

TRUST IN LEADERSHIP

This blog aims to answer seven questions about trust. It starts with a definition of trust and explores how to build, reinforce and measure it and then concludes with a team exercise that can be used with virtual workers.

1. WHAT IS TRUST?

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, trust is defined as the 'assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something. One in which confidence is placed'

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trust>

That's a tall order. How do you go about building trust?

2. HOW DO YOU BUILD TRUST?

In the article authored by Carthage Buckley, *How to Build Trust: 12 General Tips* (<https://positivepsychology.com/build-trust/>), he shared the following:

- i. Be true to your word and follow through with your actions - keeping your word shows others what you expect from them, and in turn, they'll be more likely to treat you with respect, developing further trust in the process.
- ii. Learn how to communicate effectively with others - good communication includes being clear about what you have or have not committed to and what has been agreed upon.
- iii. Remind yourself that it takes time to build and earn trust - building trust is a daily commitment. It starts with taking small steps and making small commitments and then, as trust grows, taking larger steps and making bigger commitments.
- iv. Take time to make decisions and think before acting too quickly - only make commitments that you agree to and will fulfill. Have the courage to say "no" even when it disappoints someone. Be clear about what you have on your plate and keep track of your commitments.
- v. Value the relationships you have - trust often results from consistency. We tend to have the most trust in people who are there for us consistently through good times and bad.
- vi. Develop your team skills and participate openly - when you take an active role in a team and make contributions, people are more likely to respect and trust you. It is also imperative when building trust in a team to show your willingness to trust others.
- vii. Always be honest - the message you convey should always be the truth. If you are caught telling a lie, no matter how small, your trustworthiness will be diminished.

- viii. Help people whenever you can - helping another person, even if it provides no benefit to you, builds trust.
- ix. Don't hide your feelings - being open about your emotions is often an effective way to build trust. Furthermore, if people know that you care, they are more likely to trust you.
- x. Refrain from self-promotion - acknowledgment and appreciation play an important role in building trust and maintaining good relationships. Recognizing and appreciating the efforts of others shows your talent for leadership and teamwork and increases the trust others have in you.
- xi. Always do what you believe is right - always doing what you believe is right, even when others disagree, and this will lead others to respect your honesty.
- xii. Admit your mistakes - when you attempt to hide your mistakes, people know you are being dishonest. By being open, you show your vulnerable side, and this helps build trust with other people.

Critical to building trust in organizations in leadership. It is leaders that demonstrate these characteristics and behaviours, 'walk the talk' and set an example for others.

3. HOW DO LEADERS BUILD TRUST WITH TEAMS?

When it comes to building a team that can work efficiently together, accomplish mutual goals, and still maintain good morale while doing so, there's no more significant quality than trust. Trust allows you to delegate a task without worrying whether it will get done. It allows for faster, more open communication, and gives people a sense they truly belong within the organization.

But trust doesn't come naturally or easily, and it is the leader's job to inspire and facilitate trust in a team environment. How do the strongest leaders of the business world accomplish this? According to Samuel Edwards, such leaders have the following characteristics and behaviours

(<https://www.inc.com/samuel-edwards/7-ways-strong-leaders-build-trust-in-a-team.html>):

- Patience
- Calm
- Transparency
- Openness
- Flexibility
- Mutual feedback
- Ongoing team exercises

So how, do leaders go about developing these characteristics and demonstrating these behaviours?

4. HOW DO TRUST AND ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE RELATE?

Several studies have explored the relationship between trust and excellence. Some key findings include:

- i. For sustainable excellence in performance, organizations must develop 'authentic trust'. Authentic trust is a skill, in contrast to simple trust that is perceived as a 'glue' that breaks when breached. Trust also helps develop the high performance potential, when people who interact can share the same values and vision and act like a well-integrated whole (Source: Building Trust for Excellence in Performance and Adaptation to Change, August 2006, Total Quality Management and Business Excellence 17(7):795-810, Kostas Dervitsiotis).
- ii. Trust appears to influence how motivation is translated into the group process and performance. In high-trust groups, motivation is transformed into joint efforts and higher performance, whereas in low trust groups motivation is transformed into individual efforts (Source: The Effects of Interpersonal Trust on Work Group Performance, Kurt T. Dirks, Journal of Applied Psychology, 84, 445-455, 1999).
- iii. One of the most positive and effective ways to communicate to employees their efforts have value is through strategic, social recognition. Simply telling employees how their efforts make a difference to achieving corporate goals is a powerful communication mechanism. It is also important to link the employee's effort with the mission and values of the organization so they can appreciate how their effort contributes to the results. These activities help to build trust in both leaders and the organization (Source: Trust, Meaningfulness of Work Critical to Employee Engagement and Wellbeing, 2009, <https://www.workhuman.com/resources>).

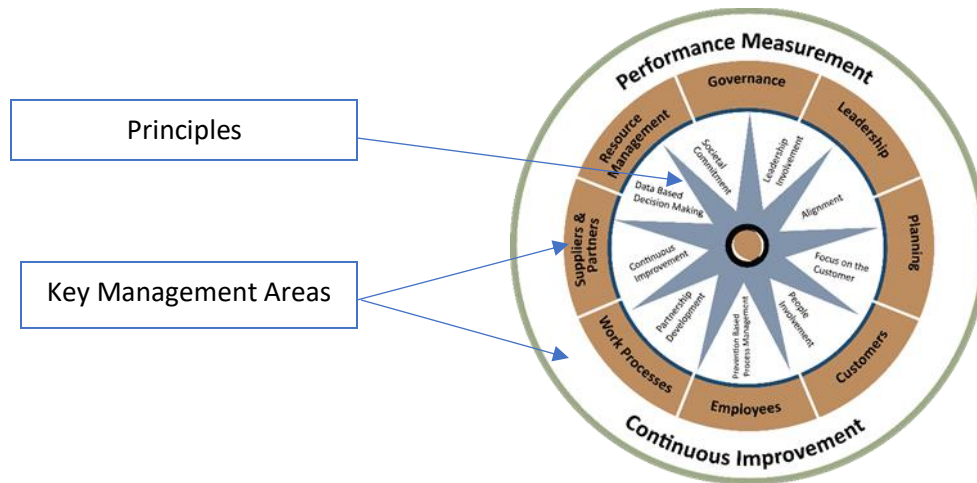
5. HOW DO EXCELLENCE MODELS CONTRIBUTE TO BUILDING TRUST?

Excellence models are comprised of the principles and best management practices that are common to high performing organizations. And it should be noted that many of these principles and practices contribute to building and reinforcing trust.

The Organizational Excellence Framework (©2010, Dawn Ringrose) is a publication that integrates the leading excellence models and provides implementation guidelines for the user.

There are nine principles that depict a culture that is committed to excellence and practices across nine key management areas that must be deployed throughout the organization <https://organizacionalexcellencespecialists.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Overview-of-the-Organizational-Excellence-Framework.pdf>.

Figure 1. Organizational Excellence Framework



Scanning down the list of principles and practices, you can see the characteristics and behaviours associated with building and reinforcing trust. The culture is characterized by a continual improvement mindset that harnesses the collective talent, skills and abilities of all stakeholders in making the organization stronger and more resilient. Leaders make sure a good governance system is in place. They develop and share the strategic and business plans with their employees so everyone understands the vision, mission, values, goals and objectives of the organization and works toward a common aim. The goals and objectives are cascaded through the organization and reflected in the work that is done, the employee performance plans and the reward and recognition system. Employees are engaged and involved in improvement initiatives and invited to share suggestions, ideas and innovations. The needs and expectations of customers are identified, employees are aligned and trained to meet these requirements and make it easy to do business and provide feedback. Win-win agreements are forged with suppliers and partners and relevant information is made available to them. All stakeholders are invited to provide feedback on the way work is done and way it can be done better so the organization can continue to improve. There is a balanced system of measurement in place and results are shared openly so everyone understands what is going well, what needs to improve and how they can contribute.

Global research conducted over the past 25 years has validated that if an organization has deployed these practices, it will develop a culture committed to excellence and go on to achieve exceptional results across a balanced system of measurement. These results include, but are not limited to: good governance, trust in leadership, customer delight, employee engagement, continually improving work processes, strong supplier and partner relationships, better utilization of resources, balanced system of measurement, and financial results.

With regards to 'trust in leadership', it is important we know how to measure and report on it. So how do we go about doing this?

6. HOW IS TRUST IN LEADERSHIP MEASURED?

Leadership measures that provide feedback on trust include the following. Each of the measures is accompanied by a method of gathering the data and information so that it can then be analyzed, reported and acted upon:

- i. Senior management effectiveness in setting strategic direction - employee and stakeholder feedback via informal communication, interviews, surveys
- ii. Senior management effectiveness in demonstrating leadership in quality principles - employee and stakeholder feedback via informal communication, interviews, surveys
- iii. Extent of senior management involvement in the implementation of quality principles – employee feedback via informal communication, interviews, surveys
- iv. Extent of senior management involvement in the implementation of improvement initiatives - senior management sponsoring and leading improvement teams, attendance at recognition events for successful teams, coaching peers and others in quality improvement principles and methods
- v. Level of understanding within the organization about the corporate statements and strategic plan - employee feedback via informal communication (e.g. meetings, planning sessions) and interviews
- vi. Degree that leadership is shared throughout the organization – number of management levels, spans of control, and extent to which individuals or teams are authorized to act to improve operations and respond to client needs
- vii. Degree to which senior management share ideas and quality practices with others – the number of occasions where management share experiences with others (e.g. presentations) internally and externally

7. HOW DO YOU BUILD TRUST IN VIRTUAL TEAMS?

In today's fast paced business environment with advanced technology for communications at our fingertips, many organizations are working together under one roof but also virtually. With virtual teams, it can be challenging to develop trusting relationships. So, what can be done to unite the team and get everyone working towards a common aim? Noted above, Samuel Edwards spoke about the use of ongoing team exercises. From my personal experience, an example of one of these exercises is the Prelude Suite™.

The Prelude Suite™ is an online experiential learning platform that empowers virtual project teams, student and professional, to collaborate better from formation. Over three modules, teams practice distributed leadership and strengthen soft skills such as self-awareness, imagination, creativity, and empathy.

Module 1: Tune Up – Team members start with a unique online self-assessment called iStar™. This

results in an individual iStar Digital Badge enabling participants to easily picture their own and each other's strengths holistically.

Module 2: Practice – Then using an online whiteboard, team members create a personal digital symbol for themselves and share it with the team. Following this, the team co-creates a digital symbol of their combined strengths and aspirational goal.

Module 3: Perform – The first exercise enables a team to easily and quickly align their shared strengths with project goals. Through dialogue and consensus they match the right person with the right tasks. The second exercise is a team charter that is negotiated and which outlines not only how the work will be accomplished but how members will be accountable to each other for their attitudes, communication, and behaviors.

These facilitated exercises enable a virtual team to establish a solid foundation for psychological safety that is essential to team wellbeing and performance. Prelude Suite has aptly been called a “trust accelerator” (Source: 5X5teams.com)



In closing, some final comments about trust. As we all know, trust is a precious commodity in this world. It can take years to build and seconds to lose, so its important to keep trust top-of-mind in everything we do. For leaders, it is particularly important as they set an example of trust when working with others and this example is often replicated. Together, the work of leaders and those they influence make an impression on the community as to whether the organization is a model of excellence or employer of choice.

Peter Drucker, author of *Managing for the Future*, captured the essence of leadership and trust so well when he stated: *“The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say ‘I.’ And that’s not because they have trained themselves not to say ‘I.’ They don’t think ‘I.’ They think ‘we’; they think ‘team.’ They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don’t sidestep it, but ‘we’ gets the credit.... This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done.”*

About the author:



Dawn Ringrose MBA, FCMC is Principal of Organizational Excellence Specialists and Author of the Organizational Excellence Framework and accompanying toolkit. Her qualifications include: Certified Organizational Excellence Specialist, Certified Excellence Professional, Registered ISO 9000 Specialist, Assessor of Quality Systems. She has worked in the area of organizational excellence since 1990 and currently serves on the Executive Team for the Organizational Excellence Technical Committee QMD ASQ, the Board of the Global Benchmarking Network and the Chair of the Leadership Content Management Committee at QMD ASQ. Over the past four years, Dawn has led and reported on the 'first global assessment on the current state of organizational excellence'. She can be reached at dawn@organizationalexcellencespecialists.ca