RESEARCH REPORT

# THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TRUST
## People's stories of trust in the workplace

Meysam Poorkavoos, Carol Hatcher and Andy Smith

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For more information visit www.roffeypark.com or contact:

UK Office

Tel: +44 (0) 1293 851644

Email: info@roffeypark.com

Singapore Office

Tel: +65 6549 7840

Email: singapore@roffeypark.com

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Meysam Poorkavoos, Carol Hatcher and Andy Smith

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## Acknowledgements

# Executive Summary

Levels of trust in our leaders and businesses are at an all-time low. At the same time high levels of trust are critical to people's effectiveness and well-being at work. Studies show that organisations with a low level of trust between employees require unnecessary monitoring, duplication and bureaucracy. They also suffer from lack of engagement and high staff turnover. These all cost organisations time and money and discourage innovation. Also newer ways of working and participative styles of leadership rely on high levels of trust for their success.

Trust is a complex, dynamic and relational phenomenon. It changes over time and in response to critical events between people. Drawing on the literature, psychological theory suggests we trust others when we have evidence or a sense that they:

- are competent to deliver
- act with good intent to us and others
- do as they say and act authentically
- are consistent in their behaviour and
- invest time in building relationships with us.

These factors are interdependent and influence each other. People are also different in their propensity to trust. Propensity to trust in different individuals is influenced by their different developmental experiences, personality types, and cultural backgrounds.

Our primary research confirmed these factors and traits. It took a longitudinal approach by following the working relationships of 17 individuals over a seven month period. By interviewing people at three month intervals we have gained a real insight into their lived experience of trust or the lack of it; how judgements about trust are formed; and how trust changes over time. Our research identifies the significant incidents and behaviours that contribute to an increase and diminution of trust.

From the stories of 17 individuals, we have selected five where the level of trust fluctuated significantly over the seven month period. We have produced the five stories in abridged form in this report both to shed a light on the lived experience of trust and as a lens through which readers may consider their own relationships. We have also analysed all the interviews using thematic analysis and identified eight trust-building behaviours that seemed to us most prominent in the stories we heard. The behaviours are summarised in the wheel of trust model (see page 27). These serve as foundations for building trusting relationships. The eight qualities are:

1. Being transparent

2. Being consistent

3. Being personal

4. Demonstrating vulnerability

5. Sticking to commitments

6. Appreciating others

7. Listening well

8. Demonstrating trust in others.

Our intention in undertaking this research was to explore how people really experience trust or a lack of it and the emotional impact of changes in trust in some of their most important relationships at work. We hope that this will serve to encourage leaders and managers to think about and reflect on their own relationships, in order to build high trust, healthier and more productive ones.

# Introduction

Trust has always been important but it seems to be more under the spotlight now. Why is this so?

At a societal level, in the UK it is clear that trust in politicians, corporates and financial institutions is at an all-time low. A recent poll by Ipsos MORI shows that politicians, business leaders and bankers are less trusted than builders[1]. There is a combination of factors at play here from the cash for questions scandals, to the collapse of the economy in 2008-9 and more recently the revelations at VW and others. At an organisational level these issues are compounded by the pace of poorly handled change. Our report on organisations and trust explains how change creates fear of loss on many levels and can lead to a diminution in trust where communication basics are ignored (Varney & Wellbelove, 2015).

The above are not the direct concerns of this report. Here we are looking at the levels of trust in day-to-day working relationships. The need for trust on this level is becoming ever more apparent because of how we now organise in the world of work. This is radically different from the turn

of the century where organisational life was characterised by a mechanistic view associated with Taylorism. Briefly, Taylor saw organisations as machines where, through objective measurement, efficient processes could be designed. As workers were seen as low skill and potentially feckless, an elite group of managers were required to control them to operate these processes through crude methods of behavioural reinforcement. This way of organising has something to recommend it. It is simple; people know where they stand and what roles to take. Decision making and authority are clear. There is clear separation between managers and workers who can negotiate different interests adversarially rather than collaboratively. Anxiety arising from uncertainty is reduced. New models and philosophies of working (engagement, empowerment, matrix working, and remote management as examples) challenge this model fundamentally. Here authority is dispersed; decision making is shared; people can be both leaders and followers; and things can only be done in collaboration. In this way of working, trust and relationships are the pre-requisites for success and often the only means of getting things done and resolving the competing agendas and conflicts inherent in organisational life.

## The nature of our research

Most research studies on interpersonal trust have taken a cross-sectional approach (snapshot view) and investigated it at a single point of time as if it were a static commodity. However, in the organisational world we describe above, trust is a dynamic phenomenon that changes over time and in response to events and interactions. From the day that we start working in an organisation and establishing relationships with our new colleagues until the day we leave, there is much that could happen which may reinforce or weaken trust. To replicate this process, in the most important strand of our research, we have taken a longitudinal approach and followed the working relationships of 17 individuals over a seven month period. We supplemented this with two other strands. In the first we undertook a significant literature review to explore the notion of trust and theories that underpin it (pages 9-11). Finally in the second strand we provided participants with a psychometric profile, the tool developed by JCA. This has specific scales on trust and we say more about this on pages 11-12.

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1    Ipsos MORI Veracity Index 2015: Trust in Professions, URL: https://www.ipsos-mori. com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3685/Politicians-are-still-trusted-less-than-estate-agents-journalists-and-bankers.aspx

# Why is trust important?

We suggested in our introduction that trust has always been important to people's effectiveness and well-being at work. We base this view on our own research and review of the literature. Trust matters because organisations with low trust between employees require unnecessary monitoring, duplication and bureaucracy. They also suffer from lack of engagement and high staff turnover. Further:

- Distrust may result in fear and destructive behaviours and waste of precious resource, for example the additional time managers take to needlessly control and monitor employees.

- When high trust exists between leaders and employees, employees spend more time on the required tasks and go the extra mile (Dirks, 2006).

- Trusting relationships between colleagues encourage people to focus on their work, instead of investing time and energy in inappropriate micro-political behaviour (that is not to say that all micro-political behaviour is inappropriate).

- Trust encourages employees to take risks and try different ways of doing things. This fosters a creative culture that boosts competitiveness. Studies about corporate innovation show that trust is the main differentiator between organisations with high innovation and those who struggle with innovation (Covey, 2006).

- New trends of work in organisations, such as virtual teams and matrix working, have made interpersonal trust even more important. Smith and Sinclair (2003) in their study found that the generation of trust is vital to the success of virtual teams. Similarly, in another study by Roffey Park, Wellbelove (2015) argues that in matrix working environments, traditional command and control forms of power are less likely to be effective. She suggests building trust, amongst other things, as one of the ways to win hearts and minds of colleagues.

Figure 1 summarises the main areas where an organisation benefits from a high level of interpersonal trust.



Figure 1: Main areas where an organisation benefits from a high level of interpersonal trust

# Why you should not trust everything that is said about trust

There are a series of myths about trust that should be discounted before we go on to say what trust is. Based on the work of Covey (2006) and Shockley-Zalabak et al. (2010), we have summarised these myths as:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Myth # 1:**<br>Trust is important but we can't do much about it | Building trust can be thought about and learned. One of the aims of our research is to identify behaviours that help build trust in organisations. |
| **Myth # 2:**<br>You either trust someone or you don't | Both trust and distrust can be created and destroyed. The five stories in this report show how trust and distrust change over time. |
| **Myth # 3:**<br>Trust equals integrity | Although integrity is an important element of trust, it is not the only element. There are different views about how to think about or conceptualise trust. One of the prominent views is that trust is a combination of integrity, benevolence and ability. |
| **Myth # 4:**<br>We can establish trust with only one person at a time | Establishing or destroying trust with one person may mean establishing or destroying it with many. |

# So, what is trust and distrust?

Trust is something we experience from the early stages of our life and yet we find it difficult to explain in words. Sometimes it is easier to define by its absence. There are different definitions of trust in the academic and practitioner literature and they all have one thing in common, namely that when we trust someone, we make ourselves vulnerable. Saunders et al.'s (2014, p.2) definition of trust, which is based on the work of leading trust scholars (Lewicki et al., 1998; Mayer et al, 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998), depicts trust as

*"occurring under conditions of risk which requires the trusting party (the 'trustor') to develop favourable expectations on the intentions and behaviour of the other party ('trustee'), sufficient to prompt a willingness to become vulnerable to the trustee's future conduct."*

Put simply, we expect that the person we trust, the trustee, will behave in a way that we have predicted or in a way that does not harm us.

Govier (1994, p.240) defines distrust as a

*"lack of confidence in the other, a concern that the other may act so as to harm one, that he does not care about one's welfare or intends to act harmfully, or is hostile".*

In short trust is "confident positive expectations regarding another's conduct" and distrust is "confident negative expectations regarding another's conduct" (Lewicki et al., 1998, p.439).

## Psychological approach vs behavioural approach to study trust

Reviewing literature on trust reveals two prominent approaches in trust research (Kramer, 1999):

1. Behavioural approach: in this approach trust is viewed as rational-choice behaviours made by an individual, for example cooperative choices in a game (Hardin, 1992). This approach focuses on the actions and assumes that these result from rational thinking and decision making.

2. Psychological approach: in this approach trust is viewed as complex intrapersonal state including expectation, intention, affect and dispositions (Lewicki et al., 2006; Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). This approach differs from the behavioural one as the researcher steps back and looks at the causes (cognitive and affective processes) that lead to an action.

In the behavioural approach trust is usually measured by cooperative behaviours in experimental games such as prisoner's dilemma[2]. However this has been criticised by scholars because:

- of its simplistic view of what is a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon
- it mainly uses laboratory and controlled environments which differs from studying trust in real life.
- studying trust based on fluctuations in cooperative behaviour make it difficult to accurately measure and account for potential multiple sources of errors (Kee and Knox, 1970). For example changes in cooperative behaviours might be due to factors unrelated to trust such as decision error or boredom (Lewicki et al., 2006).

For these reasons, we have preferred the psychological approach as our underpinning model for understanding interpersonal trust.

## Psychological approach

There are two main streams of studies in the psychological approach. The first stream of literature looks at trust and distrust as a single continuum. The second stream studies trust and distrust as two separate continuums.

### Trust and distrust as a single continuum

This approach, which is also known as unidimensional view, looks at trust as a single continuum. One end of the continuum is high trust and the other end is distrust[3]. This means that we could place a person on this continuum depending on the extent to which we trust them. In this view high trust means no distrust and high distrust means no trust. It means we either trust or distrust someone.

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2  For more information about this go to www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoner's_dilemma
3  There is a disagreement between scholars about this which is one of the weaknesses of this view. We will explain this later

**Trust and distrust as two separate continuums**

This view is known as a two dimensional approach and was introduced by Lewicki et al. (1998). In general this views interpersonal relationships as complex and with different facets. In such relationships there may be reasons to simultaneously trust and distrust another in the same relationship. We may trust someone to do certain activities but we may not trust them with other things. For example I may trust my friend to look after my home while I am away, but I might not trust them to be a good driver.

In the two dimensional approach, trust and distrust have the same sub factors as the unidimensional approach (cognition, affection and intentions[4]) but they are treated as separate dimensions. Figure 2 represents trust and distrust as two continuums. Looking at trust and distrust as two separate continuums shows that low trust does not necessarily mean high distrust. Low trust suggests lack of hope and hesitancy while high distrust suggests fear, scepticism and vigilance (Lewicki et al., 2006). Also low distrust does not necessarily mean high trust. The former suggests absence of fear, scepticism and cynicism in a relationship whilst the latter suggests hope, faith and confidence in a relationship (Lewicki et al., 2006).

For example, think about someone who has recently joined the organisation. You may have a low level of trust in them at the beginning as you don't know their abilities and skills. However, the level of distrust could also be low as there is nothing to suggest they will do anything to harm you or the organisation. After working together for a while, depending on how you meet one another's expectations, the level of trust and distrust will rise or fall.
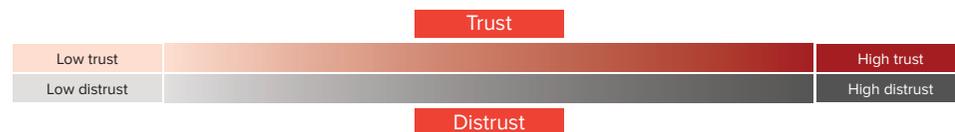


Figure 2: Trust and distrust as two separate continuums

## Our approach in studying trust

In this study we decided to adopt the second approach (the two dimensional approach) for the following reasons.

First, the problem with the unidimensional view is that whilst it is clear that high trust is one end of the continuum, it is not clear what is at the other end (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2012). Is it distrust, low trust or no trust?

4   We will explain these in the 'building blocks of trust'

Second, a unidimensional view suggests you can only trust or distrust someone. However in reality we believe trust and distrust can co-exist. For example someone could have a general high level of trust but still some distrust in a relationship with another individual at the same time.

Third, research conducted by Saunders et al. (2014) seems to confirm that trust and distrust can co-exist and that, as a result, trust and distrust are separate constructs.

## Building blocks of trust

Scholars in the psychological approach look at trust as a multifactorial state that includes cognitive, affective and behavioural sub factors (Lewicki et al., 2006). Figure 3 represents this view.
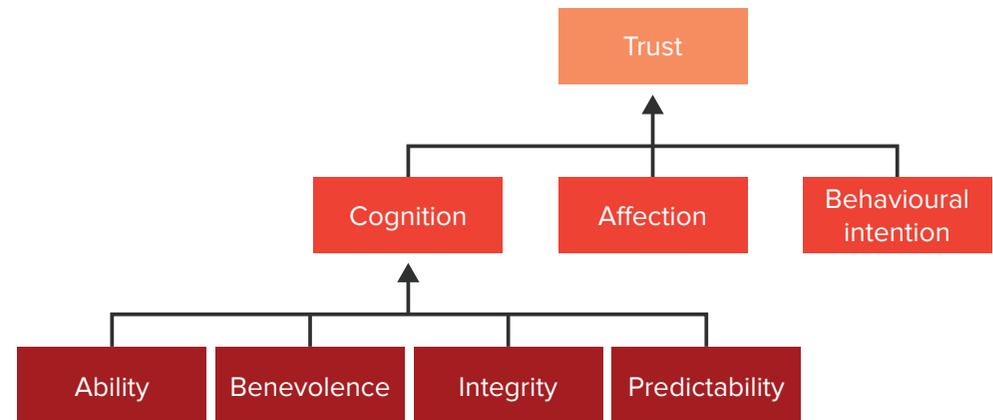


Figure 3: Building blocks of trust

**Trust based on cognition (also known as trust belief or trustworthiness)**

This is about trusting another party based on how much we know them and our judgment of their trustworthiness. There have been many attempts to identify the key elements of cognition. For example Butler and Cantrell (1984) proposed integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty and openness as key elements. In another attempt Butler (1991) extended this to 11 criteria that the other party is assessed upon before being trusted: competence, integrity, consistency, discreetness, fairness, promise fulfilment, loyalty, availability, openness, receptivity, and overall trustworthiness. One of the widely used models in studying cognition in work relationships is Mayer et al.'s (1995) . In this model we trust or distrust someone based on a combination of our perception of that person's ability,

integrity, and benevolence. Cunningham and McGregor (2000) argued that predictability should also be included to Mayer et al.'s (1995) model. Since then these four attributes have been used most often in trust studies. We describe what is meant by each of these factors below:

**Ability**: this is the extent to which we believe that the trustee has skills and knowledge in a specific area. This is important as the person might be skilled in certain activities and not in others. This is trust based on people's competence to deliver.

**Benevolence**: when we trust someone, this may be partly because we believe the trustee has a desire to act with good intentions towards us. This could be based on our previous interaction with the person, depth of the relationship or simply on what other people in the organisation say about them. This is trust based on a sense of or evidence of their likely good intent.

**Integrity**: this is the extent to which we believe that the trustee sticks to a set of principles that we find acceptable. This is trust based on evidence that people will do as they say and act authentically.

**Predictability**: This is about the consistency and regularity of a trustee's behaviour over time. This is trust based on consistency of behaviour towards us.

### Trust based on affection

This is trust based on the emotional bond that may exist between the parties especially in close interpersonal relationships (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Lewis and Weigert (1985) suggest that the emotions that we experience in our relationships (e.g. sadness or outrage due to trust violation or friendship due to a close working relationship) are likely to influence the cognition based trust. Put simply, we trust people who we like or at least invest in building relationships with us.

### Trust based on behavioural intention

This is trust based on the confident expectations that the other party will honour trust. When we see others acting in a way that implies they trust us, we are more likely to reciprocate. (Lewis & Weigert, 1985).

### Discussion

There are two important points that we need to make here. First, people are different in their willingness to trust others. In our social interactions with others we see that some people are more willing to trust others even without any prior data (cognition, affection and behavioural intentions) about the other party. This is called propensity to trust. You can think of propensity as the general willingness to trust others. People are different in their inherent propensity to trust. Mayer et al. (1995) suggest that propensity to trust in different individuals is influenced by their different developmental experiences, personality types, and cultural backgrounds.

Second, these sub factors are interdependent and reciprocally influence each other. And, depending on the situation, each of them may play a more significant role in determining the level of trust. For example in a very close relationship (such as friendship or love), the emotional bond may be superior to the other two in deciding the level of trust. Even within the cognitive sub factor one of the components may play a more significant role. For example in virtual teams integrity is more important in the short term than benevolence which is more reliant on time and social contact. Therefore the qualitative combinations of these sub factors differs across different trusting relationships (Lewis & Weigert, 1985).

## Psychometric profiling

We chose to use JCA's Emotional Intelligence Profile (EIP) (Maddox, 2014) as part of our research approach. There were three reasons for using the profile. Firstly our experience of using it suggested that its dimensions on trust (see below) would be relevant to the research. Second we wanted to offer it as an incentive to people to participate in the research and we had direct experience of using it successfully as a leadership and personal development tool. Thirdly we thought it would provide additional data on the extent to which our sample were representative of the general population.

The EIP measures 16 dimensions of EI and was developed specifically with the workplace in mind. With over 15 years of research and validation, the EIP has been used by over 20,000 leaders worldwide. It differs from other profiles in this field in that it seeks to measure attitudes as well as behavioural and feelings aspects of emotional intelligence as shown in the model below.
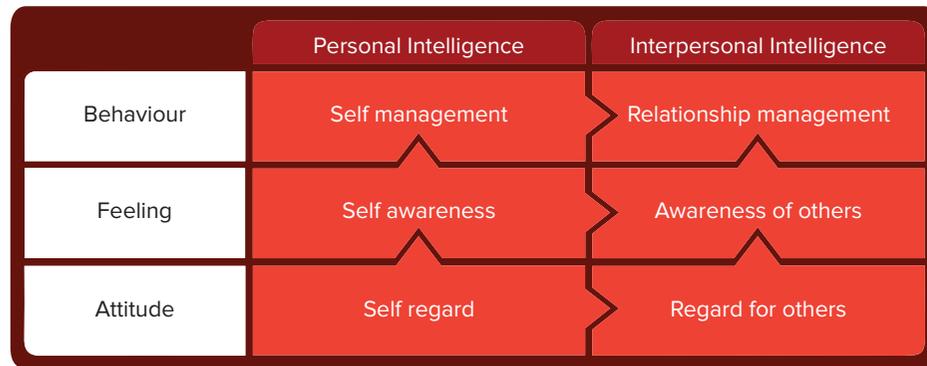
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Figure 4: Relationship between various parts of Emotional Intelligence

The 16 scales of the EIP are:

- **Self-regard**: the degree to which people accept and value themselves
- **Regard for others**: the degree to which people accept and value others
- **Self-awareness**: how in touch people are with their physiology and feelings and intuitions
- **Awareness of others:** how in touch people are with the feelings of others
- **Emotional resilience**: how well people are able to pick themselves up and bounce back from setbacks
- **Personal power**: the locus of control – to what extent people believe they are in charge of, and take responsibility for, their lives
- **Goal eirectedness**: how far people's behaviour is linked to their long-term goals
- **Flexibility**: the extent to which people feel free to adapt their thinking and behaviour to changing situations
- **Connecting** with others: the extent to which people are able to make significant connections with others
- **Authenticity**: how much people invite trust by being principled, reliable and consistent
- **Trust**: the extent to which people are mistrusting/over trusting/carefully trusting
- **Balanced outlook**: how people balance optimism, pessimism and reality
- **Emotional expression**: the extent to people consider they are able to express emotion appropriately

- **Conflict handling**: how well people handle conflict by being passive/aggressive/ assertive
- **Interdependence**: how well people balance reliance, taking others/themselves into account
- **Reflective learning**: the degree to which people reflect on what they and others feel, think and do, in order to leverage learning

## What have the results told us?

Any generalisation from what was a small sample should be treated with a degree of caution. Statistically a sample of at least 50 would be needed for drawing out findings and our commentary is based on percentile rather than raw scores. With all those caveats, our analysis of individuals' profiles suggest:

- They were in keeping with the range of the overall norm group (15,000 people consisting mainly of professional and managerial and graduate level respondents) i.e. they were averagely emotionally intelligent
- This average reflects a wide range of ratings as a group and for individuals
- In terms of key indicators that related to trust (appropriately trusting, mistrustful, carefully trusting and over trusting) ratings varied from lowest to highest
- Almost half of scores were within two decile points of the mean for appropriately trusting.

## Insights from debrief interviews

Each participant received a 1.5 hour debrief on their profile from a licensed practitioner. Each of these conversations were unique to the individual but those conducting the debriefs have remarked:

- People found the profiles useful and insightful
- For many it was reassuring and affirming
- For others, particularly where trust was affecting their well-being or engagement at work, the profile threw some relief on this
- With this awareness a few individuals decided, following the debrief, to take action to address the trust issues it had uncovered.

# Our approach to our primary research

As we stated earlier, this research is one of the few longitudinal studies on interpersonal trust in organisations. Most take a snapshot approach, looking at views of an individual towards another at a single point in time. Our study hopes to more closely replicate the experience of trust or lack of it, following a sample of individuals and their daily experience of a significant relationship at work and how perceptions of it are influenced by a multitude of factors, including the behaviour of the other party, or at least how this is perceived.

The research was conducted over a seven month period. During this period, we conducted 49 interviews with 17 employees from four organisations representing a variety of industrial sectors (software company, government organisation, charity and research institute). The three rounds of semi-structured interviews with each participant were designed to explore how individual perceptions of trust in a significant work relationship changed over time. We used two techniques to collect data:

**Card Sort**: During the first interview, we asked respondents to identify an important work relationship. We presented them with a set of cards. There was a feeling written on each card. For example, trusting, faithful and confident are some of the feelings related to trust and distrustful, hesitant and fearful are some related to distrust. We asked respondents to think about their relationship with that individual and go through the cards and place them in one of the four categories of 'do not feel at all', 'feel to some extent', 'feel strongly' and 'feel most strongly'[5]. During sorting, participants were allowed to change their mind, moving cards between different categories. This process established the level of trust and distrust towards the nominated person. After sorting the cards under different categories, we explored the reasons for the card choices using a semi-structured interview. We also probed for any incident(s) relevant to the feelings under each category.

**Relationship Mapping**: The card-sort technique provided us with in depth information about one relationship. We used relationship mapping to get a better understanding of the interviewees' other relationships in the organisation. We asked them to identify 5 individuals with whom they worked closely in their organisation and write their initials on a piece of paper. For simplicity, we asked respondents to describe only the level of trust in these relationships rather than both trust and distrust. We asked them to rate each individual on the scale of 1 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust). Then for each of the individuals we asked further probing questions about their level of trust.

From all these interviews we have selected five stories where significant variations in trust occurred over the duration of the study. These provide the case studies for this report. From all the data, we uncovered a number of behaviours which triggered changes in trust. We have used this data to identify and explain eight key behaviours that influence trust that we have brought together in an overriding model: the 'wheel of trust'

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5   For more information about card-sort technique see Saunders (2012)

**Emotional intelligence survey and debrief**

| Nov 2014 | Feb-Mar 2015 | May 2015 |
|---|---|---|

### Round 1

- Research participant identified an important work relationship
- Questions about the relationship – e.g. type of relationship, how long they have been working together.
- Card-sort:
  - Card-sort exercise to identify the level of trust and distrust.
  - Further questions about the relationship and anything (e.g. incidents) that created trust or distrust.
- Relationship map
  - Identifying 5 individuals in the organisation
  - Questions about the relationship with each individual (e.g. peer or manager, length of the relationship)
  - Rate each individual on the scale of 1-10 (1: no trust at all, 10: complete trust)
  - Questions about the reasons and incidents (if any) for their level of trust.

### Round 2

- Research participant reminded about the important work relationship that identified in their first interview and asked to reflect on any incidents or events that had affected their relationship since the first interview
- Card-sort:
  - Card-sort exercise to identify the level of trust and distrust.
  - Compared the result with round 1 and pointed out any differences in level of trust or distrust.
  - Further probing questions about any changes during the past 3 months.
- Relationship map
  - Rated 5 individuals identified in round 1 on a scale of 1-10.
  - Compared with relationship map in round 1.
  - Questions about changes in their relationship with the individuals during the past 3 months (Nov 2014-March 2015).

### Round 3

- Research participant is reminded about the important work relationship they identified in their first interview and asked to reflect on any incidents or events that had affected their relationship since the second interview
- Card-sort:
  - Card-sort exercise to identify the level of trust and distrust.
  - Compared the result with round 2 and pointed out any differences in level of trust or distrust.
  - Further probing questions about any changes during the past 3 months.
- Relationship map
  - Rated 5 individuals identified in round 1 on a scale of 1-10.
  - Compared with the relationship map in round 2.
  - Questions about changes in their relationship with the individuals during the past 3 months (March 2015-May 2015).

Figure 5: Overview of the approach to our primary research

# Case stories

Of the 17 individuals we interviewed, 5 experienced significant changes of trust in their relationships over the period of the study. Each story is about an individual and their level of trust and distrust in their relationship with another party in their organisation. To protect the identity of the individuals, we have randomly changed name and gender.

In reading our findings and our five case stories, there are two things to bear in mind. First, whilst participants' accounts of events were very real to them, we only got to hear their side of the story. Second, we have selected the stories because they best demonstrated how trust changes. The other stories may not have reflected such strong ebbs and flows in trust but we have drawn on data they provided elsewhere, for example in our model of trust. There were some consistent themes across all the stories we heard.

## Story 1: Rising distrust linked to inconsistency and micromanagement

**Context:**

Kim is a senior manager and the relationship she talked about was with Sonia. Sonia is not Kim's line manager but she is a more senior manager. Kim and Sonia have been working together on a number of projects and Sonia is a key stakeholder for Kim. The following graph represents the level of trust and distrust in this relationship over the period of the study.
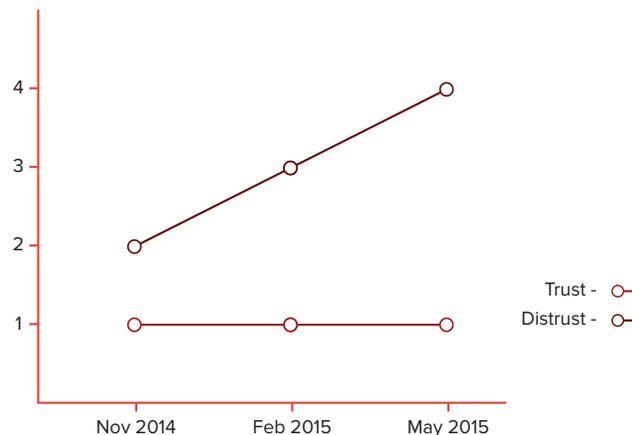


Figure 6: Level of trust and distrust in this relationship

From this we can see that trust remained low throughout but distrust increased significantly during the period of the research. This would confirm the two dimensional approach to trust and distrust we discussed earlier in this report.

**First interview:**

During the first interview (using the card-sort) we found that Kim did not trust Sonia but the level of distrust was relatively low. Kim said that when she started working with Sonia, she had approached the relationship with a positive expectation.

*"…I expected to trust the person and to be trusted a lot more because they are my link into all of my work, … , I expected it to be a lot higher and I think I probably approached my first few meetings with that in mind, but very quickly realised that we were locking horns quite quickly."*

Kim said that her reason for not trusting Sonia was her inconsistency and unwillingness or inability to clearly communicate whether she agreed or disagreed with her:

*"I think that she's quite hesitant to change but what I also find difficult is that she will have conversations and we'll almost kind of disagree on points but then what I'm finding now is conversations I had with her nearly a year ago she now agrees with me whereas a year ago we disagreed …"*

Micro management was another reason given for the lack of trust in their relationship.

*"I don't often feel that she trusts the work that I do or the work that [our team] does…. it's kind of our work is almost micro-managed, so a real dotting the Is and crossing the Ts, which I sometimes think you're a [senior manager] and you shouldn't have time to do that! You should just trust that we're professional and we're trained and we're skilled in our approach, so she should just trust that we would kind of run with that and do that."*

At the end of the first interview, we asked Kim if there was anything she wanted to add about trust in her organisation. Kim said that although she had been in the organisation for a while she did not feel trusted yet. In her previous organisation, after working for

the same period of time, she knew her boundaries and knew when she could apply her judgment. However, in her current organisation she did not feel that. When we asked her for the reasons, she said:

*"I think we're quite hierarchical here. I think a lot of people get involved where they don't need to, so relationships are complex and decision making is complex, which I think all contributes to, well, why can't you just trust me to make that decision or whatever, whereas in other organisations I've worked in, your experience and your background and your education and your ability to do the job is probably valued higher and you're kind of just left to do things. Here we do a lot of top-down and we do quite a lot of micro management and everybody needs to know about everything."*

**Second Interview:**

During the second interview, we asked Kim about how her relationship with Sonia had fared over the past three months. She said that there had been fewer contacts with Sonia as there had been less need to consult her. Kim also said that she had decided to change her tactics and get her line manager involved in the relationship.

*"This person has a real need for hierarchy, so I'm trying to adapt to her style, so over the last year or so, I've tried different tactics with the person, and so this is [using my line manager in that relationship more] just another tactic that I'm playing with."*

We asked her to do the card-sort exercise and compared the result with first interview. The level of trust had remained the same, but the level of distrust had gone up. She said that the reasons she gave during the first interview were still there. In addition, there had been a critical incident that had increased her level of distrust. This concerned a meeting relevant to Kim's role, that Sonia had insisted that there was no need for her to attend. Sonia had given her reasons and Kim had agreed not to attend. On the day, while they were preparing the room for the meeting, Kim went to Sonia and asked whether she had everything she needed. Sonia did not respond to Kim's question and just asked her to leave the room.

There had also been some email conversations that Kim perceived as being accusatory and demanding. From these emails Kim had concluded that Sonia only looked at problems from her own perspective and did not take other people's views into account.

*"[Her emails are] always from her standpoint, she never considers everything else, and I'm in a position where we have to on the areas that I look after, you have to look across the organisation, so take lots of other people's views into account, and often she as a [role level], she only comes from her view. I think, at [her] level, you should be looking up but looking across as well. But, she expects action to be taken from her viewpoint, and I don't agree with that."*

All these events made Kim feel more distrustful towards Sonia.

**Third interview:**

During the third interview, Kim explained that the number of interactions with Sonia had diminished further partly this was because there were fewer projects that required them to work together. However, the main reason was that Kim no longer sought out such opportunities to work together: she was not making the effort. Kim could work with Sonia more, but she had decided not to because of the levels of trust between them.

A few weeks after the third interview Kim contacted us and said that she had decided to leave the organisation.

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Key Themes that influenced trust and distrust:

- Inconsistency in message
- Micromanagement
- Accusatory and demanding emails
- Feeling excluded from a meeting that mattered to her
- Lack of clear boundaries
- Refusal to consider another's perspective
- Organisational culture and context
- Silo mentality

## Story 2: Perceived lack of fairness damages trust

**Context:**

David is relatively new to his team and was hired to lead a project for the organisation. The manager of the team, Rob, was one of the reasons he accepted the post in the first place. As the relationship began, expectations were high and there existed a very good implicit level of trust.

**First interview: November 2014**

By the time of the first interview, David's relationship with Rob was already at an all-time low, following an incident where the Rob had clearly transgressed the line between personal and professional relationship. The trust that David had felt towards his manager had been destroyed.

*"... I know that I cannot trust him on a professional basis anymore. And I did. I mean, he was basically one of the reasons why I came to [the organisation]"*

David described how he felt effectively trapped by the actions of his manager and this had led to the disintegration of the pre-existing level of trust between them,

*"I am very young; the project I'm managing now, I was also afraid that he would take the project away from me. And it was because of this project that I got hired."*

It was quite clear that David's working relationship with another colleague in the team, Tony, had also been affected. He described how Rob seemed to favour Tony due to the fact that Tony was '*very, very good friends*' with Rob.

We wanted to know how this 'knock-on' distrust was manifesting on a day-to-day basis. David described his great sense of caution in the professional relationship with Tony. For example, he would feel compelled to make a note of any request he made of Tony, so that if it was not delivered on time he could not '*go behind my back and tell him [Rob] about it or claim he never heard of it before*'. David also talked about how he often felt compelled to '*trace everything*' and his discomfort in doing so. So the need to cover his back was creating additional work and risk avoidance.

**Second Interview: February 2015**

Three months later when we again spoke to David, he reported a significant shift in his confidence and general happiness at work. Whilst trust issues remained, this meant he

was better able to deal with the situation with Rob directly. He had done just that and no longer felt vulnerable.

*'I feel quite confident about my standing at [the organisation], and that I'm not at his mercy, which is a good feeling. Before I didn't have that, but I still, of course, I don't trust him at all'*

Even more notable was the collapse in David's feelings of trust towards Tony, which were now at their lowest ebb. We asked why this was so. Something specific? A particular incident? But David responded,

*'No incident, I think it's...maybe just being more aware or being confirmed about their close relationship.'*

He illustrated the impact of this personal relationship by telling us how he did not feel free to have an open conversation at work with Tony. There was a fear of reprisal and a sense of having to be extremely guarded.

**Third interview: May 2015**

On our third meeting David again rated his trust in both the manager and his colleague Tony as 'no trust'. The working relationships here were described as 'civilised', but the trust seemed entirely absent. At this stage, it appeared that the repairing of trust in either relationship was extremely unlikely.

We also discussed his relationship with another, more junior, colleague in the team where the level of trust was evidently quite low. We were keen to explore how this related to the other two. David described how he was effectively cut out of another project which had great significance for him, believing this junior person to have colluded with Rob in excluding him. David was reluctant to judge, but described a certain scepticism, apparently borne of his feelings of distrust towards Rob:

*'But I would be cautious next time just to give her something....because I cannot imagine that she didn't consult him on what to do for the project.'*

The following graphs show the changes in the level of trust in David's relationships. The relationships with Rob and Tony were discussed during the 'relationship map' technique. For more details on the 'relationship map' see 13.
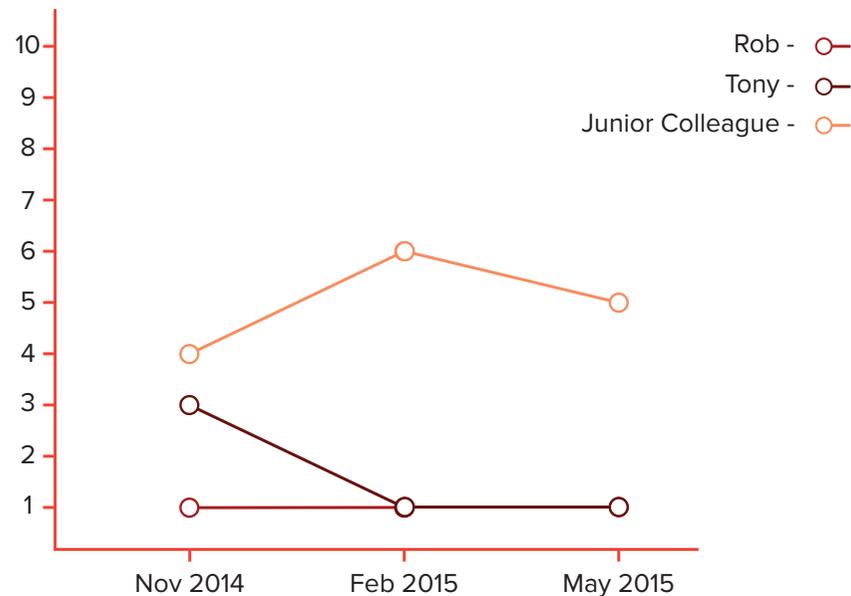
Figure 7: Level of trust in David's relationship over the period of study

Key factors that influenced trust and distrust:

• Fear of being excluded from an important project

• Perceived favouritism

• Trust contagion

• Level of confidence/vulnerability

## Story 3: Using open and honest conversation to rebuild trust

### Context:

Samantha is a senior manager in a not-for-profit organisation. She manages a number of people and generally reports to one particular line manager, Laura. For certain projects, however, Samantha reports to Jane, who is another manager in a more senior position. Samantha suggested focusing on her relationship with Jane.

### First interview

It was evident from the card-sort and Samantha's description of her relationship with Jane that she had a very good trusting relationship with her. She thought that Jane was very experienced and supportive. Even on a few occasions where Samantha had made mistakes, Jane stood by her and, rather than saying 'that was bad', encouraged Samantha to think about what she has learnt. Other reasons that encouraged Samantha to trust Jane were to do with her being approachable, empowering and respectful.

### Second Interview

Over the three months before the second interview, there had been some changes and Samantha had less formal opportunities to see Jane about her projects. The organisation had decided that Samantha should report to Jane about her project through Laura, her line manager. As a result, she had been very confused about her role and the relationship with Laura and Jane. Also, both Samantha's and Laura's role were new and lacked a clear role profile. The card-sort revealed that Samantha felt less trusting of Jane compared to the first interview. Having to report to an intermediary, although that person was her line manager, made her feel more junior, and she felt she had less access to the information and knowledge that she needed for her projects. She also felt that she had less autonomy.

*"it's a bit stuff sort of being dictated to me, whereas in the past, I felt much more in control, whereas now it feels like stuff is coming more down from top to bottom, which is a bit new and I'm a bit like, I don't like that, I'd like to have bit more [autonomy]."*

Also Samantha had noticed that Jane had been a bit inconsistent in her decisions recently:

*"She's become even more busy than she was before, she is changing her mind a lot more, which she never used to do so much, and I don't think she's changing her mind because she's changing her mind, it's just she forgets that she's already taken a decision on something."*

**Third interview**

During the third interview we found that there had been some changes that had made Samantha feel much better about her relationship with Jane. She had started a secondment in another organisation for a few days a week and Jane had been very supportive of that. She had also spoken with Laura about levels of expectation. In these conversations Samantha had been able to give some feedback about how things had been for her. She had also discussed with Jane whether it would make more sense for her to report to Jane again more formally.

*"… while I won't have a solid line, I'll have a more formal dotted line to make it obvious to everybody that there needs to be that direct relationship which will then make me feel more entitled to take up this person's time … I do have that need through that dotted line to see her."*

All in all, clarifying their roles and having an open and honest conversation with Laura and Jane helped them to rebuild trust.
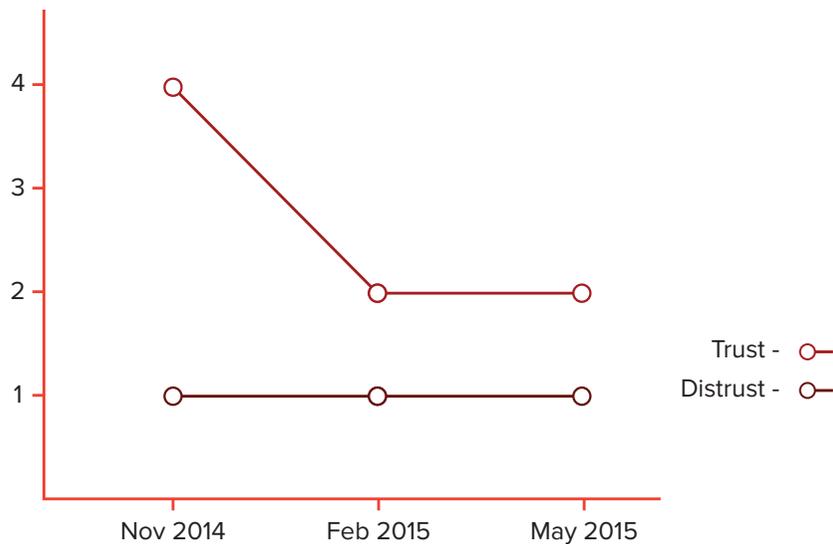


Figure 8: Level of trust and distrust in this relationship

Key factors that influenced trust and distrust:

- Supportive
- Approachable
- Empowering
- Transparency and open conversations
- Matrix management
- Clarity of roles

- Loss of direct contact
- Loss of autonomy
- Inconsistency in decisions

## Story 4: Shift in trust linked to change in context and perceptions of transparency

**Context:**

This story is about Sue, who is a senior manager in an organisation. For the study, Sue discussed her relationship with a peer called Alison. Alison and Sue both report to the same line manager.

**First Interview:**

Sue and Alison had been working with each other for a few years and over this period they had built a very trusting relationship. Sue felt that there was mutual trust in their relationship and, although they worked very closely, they knew their boundaries.

*"I suppose we have to trust each other in that we will do what's right for the organisation, what's right for the job but also do what's right for each other because our jobs are so closely linked. I suppose I have to be able to trust that she will acknowledge that something's not her decision, it's my decision. And vice versa. And so I trust her because to this point, apart from a few minor bits here and there along the way, we've always managed to do that right. So, there's not many occasions where I think she's taking over my work or I'm taking over her work. So, I trust her because it's (the relationship) so far worked quite well."*

We asked Sue about any distrust in their relationship. She said that if we had asked this question six months ago, her response would have been different and she would have said there is no distrust at all. However, she said that they were in a difficult situation due to their line manager going on leave for a few months. There was a question around who was going to get the manager's job for that period. Since they were at an equal level they both wanted the job. Although they had been open and had discussed it with each other, Sue still wasn't sure whether Alison might be doing something she considered underhand to get the job.

*"I don't know what she's doing to get that role. I don't know if she would be speaking to our line manager and our director trying to lobby to get that role. I don't know if she's talked to other people about trying to get that role. And so, I suppose it's just, it's just what you need to do to try and get ahead and so I suppose it makes me just wonder what she might be doing."*

**Second interview:**

During this interview Sue said that their line manager had gone on leave and instead of giving her role to Alison or Sue, the organisation had divided the line manager's work between the two of them. She said that the organisation had known that their manager was going on leave for a while but they had left the decision about her replacement to the last moment. Sue said if they had known about this earlier it would have been better for her relationship with Alison. We asked about the reasons that level of trust had gone down since the previous interview. The main reason she mentioned was Alison had not been transparent about a relationship she had with another person in a more senior position. This person worked closely with both Sue and Alison but Alison had some private meetings with her and did not talk about them with Sue.

*"So basically there's still an element of something going on that now and again I'm a bit like, what's that all about?"*

**Third Interview:**

During the third interview, Sue said that she felt much better about her relationship with Alison. It was partly because they had talked about Alison's private meetings with the more senior person. Things had been going well and she felt that they had a more open and transparent relationship.

*"I feel like that she is sharing her challenges more, and we're doing that quite equally; when someone has a difficult situation it's good to talk about it ... there's a lot*

*of sharing going on, so that's, I think, makes me feel that I can share with her as well. We're both happy to come up with that kind of stuff."*

*"If my team have had a problem with anything to do with her team she's been reasonably open to try and sort that out, try and be open about it, so, yes, that's probably the main thing."*
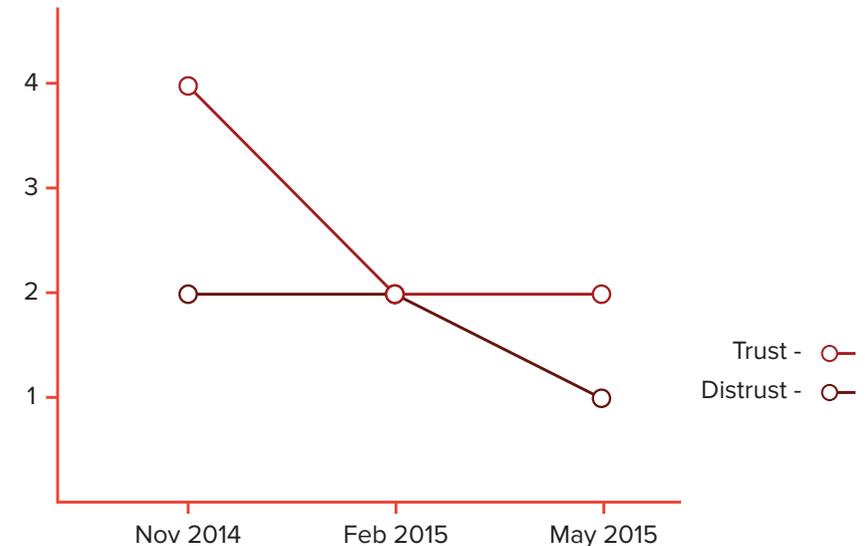


Figure 9: Level of trust and distrust in this relationship

Key factors that influenced trust and distrust:

- Mutual trust
- Manager going on leave
- Transparency and open conversations
- Change

- Competition
- Uncertainty
- Politics/competing agendas

## Story 5: Active listening restores sense of trust

**Context:**

Simon has been with his organisation for some years and manages a team. Our interviews focused on his relationship with his line manager.

**First interview:**

When we first met Simon he recounted in some detail how the trust he had in his line manager had crumbled. Historically there had been some difficulties; Simon had felt that his manager favoured another member of staff over himself and had witnessed some 'controlling' behaviours. These matters had, however, been partially resolved with some open, constructive conversations. But the real breakdown in trust emerged during a particularly gruelling project where Simon felt his manager had become 'really personally angry' about another team who were also involved in the project:

*"...she would be really personally disrespectful and really personally judgemental about their motives. So she would say things like they're selfish, they're greedy, they're out for themselves and I started to find that really, really difficult because I didn't feel like that...and I think that's when our relationship really started to suffer"*

Furthermore, Simon felt that a new member of staff had become his manager's favourite. But it was not until Simon experienced his manager's aggressive behaviour directly that he felt the trust between them had broken down irretrievably:

*"And then one day she had this really big explosion in my office where she really shouted at me and what she said wasn't necessarily wrong, but she was so aggressive and shouty, I just thought that's it, I will never trust you again, I'll never believe in you again. You've just stood in my office and shouted at me."*

At this point, Simon described feeling 'strongly distrustful' of his manager.

**Second Interview:**

At our second interview three months later, Simon reported that he and his manager had 'started to go down that road of changing the way we treat each other'. We were keen to unpick why this was so. From feeling a sense of distrust 'very strongly', Simon now felt this 'to some extent' and was able to reveal some key reasons. First, he felt a greater sense of autonomy in his role. He was working less closely with his manager by actively broadening out his projects to involve other senior managers, which had had a positive effect,

*"...that's worked really well for me, but also it's taken some of the pressure off that relationship with me and [my manager]. I feel less like she's the conduit for everything."*

Second, he had not recently witnessed the manager talking about others behind their backs, something which he took to be an indicator of her increasingly respectful behaviour. Third, Simon recalled an incident where the manager had taken a bold decision regarding a particularly serious matter, despite it being potentially not in her own best interests to do so. In this case she had really listened carefully to Simon's views, and this had a powerful effect:

*"I was quite impressed that she did it. I thought she was brave and I thought that was the right decision. So that made me think, ok, I can speak to her, I can trust her to make the right decision because she has made the right decision.*

**Third interview:**

Three months later at the final interview we found that Simon's level of trust in his manager had remained the same. A number of factors had played a part. Perhaps most significant was the fact that he had managed to maintain a comfortable degree of autonomy and a sense of ownership of his projects, something which he felt to be of critical importance:

*"I've felt much more...able to be engaged in those projects because I have the ownership, and that's a really significant shift from some of the ways things operated before".*

Simon talked about some specific instances where inconsistencies on the part of the manager still continued to affect how much trust he felt towards her. But he also spoke of his manager's supportive behaviour during a period of illness, and of feeling supported, respected and recognised following the delivery of a high profile project. There was a great sense that his contribution had been warmly acknowledged which had helped the trust between them:

*"...there's been a lot of support, a lot of recognition, a lot of celebrating of success where that individual has been openly, in front of other managers, saying well, this is a real success, this is a really good thing...that's had a really good impact on how I felt about how I'd been portrayed by that individual to others"*
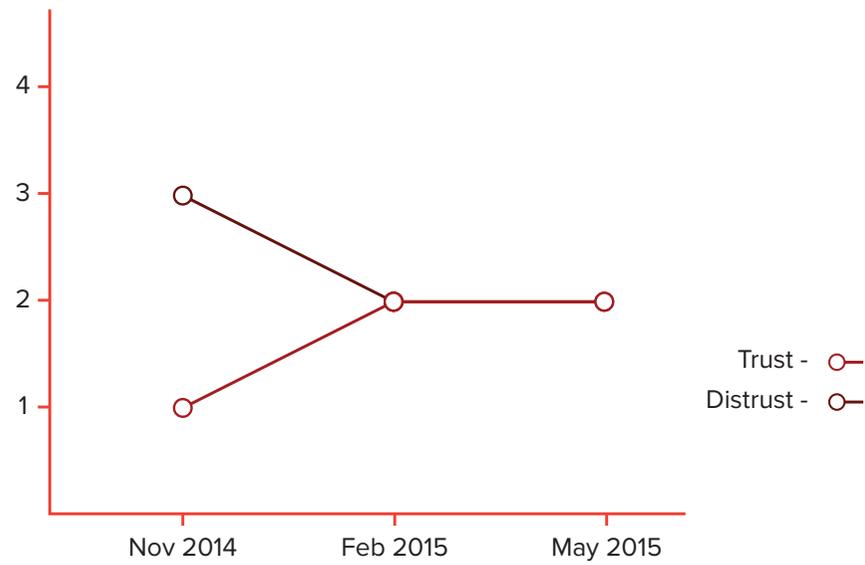
Figure 10: Level of trust and distrust in this relationship

Key factors that influenced trust and distrust:

- Autonomy

- Active listening and openness

- Open conversations

- Favouritism

- Controlling behaviours

- Talking about others behind their back

- Emotional outbursts

- Aggressive behaviours

- Inconsistency

# Behaviours that influence trust and distrust

Given that trust is such a complex and rather nebulous concept, we thought it might help to break it down here by identifying certain behaviours that influenced trust or distrust in the five stories above. Our intention here is not to list all behaviours that may help or hinder trust, but through our reflections on the stories give readers pause for thought about their own relationships and how they may do things differently in service of building greater trust.

We used thematic analysis to examine the behaviours that most influenced trust and identified eight key behaviours. We start with the most frequently mentioned behaviour.

## Being transparent

One of the behaviours that most interviewees found very important in building trust was transparency. Transparency in interpersonal relationships is about being open and honest in communication. It is about having open conversations with colleagues and presenting them with your honest view rather than concealing or spinning information. By being open and honest we assure people that there is nothing to hide. Lack of transparency may give the impression that there is a hidden agenda.

In our interviews we came across a few cases where transparency or lack of transparency had influenced trust. A good example of building trust through openness and transparency is illustrated here by Debbie and her colleague. Although they had some problems and disagreements in their relationship, they were very open about them.

*"Interestingly we've, sort of, gone through that [problems and disagreements], come out the other side and it's actually increased the trust based on the fact that whilst we had a few difficult conversations, he was always very up front with me about what he was going to do with that and the fact that he was having a conversation with me in the first place, that it was open and I don't think it was behind closed doors. And even when obviously he went to talk to my boss, he still told me what he was doing. … Even though it was difficult it didn't actually challenge my trust of him. It challenged other things, but not that."*

The opposite of transparency and openness is withholding or giving false information. This is not about lying. It is about leaving the impression that you have not been entirely straightforward and truthful. For example, you might withhold information and put a spin on communication to manipulate the thoughts or feelings of others. People tend to be sceptical when they feel that they are not getting the full story from their colleagues. One of our interviewees told us about how he felt about his colleague when she withheld information:

*"When she's got a problem or she's upset or she's frustrated or worried by something, what she says isn't really what she thinks. She's very professional, she's very polite but … you never feel like you get to what the issue is; you don't understand what the issue is. And so because of that you can never have any trust or confidence that when you've addressed something you're done with it…"*

Although transparency and honesty in conversations are necessary for building and maintaining trust, this does not mean sharing everything you know and think. Transparency does not mean sharing confidential information. Neither does it mean:

- sharing your negative judgements of others when you have not done so directly with them
- using information given to you in trust to your own advantage with others
- unbounded outbursts of emotion

## Sticking to commitments

Doing what we say we will do means that others can rely on us and this is key to building interpersonal trust. A number of our interviewees said that the main reason they trusted their colleagues was because they completed the tasks that they had been assigned to and delivered results. One of our interviewees used an interesting metaphor[6] to explain the relation between trust and delivering results. She explained trust as a bank account. "When you deliver results, you deposit into that account and when you fail to deliver, you withdraw from the trust account". This metaphor applies to trust in general as well. All the things we do in relation to building, maintaining or destroying trust are like depositing or withdrawing from a trust account.

6   Covey (2006) has used the same metaphor in his book

So, doing what we say or delivering results can help with building trust in a new relationship.

One of our interviewees had recruited a new person in her team. During the first interview she had some doubts about trusting the new recruit.

*"My trust for this person is low as he's new to our team and organisation and I don't know at what point I can move away from the fact that he's new. I'm also conscious that we're a new team and he's coming into a very new area. At what point I can assume he is no longer new and I can trust him to do the job he was recruited to do, which he cannot at the moment do. I don't know if it's a capability issue or whether it's a being new issue or am I expecting too much of him at this point?"*

Six months later, this interviewee had a high level of trust towards the person and she felt that he was very capable.

*"I had to be more involved than I thought I might need to be to help get them up to speed, but they really found their feet. So, really [three months ago] things were looking quite a lot better [compared to first time we met] and now I'm like, they're running. They're still quite new, but they've already proved themselves in what was a really quite challenging project ..."*

This seems to link to the predictability and ability dimensions of trust described by Lewicki et al (2006). Sticking to commitment was mentioned in most of our interviews as a trust building behaviour.

*"Well, this is one of the senior people at the institute, and I trust her because she's followed through in everything that she said she would do, which makes me think that, if she says something, she does it, and there's never been an instance where, she's said something or promised something, and didn't follow it up. So, that's the main reason I trust her, I think"*

*"I suppose for me, the most important thing, although I am constantly let down on this, is trusting that when somebody says they're going to do something by such and such a date, they do it. Now, in my experience, there are very, very few people who actually do that."*

## Demonstrating trust

Trust is generative. By that we mean that people are more likely to trust another person when they feel trusted by that person. When we extend our trust and let others feel trusted, it creates reciprocity and encourages our trustee to trust us in return. This is also a great way of building trust quickly in a new relationship. We came across one instance where two people in a new relationship used mutual trust, without knowing each other, to run a project.

*"He's quite new to the organisation as well, and we hadn't worked together before I don't know anything about [his area], and he doesn't know anything about [my area] We had to, kind of, trust each other quite quickly, because we were both bringing this different expertise, and it just worked out really well. We've built a good relationship, and we launched a good [project], and have worked really well together..."*

One of the great ways of making others feel trusted is by empowering them and giving them autonomy in their jobs. This could create a high trust environment in the organisation. We found from the interviews that micromanagement is one of the main killers of trust and catalysts of distrust.

## Being personal

Investing in relationships at a basic human level rather than just transactionally to get something you need is another behaviour that our interviewees suggested as important in building trust. This behaviour is about getting involved in more than just work-related dealings and getting to know someone at a more personal level. This does not mean ignoring boundaries between what is personal to you and the world of work. It does not mean disclosure of things that you hold as deeply private. It is about letting people know what makes you tick and being appropriately open about your views and concerns. One of the interviewees said:

*"I think some of [the conversations] have been about shared frustrations, her sharing her view on things; some of it is quite personal, as well. So in a non-work context and for me that all helps to build trust, really. I think with your line manager it should be somebody that you can talk quite freely with; that's really important for me. And there has definitely been more of those since we met in February, I would say."*

Another interviewee said:

*"We've also got a relationship where we can, sort of, not to a great deal, but we can take away the professional side and then talk about, you know, what that person has done at the weekend or what they're doing the coming weekend. There's a very, what I would call, a human relationship."*

A number of interviewees said that personal relationships helped them to talk about their problems, and the support they received from their colleague reinforced their trust. For example one of the interviewees was doing a part-time degree while she was working. The way her line manager enquired about her course and provided support reinforced her trust in him.

*"He was very supportive of that, and said if I have to put my [course] deadlines in the calendar, that he can access, he knows that if I'm working from home or I'm taking a day's holiday that that's what I need time to do, and he was really supportive of it, just do it as well as I can. So that's really good actually. It's great to know I'm supported."*

## Being consistent

Consistency is about communicating the same messages to colleagues and not going back on what you have agreed. This means that those who work with us can predict our behaviour in different situations. We had a number of interviewees who said the main reason behind their distrust was that their manager or peer asked them to do something (or agreed on certain things) and later changed their mind and said something different.

*"So I have one-to-one conversations with them and try and explain the situation, and then when we're in a bigger space, then they'll, you know, bring it up again or change what they said before, so I'm just finding that quite... I'm finding that it's bringing out a distrustful feeling in me of them as a person."*

In addition to consistency in messages, behaving consistently in different contexts and settings is important in building or maintaining trust.

*"He was the team leader ... he's not a very relaxed sort of person, but if you go out socially and you'd have a drink, he'd be very relaxed – completely different bloke*

*– and then you see him in the workplace. Hardly speaks to you... yes. So, you don't know what he's thinking and I think if you can't read somebody, it makes it quite difficult to trust them."*

## Appreciating others

This is about showing respect for colleagues and demonstrating care and concern as a means of building trust. One of the interviewees said:

*"My total trust would be for me to see his better behaviour with other people. So, you know, he would get up and walk out of a meeting, this very senior person. And that's just not done. You know, people might say, I'm sorry I've got to leave because I've got to get to another meeting. That's forgivable. But he would just, you know, he's had enough so he gets up and leaves. And it's just plain rude and people are very angry about it."*

Also respect should be given regardless of someone's status and power. Another interviewee said:

*"This person was very rude to me for the first two years and then changed when my job, when I got a promotion. And so then... so because of that also, I don't know what their actual feelings are, so I don't know where I stand."*

Acknowledging someone's contributions is also a way of showing respect, being appreciative of and acknowledging the efforts others are putting into a project.

*"If you do a good piece of work and he emails people, he'll say, thank you for what you've done. Whether he copies in other people or not, he's aware of what you've put into the project and the work you've done and although it's a little thing, not many people do actually say thank you."*

*"She's so appreciative about the effort everyone is putting in and she tells them and it's just brilliant and it makes it so nice. It's really nice to work for her because she's just, oh thank you very much, this is really great, even if then the next line is, I don't agree with that. She's still really appreciative that you've done it and recognises that and so it's good. She's really good."*

## Listening well

A number of interviewees said that they are more likely to trust someone who listens to their point of view. Apart from building trust, listening to another person's point of view, even if you disagree, is very important. Listening will help you place yourself in another person's shoes and look at things from their perspective. When you listen to your colleagues, they feel valued and it also gives both parties a better understanding of the situation so you can make better decisions. Listening is also another way of showing respect and making others feel trusted. As one of the interviewees said:

*"I always feel heard and listened to, and I feel she respects and trusts my advice and input, and she seeks out [my advice], which is really reassuring. So it's a good relationship, and it's just been reinforced by an ongoing way of working. You know, I can go and tell her some really difficult stuff, and she will listen and hear it, and that is put to test."*

Another interviewee explained how her manager's listening to her concerns reinforced her trust.

*"So I had to go to her and say I don't think this is right. I was really concerned about doing that and it was just… it was so easy. She was just absolutely brilliant. She didn't say yes because she didn't want it done the way I wanted it but she listened to what I was saying, she really… she took the time to really understand and it was a really complicated process. So she took the time to understand and we found a middle point where, you know, we'd gone far enough for it to be okay from a general evaluation point of view and it was simple enough for it to be okay from what she had to accept from the organisation's point of view."*

## Demonstrating vulnerability

Being vulnerable is another behaviour that was deemed important by our interviewees. This is more than just apologising, it is about taking responsibility for our actions and trying to make things right if possible when they go wrong. It is about owning up to your mistakes and imperfections. Here is an example:

*"This person I work with on some projects…one of the reasons why I trust her entirely is because there was one project where we had a bad outcome, and there was a cost … She was completely willing to share the fallout of this, it was a little bit unfair,*

*because she wasn't fully responsible for why this bad outcome happened, neither was I fully responsible for why this bad outcome happened, and there were other people involved as well. Along with those other people, we all agreed that we would share the fallout of this. So, you know, I trust her that when you're in a difficult situation, she'll pull her weight."*

One of our interviewees had disagreements with another manager on whom to send to a development programme. Overriding our interviewee's opinion, the manager insisted selected individuals were sent on the programme. However, after a while it turned out that they were not the right people for the programme. But the manager did not admit the mistake. The interviewee said:

*"Just acknowledging that we've had this conversation and actually now that we've done X Y and Z I actually now agree that that person wasn't the right [choice] … just acknowledging that things have changed, things have moved, and that a year ago we were in a different place to where we are now. … It is lots of little things that make me either not trust or not feel trusted as a person."*

# How to build trust: the wheel of trust

Figure 11 provides an overarching model for the behaviours we have described above. The questions can be used as a self-diagnostic tool to identify the behaviours which should be visible in order to raise the level of trust in your relationships with colleagues.

Figure 11: The Wheel of Trust



- How well do you listen?
- Do you demonstrate active attention?
- Do you show empathy?

- How high is your propensity to trust?
- Do you actively demonstrate trust?
- Do you micro-manage needlessly?

- How well do you demonstrate respect and appreciation?
- Do you show you care?
- Are you respecting rather than judging?

- How consistent are you?
- Do you walk your talk?
- Do people know how you will be from one moment to the next?

- How interested are you in relationships?
- Are you transactional rather than relational?
- How well do people know you and you them?

- How often do you own up to your mistakes and your own agenda?
- Do you share concerns without dumping them?
- Do you take risks in being honest?

- How honest and open are you?
- Do you withhold information?
- Do you make accountabilities clear and hold to them?

- How much can people trust you to deliver on what you say?
- Do you let people know if you can't meet their expectations?
- Do you over or under commit?

Listening well
Demonstrating trust
Being consistent
Appreciating others
Wheel of Trust
Demonstrating vulnerability
Being personal
Being transparent
Sticking to commitments

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# Concluding remarks

This report is one of the few studies that explores change in the levels of interpersonal trust over a period of time. By interviewing people at three month intervals we explored the dynamic nature of trust and gained a real insight on how trust can grow or crumble. We have presented the stories of five individuals, exploring their lived experience of trust and its emotional impact. What is clear from the stories is how changes in context, both big and small, can trigger changes in felt trust. Also, it is clear that changes in behaviour can rebuild and restore perceptions of trust where this has felt to have been lost.

To provide people who wish to improve trust in their organisation with something more tangible to focus on, we identified 8 behaviours that could be used to build, maintain or repair trust. This is not a complete list of what can influence trust but the behaviours provide a sound foundation for building trust. If we compare these behaviours with our preferred psychological model of trust (cognition, affection, behavioural intention) we can see that the behaviours are all related to at least one of the trust sub factors. For example by being transparent we are showing our integrity (cognition), or showing others that we trust them is related to the behavioural intention sub factor.

Our intention in undertaking this research was to move away from frameworks and prescriptions on trust (whilst not ignoring their value), and to focus more on the lived experience and its emotional impact. Our intention is also to encourage leaders and managers to, in reading this report, pause and reflect on the levels of trust in their own important relationships at work and what they can do to increase them. Our view, confirmed by this research, is that doing so will help create healthier and more productive work places.

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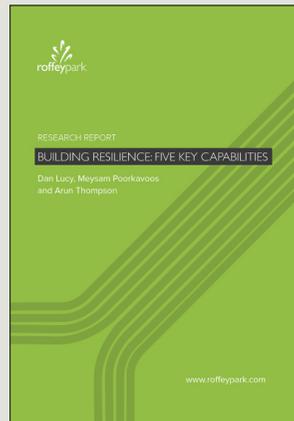Wellbelove, J. (2015). *Living in a matrix*. Roffey Park Management Institute, Horsham.
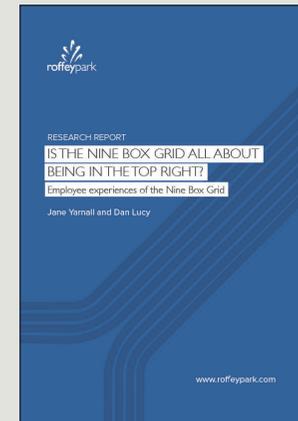
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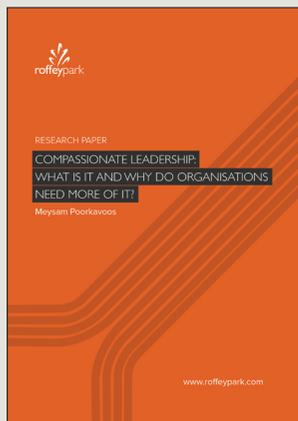**The leader as storyteller: engaging hearts and minds?**
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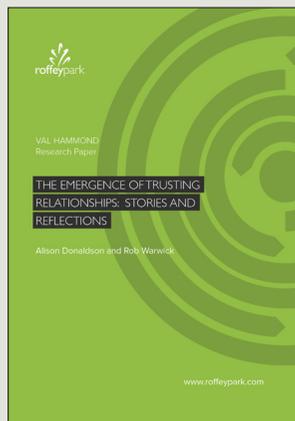**Building Resilience - Five Key Capabilities**
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Most of the studies on trust in organisations have taken a cross-sectional approach (snapshot view) and looked at it at a single point in time. However, trust is a dynamic phenomenon and cross-sectional studies of trust are inadequate to meaningfully capture changes in trust and understand how it fluctuates over time in response to events and interpersonal interactions.

We have taken a longitudinal approach and followed the working relationships of 17 individuals over a seven month period. By interviewing people at three month intervals we have gained a real insight into their lived experience of trust or the lack of it, how judgements about trust are formed and how trust changes over time. Our intention in doing this research was not to offer frameworks or prescriptions, but rather to explore how people really experience trust or a lack of it and the emotional impact of changes in trust in some of their most important relationships at work. We hope that this will serve to encourage leaders and managers to think about and reflect on their own relationships in order to build high trust, healthier and more productive ones.