



FERRIS STATE
UNIVERSITY

Doctorate in Community
College Leadership

410 Oak Street, ALU 113
Big Rapids, MI 49307
www.ferris.edu/ccleadership

LEARNING LEADERSHIP

What Does Trust Have to Do with it?

The Leader's Role in Building and Maintaining Trust



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Co-Editors:

Deedee Stakley, Joseph Vitanza

Contributing Writers:

Yolonda Barnes, Susan DeCamillis,
Fiona Hert, Linda Holoman, Tina Hoxie,
Kimberly Klein, David Peruski, Deedee Stakley,
Joseph Vitanza and Daniel Wanink

TRUST

Trust is the most basic of all human emotions taking root from the time of our birth. Trust allows us to explore our surrounding environments and promotes growth, enables personal development, and creates a sense of comfort. However, just as readily as trust flourishes, it can be destroyed through interactions that cast doubt and suspicion upon one's intentions.

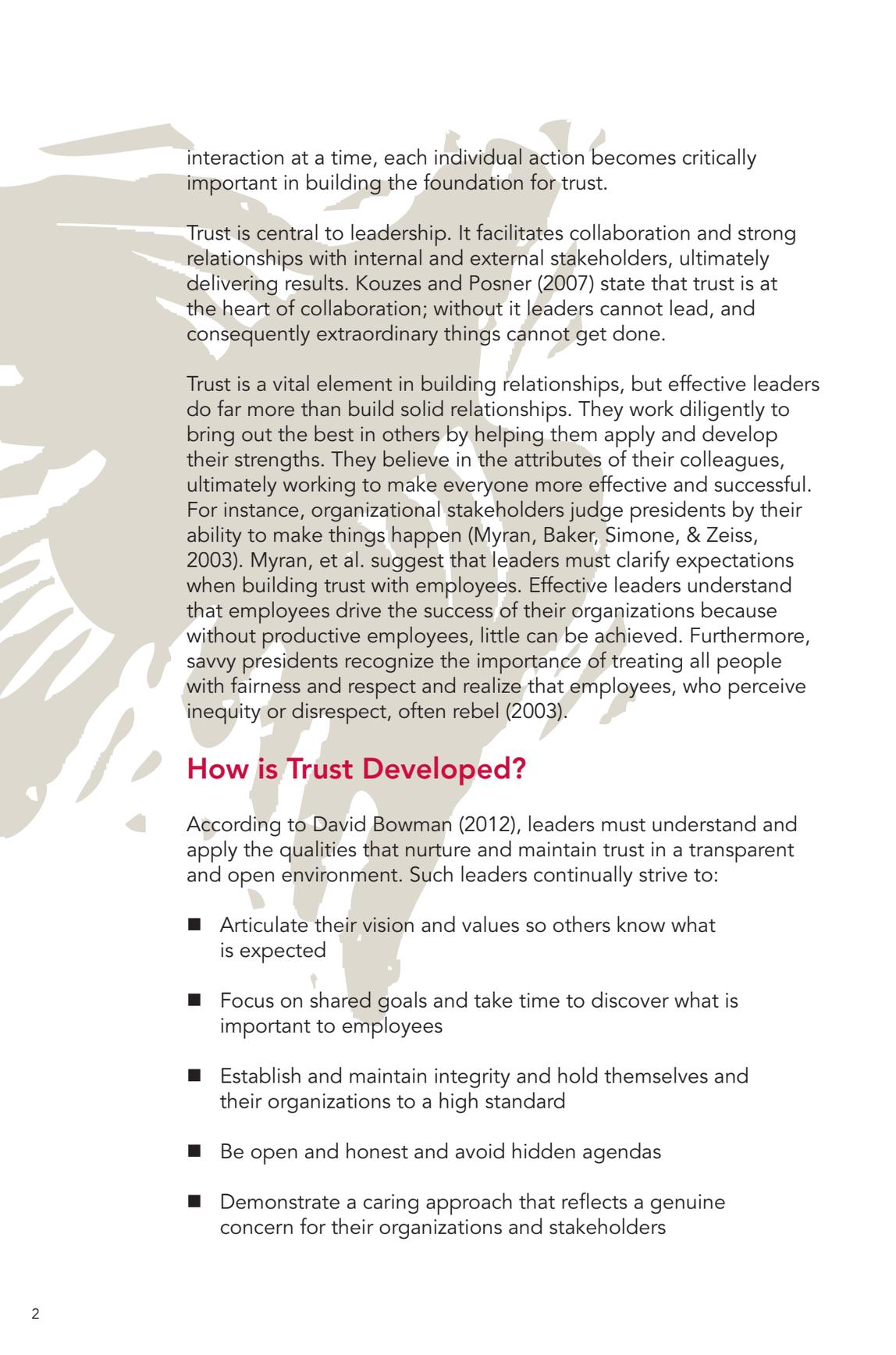
Trust is a complex human emotion that is formed through life experiences and, as a result, shapes individuals differently. It builds upon a broad continuum driven by competence, integrity, and confidence. Involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, trust is generally viewed as a positive attribute that allows one to have faith in mankind to do the right thing (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007).

Established through credible words and actions over time, trust is a necessary element for organizational effectiveness. Trust has a significant impact on an organization's mission, leadership, staff, and customers. The commitment and integrity of successful leaders are essential in paving the way for unparalleled cooperation and organizational performance. According to Covey (2009), trust is a critical element for any leader and often makes the difference between an initiative's success or failure.

Because trust is built or destroyed by one interaction at a time, each individual action becomes critically important in building the foundation for trust.

Trust is Central to Leadership

Trust, though complex, is established through relationships (Pixton, 2008). Because trust is built or destroyed by one



interaction at a time, each individual action becomes critically important in building the foundation for trust.

Trust is central to leadership. It facilitates collaboration and strong relationships with internal and external stakeholders, ultimately delivering results. Kouzes and Posner (2007) state that trust is at the heart of collaboration; without it leaders cannot lead, and consequently extraordinary things cannot get done.

Trust is a vital element in building relationships, but effective leaders do far more than build solid relationships. They work diligently to bring out the best in others by helping them apply and develop their strengths. They believe in the attributes of their colleagues, ultimately working to make everyone more effective and successful. For instance, organizational stakeholders judge presidents by their ability to make things happen (Myran, Baker, Simone, & Zeiss, 2003). Myran, et al. suggest that leaders must clarify expectations when building trust with employees. Effective leaders understand that employees drive the success of their organizations because without productive employees, little can be achieved. Furthermore, savvy presidents recognize the importance of treating all people with fairness and respect and realize that employees, who perceive inequity or disrespect, often rebel (2003).

How is Trust Developed?

According to David Bowman (2012), leaders must understand and apply the qualities that nurture and maintain trust in a transparent and open environment. Such leaders continually strive to:

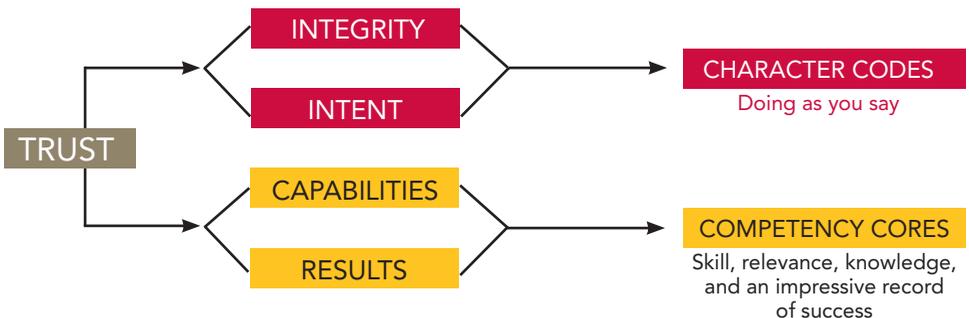
- Articulate their vision and values so others know what is expected
- Focus on shared goals and take time to discover what is important to employees
- Establish and maintain integrity and hold themselves and their organizations to a high standard
- Be open and honest and avoid hidden agendas
- Demonstrate a caring approach that reflects a genuine concern for their organizations and stakeholders

- Engage employees to ensure that everyone is part of the team
- Do what is right and make knowledge-based decisions
- Maintain open dialogue with stakeholders and limit the number of surprises that they encounter

By applying these proven trust-building strategies consistently, leaders can build stronger employees, teams, and collaborative work environments that fulfill the mission, vision, and values of their organizations.

Covey (2006) identifies four key behavioral dimensions that foster trust: integrity, credibility, competence, and character. He states that most of the major violations of trust are violations of integrity. Covey stresses that integrity is more than honesty, and proposes that it consists of three other virtues: congruency, humility, and courage. Congruency is when one acts according to his or her values; humility is the ability to look out for the good of others in addition to what is good for you; and courage is the ability to do the right thing even when it may be difficult.

Covey (2006) further identifies four “cores” that are key to building credibility and trust. The four cores are integrity, intent, capabilities, and results. Integrity and intent are character cores. Capabilities and results are competency cores. All four cores are necessary for trusting and productive relationships.



Character is a balance of integrity and intentionality; one’s ability to keep commitments is important to character. Covey states that the quickest way to build trust is “doing what you say you will do – talk straight and deliver results” (Covey, 2006, pp. 216-217).

Competence implies that leaders are proficient in their skills, knowledge, capabilities, and abilities. They have impressive records of accomplishment, exemplary performance histories, and exceptional knowledge and skills.

Leaders who possess a high level of trust with their staff have the courage to live, and lead by, their values and beliefs.

Behaviors exhibited by leaders are often reflective of their degree of trustworthiness; the following questions offer a guide in determining this. *Am I believable? Am I someone people can trust? Am I someone that I can trust? Do I accomplish what I am expected to do?*

Leaders who possess a high level of trust with their staff have the courage to live, and lead by, their values and beliefs. Leaders who fail to do so are dismissing one of the most effective strategies for building trust in an organization—leading by example. By using this approach, leaders are able to model the qualities they expect from employees as well as demonstrate integrity, credibility, congruency, and character. Thus, they inspire and develop trust within and throughout the organization.

Strategies that Invoke Trust

Higher education organizations are currently facing serious challenges as a result of several complex issues and a declining economic climate. Consequently, the need to build and cultivate solid relationships is essential, not only for success, but for survival. Solid relationships are developed over time, and generally they are based on a strong foundation of trust. And while trust itself is difficult to measure, a lack of trust is often more visible in that it can be very costly to an organization in the form of unhappy stakeholders and lost opportunities.

Many strategies can be used by organizations to enhance trust. Strategies such as Appreciative Inquiry, Shared Vision, Systems Thinking, and Mutual Gains help to engage the organization in a systematic approach to fulfill its mission, vision, and values, and to establish heightened levels of trust and synergy.

Few approaches have the potential to be as transformative as **Appreciative Inquiry** in addressing challenging issues and

affecting change. According to Cooperrider and Whitney (2008), Appreciate Inquiry (AI) is “the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential” (p. 3). According to Peterson (2003), the AI process has the ability to restore trust, generate hope, invite vision, discover vistas of possibilities, all while building upon the inherent strengths within the organization.

Likewise, a purposeful **Shared Vision** requires strong internal trust within an organization and is a catalyst to building trust. According to Kouzes and Posner (2009) in an article entitled, *To Lead, Create a Shared Vision*, “The only visions that take hold are shared visions—and you will create them only when you listen very, very closely to others, appreciate their hopes, and attend to their needs” (p. 1). Likewise, Peter Senge (1990), in his book *The Fifth Discipline* describes shared vision as shared pictures of the future that foster genuine commitment and enrollment, rather than compliance to organizational goals and “a force in people’s hearts” that provides the focus and energy for learning (p. 206). Senge sees vision as the foundation for trust in the organization.

Systems Thinking, the concept of looking at something holistically rather than through its component parts, is yet another approach that organizations are using to improve the way they operate. According to Joseph Alonzo (2012), systems thinking provides greater understanding and insight into our interconnectedness. It enables us to enhance how we relate to each other, other systems, and work toward a mutually shared goal. This fuller comprehension of the entire system and interconnectedness provides the foundation for trust.

Yet another organizational strategy based on trust is the **Mutual Gains** approach which involves developing a consensus-building, win-win strategy for finding mutually acceptable solutions that meet the interests of both parties. Fundamental to the success of Mutual Gains is trust and mutual respect. Consequently, as in the other organizational strategies, trust becomes not only a foundational tenet; the Mutual Gains strategy itself also becomes a catalyst for the development of trust.

The strategies listed above are only a few of the many powerful tools that a leader can use to enhance trust within an organization. The focus on a positive holistic approach in leadership is the common thread that runs through these organizational strategies.



Appreciative Inquiry

by Fiona Hert

Appreciative Inquiry is a strengths-based and collaborative process used in personal and organizational development. Since its development in the 1980s, this approach has been used throughout the world for organizational change in companies such as BP, McDonalds, and British Airways, and for community consultation and development (Vega & Associates, 2003). Its premise is that by focusing on an organization's strengths, rather than its problems, solutions-oriented change can occur within the organization. Participants in the AI process begin with understanding the four guiding principles:

Principle 1

Words create worlds: "Reality" is not an objective fact; it is experienced by all of us differently. We create meaning with our words, and we impact our culture either positively or negatively with our words. By using positive words, we can create a positive reality. This is very powerful!

Principle 2

Positive images lead to positive action; we are all more likely to be inspired by a viewpoint of a positive future. We are energized to move forward.

Principle 3

Quality relationships are essential to organizational success; to be effective, employees need to feel safe, engage in honest and clear communications, and build on trusting relationships.

Principle 4

Previously hidden possibilities emerge when the entire organization engages in conversations that matter. When an organization speaks with a common voice and in caring and meaningful ways, a deeper

understanding by individuals can occur which will have a positive impact on the organization.

By creating positive relationships, using a process of appreciating and inquiring, and building on a deep understanding of perspectives and reality, an organization can come to terms with change collectively and collaboratively.





Shared Vision

by Susan DeCamillis

Developing and articulating a shared vision is one of the keys to being a successful leader. The purpose of articulating a shared vision is to make it 'real' and to allow people within the organization to share in activities that help to realize common goals. When articulating a vision, it is best if the vision is complex, challenging to meet, collaborative in nature, and purposeful.

The call for colleagues to come together and engage in collaboration for the sake of realizing this shared vision brings a level of commitment and buy-in. Developing a vision and making that shared vision known also helps to create a level of trust within the organization. When there is a common and shared vision, work toward that vision can be made throughout the institution and at different levels: individual, group, and department. When a leader consistently and clearly articulates the vision of the organization, this message can be used to prioritize work and guide decision-making processes. Stakeholders rarely question what the vision is, where the organization is headed, and how each individual can contribute to realizing the vision.

Donna Fitzgerald (2003) lists four strategies necessary to create and benefit from a shared vision. They include:

- Create or elicit the initial vision
- Translate the vision into physical activities that are required to achieve it (using systems thinking)
- Articulate this vision to others as either the right or best way to reach the common goal
- Hold true to the essence of the vision when reality changes the plans

Systems Thinking

by Tina Hoxie and Deedee Stakley



According to Peter Senge, systems thinking establishes a conceptual framework that provides knowledge and tools that help individuals to see the big picture and determine how to make effective changes. Senge describes the five disciplines that must be mastered at all levels of the institution: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking (2006).

Systems thinking provides individuals with a way to look at a situation and see the whole picture, including connections, links, and relationships. By focusing on systems thinking, individuals can learn to identify the underlying structures that impact a complex situation. This can be accomplished by using a set of specific tools, processes that lead to improvement, facilitation that leads to innovation and creativity, and a problem-solving approach that strives to understand the whole. Instead of employing a traditional or scientific cause-and-effect approach, systems thinking employs a holistic approach. It looks at the big picture, finds connectedness, analyzes the situation, and considers the value that individual parts contribute to the whole system. It considers the influences of all the parts, looks at the system that supports a process, and develops an understanding about how each step interacts and adds value. This process of looking for patterns or interrelatedness enables one to better appreciate the connections in a system.

Charlotte Roberts overviewed a unique way to consider systems thinking from the perspective of striving for sustainable success. She described three elements to systems thinking that include visioning by involving stakeholders; truth telling by demonstrating a commitment to discovering the truth; and evolving consciousness to the process and group self-awareness (Pegasus Videos, 2011).

Can Trust be Rebuilt?

Trust is an essential component of effective leadership; it is a deeply personal value that once disrupted is not easily reestablished (Covey, 2009).

When trust has been destroyed or compromised, it can be rebuilt if the leader is committed to doing so by nurturing stronger relationships. According to Stephenson (2004), leaders can take three core steps to begin rebuilding trust.

First, leaders must live by the ethical values that they communicate. It is simply not enough for leaders to talk about having ethical values if they do not also commit to demonstrating these values in their professional and personal conduct. To help employees act with integrity, leaders must have a clear and consistent set of values that are both shared with and modeled for employees.

According to Van den Akker, Heres, Lasthuizen, and Six (2009), "It is therefore important that leaders themselves are indeed moral persons and explicitly demonstrate ethical behavior to their followers. Followers learn what to do and what not to do by observing their leader's behavior and are likely to imitate their leaders, whether the example set by the leader is good or bad" (p. 104).

To help employees act with integrity, leaders must have a clear and consistent set of values that are both shared with and modeled for employees.

In addition, employees and other stakeholders must be encouraged to be open and honest as well.

Second, leaders must create a culture of trust and compassion based upon open communication. Good leaders say what they mean, listen to others, and respond accordingly. "Communication is fundamental to building trust," says Jodi Macpherson, a communications expert at Mercer Inc. "It contributes to the creation of an environment of trust around leaders that enables them to lead effectively, engage employees and ultimately deliver results" (Besslin & Reddin, 2004, p. 1). In addition, employees and other

A background image showing several hands of different skin tones reaching out to hold a globe. The hands are positioned around the globe, with some fingers pointing towards it. The overall tone is warm and collaborative.

stakeholders must be encouraged to be open and honest as well. “Communication is the critical link to stakeholders,” says David Moorcroft, Senior Vice President, Corporate Communications, at RBC Financial Group. “Not just to provide information, which is just the table stakes. Building trust involves managing communications and creating the right channels that give employees more of a say in things and encouraging discussion around what needs to be done” (2004, p. 3). Effective leaders can and do win the trust of their stakeholders by communicating openly and often, having clear and consistent communications strategies, and regularly assessing the overall communications effectiveness of the organization.

Sustaining a Culture of Trust

Trust is at the heart of every transaction. The best leaders clearly understand that trust impacts lives every day. Trust influences the quality of every relationship, every communication, every work project, and every business venture. Regardless of the engagement, leaders must encourage trust (Covey, 2009).

“Leadership without mutual trust is a contradiction in terms.”
~Warren Bennis

Given the importance of building trusting contacts, leaders must act intentionally in fostering these interactions. It is imperative that communication is transparent and endorsed. Ideally, leaders go first, setting the stage by modeling behavior. Trust is established when leaders advocate clear direction coupled with well-defined expectations and strong accountability.

Leaders are guided by the vision, values, and strategies embraced by the organization. This road map propels the team members to honor the mission and respect each other in the process. Leaders act as coaches as they praise, mentor, and support members of the team. This is most helpful in developing cooperation and high performance on an individual and collective level.

“Discretionary energy is at play when an employee goes beyond the minimum. Sometimes discretionary energy is about innovation

and creativity, but more often it is about jumping in before being asked, going beyond the basics to meet a need or solve a problem” (Edmonds, 2011).

According to Edmonds (2011), some of the key activities required of leaders to create an environment conducive to discretionary energy include:

- Clarifying and communicating vision, values, and strategies
- Setting and communicating goals for the team and for individuals
- Coaching, redirecting, and praising to ensure team members cooperate and perform well, both individually and as a team
- Honoring and respecting team members and demanding that they do the same for their peers and customers

An atmosphere hosting this type of energy has a look and feel about it: Leaders who are able to proactively manage activities are able to create a culture of trust and respect which results in a more gratifying environment for employees. This is reflected in the willingness of employees to go beyond the standard, where volunteering and going above and beyond what is required is not a rarity but a norm. Employees proactively solve problems and their work exudes passion and commitment as they consistently surpass the required expectations. Covey (2009) explains that organizations that contain high trust operate in a dividend market which enables them to succeed in their communications, interactions, and decisions with incredible speed. The reality is that these organizations outperform. They attract top-notch employees who crave an environment that encourages initiative, innovation, and creativity.

Conclusion

Building organizational trust requires reading, discussing, and reflecting upon the concept of trust. It begins with an appreciation and understanding of trust, but it also requires practice and conscious application. Trust in an organization is not a given. It is the result of deliberate, strategically guided action.

From an organizational perspective, trust is built step by step and commitment by commitment on every level. Effective leadership—leadership that recognizes the value of trust, the elements that contribute to it, and the ways to repair it if it is compromised—is essential to the sustainability of a dynamic organization.



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Learning Leadership by Design



Learning Leadership by Design Logo History

In 2000-2001, Learning Leadership by Design, a series of workshops sponsored by the former Michigan Department of Career Development, provided a forum for approximately 100 Michigan community college leaders to explore the issues of the time. These included collaboration, assessment, developmental education, and others. Sessions were situated in retreat settings, such as Garland Resort and Frankenmuth. Northwestern Michigan College art instructor and former humanities division director Jill Hinds (1949-2013) was invited to produce a logo for one session. She produced the logo you find in this publication and a series of abstract birds in varied, rich colors to reflect the diversity of disciplines, students, and staff of our colleges - sometimes flying in different directions but always moving forward. We have resurfaced this logo and the theme with this leadership publication to honor Jill's immense contributions to community college students of the arts and her gift of art to many in a variety of media and different contexts, including leadership development.