



Who Do You Trust?

In times of great change, **trust** is the **key element** for individuals and organizations

by Stephen K. Hacker

THE WORLD HAS been changing since the beginning, but many people don't grasp that change is accelerating. From medical advances to transportation speeds to communication ease to knowledge sharing, the world is experiencing an unprecedented acceleration of change. This change is technical and social in nature.

The ways we interact with each other, for instance, have shifted due to technology changes and social innovation. Think of the internet, social media, online dating, cell phones and texting.

In 50 Words Or Less

- Increasing complexity and pace of change demand productive relationships to deliver needed quality, creativity and responsiveness.
- Generating trust among individuals is essential to shaping these productive relationships.
- Trust is composed of three critical elements: consistency, commitment and capability.
- Building trust requires investment, examination of assumptions and risk.

Consider also the increase in complexity being experienced today. Growth in connectivity, interdependency, diversity and adaptability throughout the world has delivered many blessings. People are able to collaborate with others half a world away, build on the expertise of many cultures, and create products and services at mind-spinning speed.

These same factors have greatly advanced complexity, however. Think of the countless systems interacting together during a normal day. When one of these systems slips and underperforms, an entire working environment is affected. The loss of a cell phone, for instance, can suddenly bring the day to a halt, which is simply amazing.

Given the acceleration of change and increased complexity, how is the work world faring? Organizations are under much stress to rapidly deliver quality, creativity and responsiveness. Increasingly, workplaces rely on cooperation, teamwork, empowerment, coordination, knowledge sharing, cross-functional groups and business-to-business partnerships. More and more, organizational success is being contributed to by high-performance work teams and through strong interpersonal relationships.

Trust is understood to be vital to these functioning social structures. Trust promotes an engaging working environment and psychological well-being, allowing individuals to focus on their performance. Research has shown trust to be a key component in producing a high-performance culture in which collaboration and helping behaviors are critical.¹

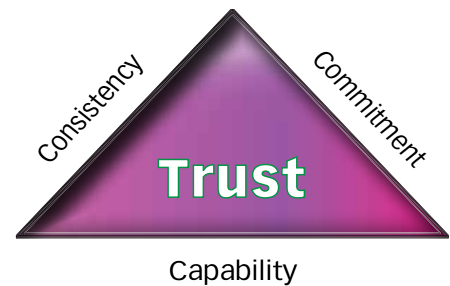
In short, trust is essential to the social undertaking of quality and continuous improvement.

What is trust?

Achieving the needed trust requires a clear understanding of trust's composition and a straightforward development process. Like "love," trust is a big concept and often ill-defined word. Certainly, it is in everyday vocabulary, but exactly how do you define it?

At a basic level, trust is the reliance on someone else with something important to you. When ill, you trust a physician will help you get better. To a certain extent, you put your health in the hands of a physician. A level of risk is associated with the relationship, so the general definition of trust in this case would be: The willingness to accept your vulnerability to another person and rely on him or her.

Trust triangle / FIGURE 1



This definition, however, does not disclose the critical components of trust. In conducting original research into trust's composition, three key elements can form a functional definition:

Capability—The level of trust you grant someone depends on the person and his or her role within the relationship. You may find your car mechanic and your physician trustworthy for their respective roles, but you wouldn't let your mechanic provide health services. Nor would you allow your physician to repair your car's transmission. Their capabilities in their respective roles foster your perception of trustworthiness.

Capability is an important dimension of trust in the workplace. You rarely trust someone with a task you believe he or she cannot achieve. Trust also is granted when a person is aware of and forthcoming about his or her capabilities, including deficient areas. Capability is one of the three elements to examine when choosing to trust or distrust.

Commitment—Your perception of another's commitment affects trust levels. This element has two aspects. First, is the person committed to you and your welfare? When you need help, you would rather ask a friend than a stranger because you know your friend has concern for you and is committed to your well-being. Likewise, if you perceive a co-worker cares for you as an individual, trust is high.

Secondly, commitment to a common task or goal is important. Cynicism and suspicion often arise when people perceive others have a hidden agendas or unclear objectives. You trust people who have similar purposes and objectives. You trust people to a lesser extent when their drive differs from yours, and you distrust people when you cannot ascertain their purposes and objectives.

Consistency—Trust increases with demonstrated

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consistency. Consistency between words and actions validates integrity. People who don't "walk the talk" have a difficult time fostering trust.

More often than with yourself, to help discern trustworthiness you measure a person's consistency when observing him or her with others. You can clearly see when word and deed match and when there's inconsistency. You may disagree with an action of another, but trust may be bolstered by his or her consistent but disagreeable behavior. Trust flows from the perception of integrity and predictability.

With the above explanations of the three C's (capability, commitment and consistency), an improved definition of trust is acquired: A person's willingness to increase his or her vulnerability to another person based on his or her perception of the other person's capability, commitment and consistency.

The trust triangle shown in Figure 1 denotes the three trust components forming an area that represents the level of comprehensive trust existing. Each leg of the triangle helps determine the level of trust. An abundance of each element is required to fully trust another, but it is possible to build trust in one or two of the elements without fully trusting another.

You might say, for example, that you trust someone's ability to do a particular job, but not his or her commitment to a task. In fact, you might suspect someone deeply opposes contributing to the successful outcome of a task. The net result is that you don't trust that person with the task. The area of trust in this given context is zero.

Trust willingness

A working definition of trust is of great value, but developing trust is a different matter. Trust willingness refers to your readiness to open the door to confidence in others (Figure 2). There is no requirement to open the door to trust with anyone in particular. There are many incidents in which you simply may not choose to develop a relationship, but if trust is desired, effort is obligatory.

Trust willingness is built on three dimensions—just like three hinges on a door: your willingness to invest, examine assumptions and risk acting on trust. If one of the hinges doesn't function, the door will not open.

Willingness to invest—Developing trust requires time and effort. A high level of trust will not be achieved by waiting for it to happen. Invested time is spent listening, expressing and sharing experiences. From such efforts, a platform to learn about another occurs. Without the investment of time, however, trust will not form.

Willingness to examine assumptions—Trusting relationships would be limited if you trusted only those individuals you feel comfortable with at first encounter. Willingness to examine assumptions refers to awareness of predispositions and judgment of others.

Have you ever met someone and experienced bad

The door to trust / FIGURE 2



W = willingness

first impressions, but after additional interactions with that person a solid relationship bloomed? What changed? Sometimes, assumptions are off the mark. Are you aware of your judgments? Having predispositions is not right or wrong, but it is important to become aware of them and to be ready to examine them often.

Willingness to risk—The notion of risk is embedded in the definition of trust itself. Trust will not develop without risk and without vulnerability. Many things can be on the line when you trust: money, a project, career, promotion, personal exposure, emotions or life itself.

Risk has two sides: success and failure. By putting things of importance to you on the line to develop trust, disappointment and damage or a trusting relationship could result. That's why it's called risk. But without risk, trust is nonexistent. Risk is a powerful catalyst. The more you risk, the greater the possible returns and potential losses.

The door to building trust depends on all three willingness hinges working. If for some reason you decide not to invest, the door will not open. Likewise, if you decide not to risk or examine trust-preventing predispositions, trust will not grow. This is not to say that trust must grow with everyone you meet. The concept of optimal trust calls for a reasonable assessment of the relationships you wish to develop.

Rarely do you build a trusting relationship with the person who services the vending machine—there is no incentive to it. You may trust the candy company and the vending service company to supply a quality product, but a deep, personal relationship with the service person seems unwarranted.

When a person in your environment has a strong, steady influence on your daily life, however, consider building trust. Psychology academicians at Duke University have discussed how the dependence or interdependence in a relationship affects the need for trust between parties.²

When the level of dependence or interdependence is high, the need for trust is also great. With a clear vision concerning the level of desired trust, an appropriate trust-building strategy can be developed.

The art of building trust

The development of trust is typically perceived as a slow process. Try this exercise: Think of a living person you trust the most in the world. How did you come

to trust this person? Most answers relate to time: "I have known him for a long time." "We were in school together." "She has always been there for me."

The process is called knowledge-based trust. Getting to know a person over time and experiencing many interactions is a process. Time is scarce, however, in today's fast changing and complex environment. New teams and work relationships are formed constantly, offering little time to develop relationships. Therefore, a method is needed to allow development of trust rapidly.

The speed at which you create trust is linked to intention to do so. It can happen rapidly. Think of persuasive salespeople who can build trust quickly, and ask yourself how they do it.

In life-or-death situations, individuals have demonstrated enormous will to build trust and have often succeeded. Think of natural disasters in which speed is paramount and trusting relationships quickly form. So, building trust is not always a slow process.

With trust-building skills, relationships among individuals, within and between teams, and among organizations can flourish at remarkable rates.

An opportunity to accelerate trust building lies in the readiness to rapidly engage in disclosure. In building one-to-one relationships, significant disclosures could include your hopes and aspirations, your purpose in life, or your fears and concerns.

Taking such a step to share meaningful knowledge about yourself is a big step and seemingly a risky one, but discussions about the weather, the school you attended, your marital status and hobbies are slow and not revealing. It is difficult to understand areas of common commitment through social chat.

By sharing meaningful information about yourself, you clarify who you are and what is really important to you. Knowing what an individual is about helps you better understand possible behaviors and gives clues to predictability. The disclosure of your life's purpose, for example, will have a direct impact on the level of trust.

The risk taken by sharing such personal information demonstrates your willingness to build trust. Furthermore, through rapid disclosure, individuals can share their trust readiness. A clear picture of capability can be gained by sharing skills and experiences.

Beyond one-on-one relationships, trust within a team or organization can be built swiftly. Here too, dis-

closure is beneficial. What are the true goals and objectives of the organization? What is important to the team, and what are the unspoken rules? A refreshing breath of frankness and honesty can rapidly create a trusting environment.

Dropping organization-speak, politically correct phraseology and media-acceptable explanations can have a remarkable impact on trust. Is the team or organization willing to take such a risk? Does the willingness exist to openly share genuine commitment to promote trust? Often, the choice is not to have such candidness due to fearing the downside risks: misunderstanding, exposure or possibly loss of power.

Jumpstarting trust building also can be achieved in declaring intentions. By sharing what is desired in the relationship, all parties can become aware of the reasons to build trust. Why build a relationship? Does a common desire exist? Answering these questions can clarify commitment.

Declaring intentions helps explain what you can be counted on for in a particular relationship. When intentions are unclear, misunderstandings become frequent. Clarifying your intentions about the relationship is likely to build trust because others understand your motivations. And yes, there is risk involved here, too.

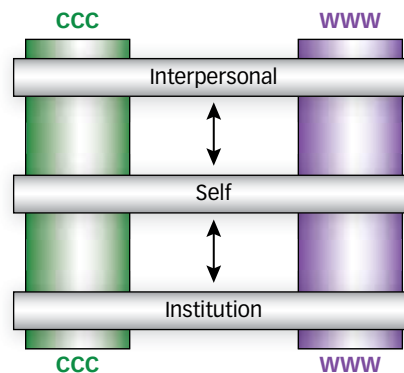
A strong start in building the relationship is important, but don't forget that to sustain or grow trust, ongoing investment is needed. Continually investing time and energy, displaying a willingness to examine assumptions and risk taking will create the opportunity to further develop trust.

Trust readiness

A comprehensive picture of trust begins to develop—with a definition of trust revolving around the three C's coupled with the process of building trust involving the three W's (willingness to invest, willingness to examine assumptions and willingness to risk). The opportunity to build trust resides in the application of the three C's and three W's across several entities.

First, the opportunity to build trust dwells within each individual. Do you exhibit trustworthiness by having an abundant area within the trust triangle that displays capability, commitment and consistency? Are you willing to trust by demonstrating a desire to invest, examine assumptions and take risks? To the degree in which you do, you show evidence of your trust readiness:

Levels to build trust / FIGURE 3



CCC = capability, commitment and consistency

WWW = willingness to invest, willingness to examine assumptions and willingness to risk

Trust readiness = trustworthiness (capability, commitment and consistency) + trust willingness (invest, examine assumptions and risk).

Trust readiness underpins relationship formation. The ability to demonstrate trustworthiness and trust willingness speeds trust building. It calls on self-discovery to assess personal levels of trustworthiness and trust willingness: trust readiness. Trust of self provides valuable insights. The New Year's resolutions made and kept or not kept speak to trusting of self. If you cannot trust yourself, chances are that others cannot trust you, and you cannot trust them.

Next, there is the prospect of working directly with another in a relationship. This interpersonal challenge is the one most often brought forth when the subject of trust arises. Working relationships can be seen as one-on-one and within multiple one-on-ones offered in a team setting. A significant aspect of team development is the multiple one-on-one relationships existing within a team.

Institutional trust

The final units of analysis can be found within institutional groupings. Trust work can be addressed within and among bodies of people such as trust among teams, trust within an organization and trust between

organizations. These units of analysis are each unique in the manner in which trust takes form.

The profound level of the institutional influence is often subtle in its delivery. You become desensitized and unable to consciously recognize the many messages screaming trust or distrust to the workforce. For this reason, you must stop, stand back and see anew the messages being delivered. The many messages related to trust are most often found in the organization's culture, structure and leadership, as discussed by Robert Shaw.³

The culture of an organization has a direct impact on trust because it sets the norms and acceptable behaviors. Organizational cultures that promote high levels of trust have a well-defined purpose, values and vision that are understood and accepted by all.

Encouraging open, direct and honest communication helps develop trust. The dissemination of authority and accountability—coupled with acceptance of risk-taking throughout the organization—support trust.

Organizational structure constitutes the framework within which employees work and interact. Rules, norms and policies can foster trust or distrust. An excess of control systems can foster distrust, for example, while a policy of empowerment increases the level of trust. Well-developed information channels can provide a shift of information-sharing criteria from “need to know” to “need not to know.” Furthermore, clear roles and accountabilities promote a trusting environment.

Leadership behaviors provide the climate for trust to grow or diminish. Leaders are assessed on their trust readiness because open and accessible leaders foster trust. Speaking truth—not organizational slogans—advances the cause of trust.

Think of effective trust-building leaders you have known in the past. What are the characteristics they demonstrated? Joined with an organization's culture and structure, leadership lends its support to the creation of trust or distrust.

Bringing the components together

A holistic representation of building trust can be captured in the three levels for actions to build trust (Figure 3, p. 29):

1. **Interpersonal**—You interact with one another to build the relationship.
2. **Self**—You build your personal trust readiness.

3. Institutional—You create a favorable environment to develop trust.

The question is where to begin. You could spend a lifetime fully developing trust readiness, or you could simply start with institutional entities to best create a favorable environment.

The answer is to start across the board. The three levels have an obvious interrelationship, and waiting until you are driven to perfection would be futile. With each unit of analysis comes a tailored assessment and current best approach in developing trust.⁴

Strong intentions

Achieving quality requires people interacting, and trust is the key link among people. Trust is derived from the perception of another's capability, commitment and consistency. Trust willingness is demonstrated in the investment of time, examination of assumptions and risk taking performed in the relationship. Each of you has the immediate opportunity to increase your trust readiness (trustworthiness + trust willingness).

Apart from working on yourself and your individual relationships, the institutions in which you reside offer ample openings to build a trust-conducive environment.

There are no magic recipes, just a strong intention to create. With the power of will, even mistakes along the way will serve to strengthen relationships. **QP**

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

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