

## Building Trust into your Organisation

Written by Sarah Cook

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In recent times, most people will have felt unease when formerly respected and trusted institutions-banks, police, government, for example- are clearly shown to have failed to deserve that respect. The scandal of phone hacking has further undermined trust and confidence.

In a whole range of relationships, trust is the essential component for lasting success. In organisations, when trust erodes, relationships start to break down-mistrust can foster low morale, energy-sapping dog fights and office politics, disunity and an "I'm alright Jack" attitude to others. Senior managers in particular must take responsibility for setting the tone in the organisation; they have to work especially hard to be seen to behave with integrity and underpin best practice, since practically every employee survey shows least levels of trust for their top team, highest for immediate managers. L & D must use its expertise to work alongside management to support the development of a trusting culture. The Great Place to Work Institute sums it up that "Trust and a sense of 'ownership' over work remain important elements of great places to work".

We contend that there are seven key components to a trusting relationship, which in turn will help create long term strength and more productive organisation:

### SEVEN KEY COMPONENTS

#### 1 Credibility and sincerity

Do your company messages ring true? The only way to be credible and for employees to believe in you is to do what you say; actions speak louder than words. As an organisation therefore you need to ensure that you manage through involvement and respect the performance of the team, setting a positive example as a manager, and that there is an on-going focus on taking up suggestions for continuous improvement.

#### 2 Consistency and reliability

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Are you consistently reliable? Trustworthiness relies on delivering consistently to a high quality standard. This means ensuring that employees do not fall below agreed standards and externally that the product itself and services are reliably sound. Consistency also means upholding the same values and displaying the same behaviours wherever you are in the organisation. If a customer deals with the dispatch department when ordering a washing machine they expect them to be treated with the same courtesy that they would when they bought the machine in the first place. This in turn depends on people internally dealing with each other in the same consistent and respectful way.

### 3 Friendliness and empathy

How approachable is your organisation? Employees need to feel a measure of empathy from managers and colleagues. One financial service organisation has trained its staff to deal empathetically with the 'raw emotion' employees may potentially encounter when dealing with life situations such as divorce, redundancy and ill health. In this way it has helped improve its levels of customer satisfaction and, importantly, the way employees deal with each other.

### 4 Coaching and development

Are employees reassured that they are dealing with knowledgeable colleagues? Do they themselves feel they have access to the development they need? Managers should coach and develop their team members, encouraging them to stretch their capabilities to the full and develop their potential. Managers must be skilled to pick up appropriate cues and deal with the other person in a way that they feel most comfortable with, including any concerns or issues. Trust amongst colleagues and customers can also be strengthened by promoting interpersonal skills. This will help people to be authentic in their dealings with others: a call centre handler needs to sound positive as well as being a good listener; a shop checkout assistant needs to be warm and friendly, even when you're the hundredth person today that they dealt with.

Often behaviour will be supported by clear goals; tangible incentives may well underpin and encourage their achievement. Everyone needs to understand the goals of the organisation and managers need to work at translating these so that people understand how what they're doing fits in with the strategy.

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### 5 Empowering staff

Will employees have the confidence and capability to sort out most issues on the spot? Encouraging staff to take ownership of issues is important, as well as helping everyone understand the levels of decision that they can take. A manager seeking to build trust will start with his or her employees, giving advice and guidance, but not dictating or micromanaging.

### 6 Giving feedback, particularly praise and recognition

Do employees look confident and know what they are about? Managers build trust and capability by finding things worthy of praise and giving plentiful feedback, because it is clearly helpful and valuable in building confidence and this in turn breeds trusting customer relationships.

### 7 Transparency

Numerous studies show that a person's line manager plays a vital role in the process of building trust. Most organisations can be difficult to figure out, whether it be on pricing, on real priorities and on things like promotions and pay. In all too many cases, communication is on a "need-to-know basis" and therefore is minimal.

Employees need to feel they're being listened to and that they can make a real contribution. They will tend to show the same respect to outsiders that they are given by their managers and colleagues.

## HOW CAN L & D CONTRIBUTE?

L & D has an important role in developing and maintaining trust through the wise use of its tools, techniques and approaches.

Support to achieve and maintain a trusting relationship

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At times, managers may need help to promote the kind of honest relationship that both sides will benefit from: for example, this may be 360° feedback tools, sometimes it might be facilitated team sessions.

### Skills development

Perhaps one of the most straightforward ways to encourage trust is to incorporate developing certain behaviours into skills development programmes for leaders. For example, communication skills training helps participants to understand how non-verbal communication and verbal communication can both build up trust or reduce it. Confidence in deploying skills at an interpersonal level can go a long way to breaking down barriers. In addition, insight into the range of communication tools and their role in building trust can help.

#### The role of Emotional intelligence (EQ)

The most 'efficient' organisations are not always the most sensitive to other people, and this lack of sensitivity can easily undermine trust. Research by Daniel Goleman, author of *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, makes it clear that when it comes to trusting relationships, it is more often how we are and how we relate to other people that count. For L & D, developing EQ in the organisation should be a significant priority. Managers with high EQ are authentic and transparent; they have self insight and are able to take the emotional temperature and better control the effects they have on others. They are able to take steps proactively to build trust: create rapport and relate to other people and manage the organisational climate.

#### Performance management skills

Unacknowledged and poorly handled performance and competence issues can undermine trust. It is only by having the ability and willingness to tackle issues will confidence and respect remain. This may involve conflict; if you duck away from conflict you risk issues building up and trust eroded.

### Understanding of the impact of different leadership styles

Leadership styles have substantial impact on engendering or destroying trust. Many organisations run sessions on different leadership styles, with insight into one's own preferred style and also the range and impact of a variety of different styles. The importance of

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participation and involvement can also be explored: the more distant leaders are, the more likely that lack of trust develops.

Role modelling and management by example are powerful ways to reinforce trust-and of course, the opposite: poor examples and lapses will quickly be picked up.

### Insight into culture

One of the essentials that managers need to know is the power of culture and how symbolic gestures can be interpreted, sometimes at an unconscious level. Tools such as the Cultural Web, the Seven Ss, and Charles Handy's Gods of Management categorisation can help to give real insight and awareness into what culture you currently have and what culture you desire to create. Importantly, it will give insight into what levers you can use to achieve change and the barriers and blocks to fostering a trusting culture.

### Taking an organisation wide role as an analyst and feedback provider

Because L & D have such an important role across the organisation they are sometimes able to spot issues such as threats to trust and engagement. Therefore make sure the L & D function feels confident in raising such issues and in giving feedback across the organisation.

### Company examples

Insurer Admiral believes transparency and openness is key and therefore communication takes a high priority. The company adopts a "multi-strand" approach to communications: face-to-face meetings and staff briefings, also regular information via the company intranet or email. It holds regular small-group sessions to give individuals face-to-face dialogue with its managers, plus head office support managers meet staff from different locations to break down barriers.

Drinks group Bacardi- Forman Brands displays visible respect for employees, which is repaid by trust. Respect is shown in the stated company values: one is challenge or commit, where it actively encourages management decisions to be questioned before commitment. It is consciously open in its style, with regular forums and frequent communications which stress

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feedback.

Banking group First Direct has consciously built a spirit of togetherness and its management are approachable and sit alongside staff, not shut away in ivory towers. It recognises the importance of EQ and trains its staff to respond individually to the mood and needs of other people-customers and colleagues, to discern and interpret signals and to understand their own impact, and the impact other people have on them. It puts regular communication and good listening well up the corporate priority list. It has created systems for active peer support and employee engagement which drive award winning customer service. Trust was put to the test in 2009 when 70 redundancies were announced. Openness of communication and pre-warning, plus treating people with respect helped to avoid erosion of trust.

Look inwards at relationships

The message of how the seven components of trust come together is this: rather than trying to fix the corporate image or “coat of paint” on the outside, first look inwards at relationships and investigate and strengthen how managers build trust, since this will radiate outwards to all employees, who in turn will deal with customers in a confident and trustworthy way. So creating high levels of trust starts with buy-in and example from senior leaders and managers. With concerted determination implemented through active involvement across the organisation, organisations will see benefits-and importantly, so will customers.

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