



Dissecting Trust: A Multifaceted Approach to Team Performance

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Why is trust so difficult to understand? After all, trust is fundamental to our relationships and influences everything we do. Many people regard trust as an emotion you simply feel or do not feel. However, trust is not an emotion -- trust is a choice, and we learn to trust or distrust others over time. Although we all know trust when we experience it, what it means to trust others and the impact trust has in every aspect of our lives is often less obvious.

In the workplace, trust often mediates team outcomes and leadership effectiveness. I have worked with many teams and organizations and found that trust almost always contributes to some level of team dysfunction. Trust is a primary driver of team performance and one of the most essential elements in team success. However, most people think about trust as if it is one simple feeling experienced equally by all team members. This is problematic because trust is anything but simple; trust is multifaceted, experienced differently by each member within a given team and the outcome of a complex series of interactions.

To more effectively develop team trust and, in turn, increase team performance, we must stop oversimplifying trust and begin managing trust with more precision and specificity. We can do this by changing our approach toward measuring and intervening on trust and thinking about trust through a multifaceted and multidimensional framework.

While there are many facets that contribute to trust, we can focus on leveraging and/or refining the following core behaviors to impact team trust:

1. **Engaging in conflict and confrontation:** To what extent does the team engage in constructive conflict, seek productive conflict resolution and solicit and provide critical feedback?
2. **Demonstrating vulnerability:** To what extent is the team humble and candid? Do team members relate to one another and demonstrate empathy?
3. **Active listening:** To what extent does the team seek to understand, demonstrate active listening skills and remain open to new perspectives and ways of thinking?
4. **Knowledge sharing:** To what extent are team members transparent and collaborative?

5. **Achieving results:** To what extent does the team drive results, define team success and maintain self, peer and top-down accountability?

These five facets are fundamental to team trust, and if any of these behaviors are challenged, the impact on trust is significant. By focusing specifically on these facets, we can identify which particular behaviors are influencing team trust and effectively modify those behaviors. In addition, we must also consider the many dimensions of trust.

Certain relationships may be more or less trusting than others. Rather than reflecting on these facets alone for teams as a whole, we can also examine the differences in levels of trust between relationships on any given team.

- **Team members:** How do team members, the team leader or others in the organization demonstrate these behaviors with the team?
- **Team leaders:** How do team members or others in the organization demonstrate these behaviors with the team leader?
- **Stakeholders:** How do consumers of the team's output experience that team?

Considering the differences in trust between each relationship, as it relates to the five core facets, allows us to identify both how and where we can begin intervening in trust.

By shifting our perspectives on trust to a facet and dimension-specific level, we can begin to develop trust with precision and directionality rather than relying on broad and inexact techniques. Through this targeted approach, team leaders and team members can define and address specific challenges and opportunities within the team and between teams, leaders and other parts of the organization. In turn, we can more effectively and efficiently foster team trust, increase team performance and positively impact our organizations.

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