.31	4	6	72	1.93	44.8
	4.33	4	6	67	1.91	44.2
Level of corruption (C/L)	3.58	4	1	110	2.11	59
	3.63	4	1	101	2.13	58.5
Administration image in society (C/L)	3.76	4	3	76	1.85	49.12
	3.94	4	3	67	1.89	47.8
Previous experience of cooperation (C/L)	3.51	3	1	83	1.92	54.7
	3.01	3	0	33	2.28	75.9

Source: own study

case of most variables the respondents assessed higher the factors related to local administration institutions.

In analyses of the study results Spearman's rank correlations have been interpreted to assess the impact of each factor on the current level of cooperation and potential for its future strengthening as a result of positive changes in these factors (Table 5). The assessment of influence of each factor has shown a high correlation in the case of the following variations: transparency of administration activities, reduction of corruption, administration image in society and previous experience of cooperation (Spearman's rank correlation in the range of 0.6–0.8). The high correlations mainly concern the assessment of cooperation between companies and local administration institutions and the possibility of strengthening it in the future.

Concluding, selected results of research on trust and cooperation between companies and administration institutions in Poland it should be noted that mutual perceptions are slowly changing—officials and entrepreneurs are more and more aware of their mutual contribution to the country's development and strive to build cooperation on a partnership basis—however, there are still many unidentified areas of possible cooperation. Both business and government representatives pay attention to cognitive, system and communication obstacles and barriers (Giedroń 2015). These obstacles exist on both sides and are the starting point for initiating the

**Table 5** Spearman's rank correlations for the assessment of the influence of each factor on the current level of cooperation and potential for its future strengthening as a result of positive changes in these factors

Correlation of Spearman's rank ( $p < 0.05$ )	
Transparency of administration activities	
(a) Central government institutions	0.600
(a) Local government institutions	0.646
Financial and organizational support for entrepreneurship development	
(a) Central government institutions	0.485
(b) Local government institutions	0.467
Cooperation offer prepared by administration	
(a) Central government institutions	0.488
(b) Local government institutions	0.432
Level of fiscal and organizational barriers to start up a business	
(a) Central government institutions	0.472
(b) Local government institutions	0.493
Level of corruption	
(a) Central government institutions	0.555
(b) Local government institutions	0.667
Administration image in society	
(a) Central government institutions	0.503
(b) Local government institutions	0.604
Previous experience of cooperation	
(a) Central government institutions	0.616
(b) Local government institutions	0.802

Source: own study

necessary changes. The main areas of low trust and lack of cooperation between the two sectors, as indicated in this article, lead to a fundamental conclusion that the fight against stereotypes and dialogue builds on the effectiveness of cooperation. Of course, system barriers such as bad law, infrastructure limits, lack of funding cannot be ignored. However, the vast majority of recommendations relate to the fight against stereotypes, striving to exchange information, mutual support, and joint search for solutions, understanding and respect for the other side. Efforts to unlock the communication process and change attitudes are encouraged by the many positive experiences of existing forms of cooperation between sectors. On the part of entrepreneurs the employers' organizations should have a key role as they have the organizational and substantive background necessary in building a long-term relationship and are called for such a commitment.

## 5 Conclusion

The aim of the study presented in this paper was to identify the main factors affecting the level of trust and cooperation between enterprises and administration institutions and to show how positive changes in particular factors could lead to closer cooperation between actors in both sectors in the future. Conclusions were formulated on the basis of the results of questionnaire surveys carried out among companies from Podlaskie Province (Poland).

As the conclusions of the study, it should be emphasized that the studied companies indicate a fairly low level of trust in administration institutions. The respondents assessed the existing level of cooperation with these institutions very low. In particular, low trust and low level of cooperation with the central government institutions were reported by the respondents. The examined companies which indicated a higher level of cooperation with public institutions assessed better the possibility of strengthening it in the future.

Among the factors affecting current cooperation between enterprises and public institutions the lowest assessments were for the following variables: the offer prepared by administration, image of administration in Polish society, previous experience of cooperation. On the other hand in respondents' opinion positive changes in such factors as: financial and organizational support for companies from the administration could most likely improve cooperation among the sectors. Similarly, lower levels of fiscal and organizational barriers and also the offer of cooperation prepared by administration could increase the level of cooperation between enterprises and public institutions.

The assessment of the impact of each factor on the current level of cooperation and the potential for its future strengthening as a result of positive changes have shown a strong correlation in the case of such variables as: transparency of administration activities, lowering the corruption level, previous experience of cooperation (Spearman's rank correlation in the range of 0.6–0.8). The studied companies responded that the current level of confidence in public institutions is most influenced by: the offer of cooperation and support prepared for enterprises and administrative procedures. The political influences at the office were the least important. Positive changes in such factors as: administration support for entrepreneurship development, openness and transparency of activities, political neutrality of the authorities would most likely influence the improvement of the level of enterprises' trust in the public sector.

The above results show weaknesses and factors which particularly affect the existing level of companies' trust in administration institutions in the Podlaskie Province (Poland). They provide a platform for discussion between representatives of both sectors on possible actions and programs at central/local government level to promote cooperation and eliminate the low trust of companies in administration institutions.

It has now become evident that an increase in public sector rationality and some openness to the functioning of the private sector is a general civilization regularity

that will become a necessity in the years to come. Both the public administration (in terms of responsibility for the efficiency and effectiveness of public services and the development of civil society) and companies seeking financial and organizational support for effectively reaching their goals can benefit from creating favorable, trust-based cooperation conditions. Therefore, any attempt to show the reasons for distrust between the sectors could serve as a better explanation of the low level of cooperation between companies and administrative institutions in Poland and development of solutions that improve relations between the parties.

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