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*“Trust men and they will be true to you; treat them greatly and they will show themselves great.”*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

*“He who does not trust enough, Will not be trusted.”*

—Lao Tzu

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## Abstract

Trust is a dynamic, interpersonal link between people, with unique implications for the workplace. Trust is defined as an expectation or belief that one can rely on another person’s actions *and* words and that the person has good intentions to carry out their promises. Trust is most meaningful in situations in which one party is at risk or vulnerable to another party. For this reason, it becomes critical in relationships between leaders and followers, who by definition have different roles and different levels of status and power. This chapter explores the role of trust in the leadership relationship, the antecedents and consequences of trust in leader-follower relations, as well as the different outcomes that often result from trusting versus mistrusting relationships. In addition, we will consider situations where trust can act as an important buffer against negative workplace experiences. Finally, we will consider when and why leaders are more likely to trust their followers, the dynamic development of trust between leaders and followers, and mistrust. Because trust is a relational concept that occurs between people, both leaders and followers play an important role in creating and sustaining trusting relationships.

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## Introduction

It is hard to imagine a situation with more risk and vulnerability than that between leader and follower, each of which can be vulnerable to lying, subterfuge, or even outright fraud if the other person does not follow through with consistent actions based on stated promises. Imagine that you arrive to work on Monday morning, only to find out that rumors are spreading that your boss will be laying off part of your team at the end of week. Your boss promised you in confidence last month that there would be no future layoffs in your team. Do you trust that she will keep her word? Will you risk your own reputation and credibility to counter the rumors? Alternatively, imagine that your boss asks you to do something that you perceive is unethical. When you question him, he tells you that there are other factors to consider and to not follow his request would be even more unethical. He implores you to “just trust me on this one.” How would you respond?

Trust is a dynamic, interpersonal link between people, with unique implications for the workplace. Trust is defined as an expectation or belief that one can rely on another person’s actions *and* words and that the person has good intentions to carry out their promises. Trust is most meaningful in situations in which one party is at risk or vulnerable to another party. For this reason, it becomes critical in relationships between leaders and followers, who by definition have different roles and different levels of status and power. Traditionally, most discussions of leadership ignored the critical role of trust as the primary mechanism through which leaders and followers exchange power and influence, despite the fact that actions such as delegating a project or sharing confidential information require a great deal of trust. In this chapter, we will explore the importance of trust as a core cognitive and affective process in the dynamic leadership/followership relationship. Because trust is a relational concept that occurs between people, both leaders and followers play an important role in creating, sustaining, destroying, and rebuilding trusting relationships.

In this chapter, we will explore the importance of trust as a core belief and feeling that can develop between leaders and followers. Because trust is a relational concept that occurs between people, both leaders and followers play a critical role in creating, sustaining, destroying, and rebuilding trusting relationships. The chapter is structured as follows: we will first consider the role of trust in the leadership relationship, emphasizing that trust is a critical foundation for both effective exchange-based and motivational leader-follower relationships. We will then explore the antecedents and consequences of trust in leader-follower relations, exploring what factors predict when trust is more or less likely to develop, as well as the different outcomes that often result from trusting versus mistrusting relationships. In addition, we will consider situations where trust can act as an important buffer against negative workplace experiences. Finally, we will explore when and why leaders are more likely to trust their followers, the dynamic transfer of trust between leaders and followers, and mistrust and trust repair.

## The Foundational Role of Trust in Leader-Follower Relationships

Trust has always occupied a central role in the leader-follower relationship. The formal study of trust development between leaders and followers dates back to the 1970s, when researchers begin to explore how managers develop good working relationships with subordinates. This early research identified two core foundations of leader-follower trust. The first was *competence or ability*, which involves perceptions that the other party has the knowledge and skills needed to do a job, along with the interpersonal skills and “general wisdom” needed to succeed. The second foundation was *character*, which was subsequently split into two distinct constructs: *benevolence*, or the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good for the trustor, and *integrity*, or the degree to which a trustee is believed to follow sound ethical principles.

From this early research, trust has formed a key component of most of the core leadership theories. However, the essence of leader-follower trust can still be tied to these two fundamental building blocks: how leaders establish they have the competence to lead effectively, reflecting both task and relationship-oriented skills, and how they establish their benevolence and integrity. Further, leaders have two primary mechanisms through which to establish these foundations. The exchange-based model asserts that supportive, participative, and empowering leadership behaviors send a message that the leader has confidence in, and concern for, his or her followers and that these leadership behaviors in exchange foster higher levels of trust in the leader. Other leadership theories highlight a complementary mechanism for the development of trust, which holds that more opportunities to participate in decision making provide followers with greater rewards from doing their work and allows them to feel more empowered. The result is greater levels of trust in the leader and improved work performance.

Trust forms a key foundation underlying relationship-oriented leadership behaviors dating back to the classic Ohio State University and University of Michigan studies, as “consideration” or “concern for people” is characterized by mutual trust, respect, and support for another person’s ideas, as well as appreciation of their feelings. Research dating back to the 1970s on the vertical dyad linkage model has demonstrated that managers have different relationships with employees who are trusted compared with employees who are not trusted. In addition, leader-member exchange (LMX) research has demonstrated a link between LMX relationship quality and trust. These findings highlight that a followers’ trust in his or her leader is critical in predicting employee experiences and that organizational efforts to redesign jobs and support empowerment initiatives may have limited utility if you do not first trust your boss.

The meaningful role of trust in transformational leadership has long been recognized as well. Bass’s model of transformational leadership argued that this leadership style is effective in part through its facilitation of follower trust. Some research suggests that the relationship between transformational leadership and performance is dependent on both followers’ trust in the leader and value congruence. For

example, in a study of Research & Development teams, consulting team members when making decisions, communicating a collective vision, and sharing common values with the leader predicted 67 % of employees' ratings of trust in their leaders. Together, these leadership behaviors signal that the leader is unlikely to break trust, allowing followers to share sensitive information and rely on the leader's judgments in ambiguous situations.

Similarly, trust is a key process in ethical, servant, and authentic leadership styles. Research supports the critical role between followers' perceptions their manager has integrity and trust in the manager, which in turn influences follower attitudes and performance. Knowledge workers increasingly require an authentic leader whose values are aligned with the company's mission in order to lead with transparency and trust. Authentic leadership is fundamentally based on trust, which fosters a more candid and direct process when dealing with difficult problems. A credible leader must first develop "credits" with potential followers before they will consent to being led in a new direction; as a result, leaders who are more transparent and positive are more likely to have followers who trust them and rate them as effective leaders.

The topic of trust has taken on added importance in the wake of highly public scandals such as Enron, Worldcom, Bernie Madoff, and others. As a result, there is increasing pressure on leaders to act as "ethical stewards" who build trust by truly investing in and affirming the identities and worth of those whom they serve. This style of leadership generates increased employee commitment through a leader's ability to align systems that build trust and ensure the welfare and growth of both followers and communities.

Overall, all of these leadership theories resonate with the core foundations of leader-follower trust: that leaders must be able to demonstrate their ability and competence to lead and their integrity and benevolence toward those over whom they wield power. Recent leadership theories have focused a great deal of attention on integrity as a core foundation of leader-follower trust, arguably downplaying the role of task and relationship-based behaviors in communicating a leader's competence and benevolence. Therefore, leaders are cautioned not to forget the core emphasis on competence and expertise. Particularly in the context of developing knowledge workers, as a leader you must pay additional attention to knowledge building behaviors, such as scanning the environment for new ideas, developing knowledge networks, sharing technical expertise, bringing in outside experts in areas where you lack experience, providing feedback that is relevant to increasingly complex tasks, and overseeing the quality of work that you may have not done yourself. Together, demonstrating competence in these skills engenders trust and knowledge sharing, and these competence-enhancing behaviors play an important role in building leader-follower trust.

In sum, across leadership theories, there is evidence that effective leaders must demonstrate ability through setting a compelling direction, providing structure, and demonstrating task-relevant knowledge. In addition, leaders must develop perceptions of benevolence through coaching behaviors that foster a supportive context. Finally, leaders must develop and sustain perceptions of integrity through justice, acting in ways that are consistent with their values and accountability.

## Development of Trust in Leader-Follower Relations: Antecedents

So, given the critical importance of trust to most leadership approaches, how do you develop trust, both with your boss and with your employees? The antecedents of trust are highlighted in Table 2.1.

Overall, your leadership style and management practices are critical, specifically in terms of promoting justice such as ensuring fair procedures, outcomes, and interactions with your followers, using participative decision making, providing organizational support to help them tackle problems, ensuring their expectations are fulfilled, and using both transformational and transactional leadership styles. As a manager,

**Table 2.1** Antecedents of trust

Theme	Key findings	References
Characteristics	Leaders and followers with higher propensity to trust more likely to develop positive exchange relationships	Bernerth and Walker (2009)
Leader behaviors	Transformational leadership	Dirks and Ferrin (2002)
	Quality of treatment by managers	Bijlsma and Koopman (2003)
	Quality of managerial decision making	
	Shared social bonds	
	Understandable actions by management	
	Trustworthiness	Bijlsma and van de Bunt (2003)
	Monitoring performance	
	Providing guidance to improve individual performance	
	Openness to followers' ideas	
	Conflict management style of manager	Chan, Huang, and Ng (2008)
	Providing support in case of trouble with others	Ertürk (2010), Fairholm and Fairholm (2000), Moye and Henkin (2006)
	Consideration for employees' needs and interests	
	Protecting employees' rights	
	Behaviors denoting benevolence toward followers	Lapierre (2007)
Perceived authenticity	Gardner, Fischer, and Hunt (2009)	
Ethics	Perceptions of ethical leader behavior relate positively to trust	Den Hartog and De Hoogh (2009)
		Mulki, Jaramillo, and Locander (2008)
		Salamon and Robinson (2008)

(continued)

**Table 2.1** (continued)

Theme	Key findings	References
Justice	Relationship between ethical organizational climate and turnover intentions is mediated by trust and other factors	DeConinck (2010), Stinglhamber, De Cremer, and Mercken (2006), Zhang, Tsui, Song, Li, and Jia (2008)
	Perception of an ethical climate increases trust in leader	DeConinck (2010)
	Interactional justice predicts trust in one's direct leader	De Cremer, van Dijke, and Bos (2006)
	Distributive justice is related to organizational trust	Tzafrir, Harel, Baruch, and Dolan (2004)
	Procedural justice affects cognitive and affect-based trust	Jones and Martens (2009)
	Procedural justice mediates the relationship between employee development and trust in leaders	
	Perception of overall fairness defines trust in less certain trust assessments	
Organizational politics	High levels of organizational politics erode trust	Poon (2006)
	Relationship between organizational politics and job outcomes is moderated by trust	Vigoda-Gadot and Talmud (2010)
Perceived organizational support	Perceived organizational support has a strong relationship to trust	Dirks and Ferrin (2002)
	Unmet expectations impact trust relationship	

you must consistently demonstrate behaviors that promote trust, such as consistency, integrity, concern, and benevolence. In other words, trustworthy managers show consideration for employee's needs and interests and protect their rights. Managers who treat their employees fairly, make their actions and reasons for those actions understandable, and who make quality decisions are more likely to be trusted.

In experiments, supervisory behaviors denoting benevolence toward followers had the strongest positive impact on participants' willingness to support their supervisor, likely due to the norm of reciprocity described by social exchange theory. In addition, leader benevolence toward the follower's peers also had a significant positive effect. This finding is consistent with social information processing theory, which posits that individuals observe how others are treated and amend their attitudes, intentions, and behaviors accordingly. Therefore, trusting relationships can develop both through exchange, where if I treat you well you are more likely to reciprocate and treat me well, and through observing trustworthy leader behaviors and mimicking them.

Other research suggests additional cues that followers use to determine how much they should trust their direct leaders. These include whether or not leaders monitor performance appropriately, provide guidance to improve individual performance,

provide support in case of trouble with others, demonstrate openness to followers' ideas, and utilize cooperation-related problem solving. Importantly, research demonstrates that a leader's appreciation of a job well done does not necessarily lead to trust; followers look for more than a "good job" before deciding whether or not to trust their leaders. We are more likely to trust others that "have our backs" when we run into problems, help us to continually improve our work, and work with us collaboratively to solve problems rather than making arbitrary decisions.

Perceptions of justice are also important in determining whether or not you are likely to trust your organization and your leader. Interactional justice, or your perceptions that you receive fair and interpersonal treatment from your leader, affects whether or not you believe that your leader is benevolent and has integrity. Employees use perceptions of overall fairness to decide whether or not to trust organizational authorities, and justice perceptions play a big role when employees are not sure whether or not to trust their leaders. For example, whether or not you perceive that the new process for allocating bonuses is "fair" or not, and whether or not you believe it was communicated effectively, will likely impact your level of trust in both your manager and the organization as a whole.

Interestingly, research finds no relationship between trust in leadership and the length of relationship between leaders and followers, and only a weak relationship between trust in leaders and followers' *propensity to trust*, or the extent to which an individual approaches new relationships overall from a more trusting or distrusting mindset. These findings are highly significant for managers who seek to develop trusting relationships with their followers, as it suggests that although followers vary in their tendencies to trust others, these dispositional or personality differences explain little of followers' actual trust in their leaders. In addition, it is important to point out that while managers may often assume that the length of their relationship with followers is associated with followers' willingness to trust them, in actuality trust can be much more spontaneous, dynamic, and fluid. Therefore, managers should not assume that time will automatically lead to more trusting relationships, nor can they assume that employees who they have longer-term relationships with are automatically more trustworthy than newer employees.

Similarly, it is important to note that the relationship between rewards and trust is complex and leaders cannot simply "buy" the trust of their followers with raises and bonuses. Followers' interpretation of what a reward or bonus "means" and how it is applied and communicated is strongly impacted by whether or not they trust their leader. The same bonus may simultaneously be considered by a trusting follower as a genuine reward and motivator for a job well done; alternately, it may be perceived as a "trick" or "trap" designed to squeeze more work out of a less trusting employee.

As an individual, you approach new relationships with expectations about the extent to which others are trustworthy, and these expectations can have an important impact on the relationship that develops. Research suggests that the most positive leader-follower relationships exist when *both* managers and employees approach a new relationship with positive expectations that trust will develop. Those who are more willing to trust others to reciprocate seem to form the best trusting relationships. Thus, it will likely work to your benefit to approach new relationships with an

attempt to give the other party “the benefit of the doubt” and communicate your willingness to trust him or her early on, which allows the other party an early opportunity to reciprocate. However, as with most behavioral tendencies, your propensity to trust can be strongly impacted by the situation. Imagine you have worked in a company for 5 years, and over this period you have had a succession of five different managers, each of whom promised to turn the department around with a new vision and new initiatives, only to face resistance and leave the company. How likely will you be to trust the sixth manager and her new vision? Understanding the history of the company and your team is therefore critical when entering a new position. If previous relationships were characterized by high levels of suspicion and distrust, it will likely be more difficult for you to earn the trust of your followers.

### **Organizational Level Variables: Ethics and Politics**

It is important to highlight that employees do not develop trust in their leaders solely on the basis of interpersonal processes. Perceptions of an ethical climate or collectively felt trust also increase trust in one’s supervisor, which in turn reduces interpersonal conflict and emotional exhaustion. Followers’ perceptions of an ethical work climate are related directly to supervisory trust, suggesting that organizational level factors can “bleed into” perceptions of a leader’s trustworthiness. On the flip side, if you perceive that organizational policies for bonuses and promotions are unfair, you will be less likely to trust your manager to apply them fairly. Perceptions of high levels of organizational politics can also erode levels of trust in both leaders and coworkers. Highly politicized organizations have lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, as well as higher levels of stress and burnout. While research suggests that the presence of trust and social support can go a long way toward minimizing this damage, paradoxically it is harder to build and sustain trusting relationships in the organizations where trusting relationships are precisely the most beneficial. Together, these findings highlight the detrimental role that unethical work environments and highly politicized organizations can have on developing trusting relationships and suggest that you will have a more difficult time developing trusting relationships in these contexts.

As a result of these organizational factors, it is important to highlight the importance of specifying “trust in whom.” Research suggests that trust in a direct leader has an equal or greater effect on performance, altruism, intent to quit, and job satisfaction, than does trust in *organizational* leadership. However, trust in organizational leadership tends to have a greater impact on organizational level outcomes such as whether or not an employee is committed to the company and will stay even if they receive a more attractive offer somewhere else. These findings suggest that followers can and do develop different trusting relationships with their immediate leaders versus leaders higher up in the organizational hierarchy. In addition, hierarchy affects the weight we place on different factors in determining whether or not to trust our leaders. For example, employees occupying higher-level positions in management tend to place more weight on having a sense of control and autonomy, while lower-level employees such as clerical staff and frontline employees tend to place more emphasis on the quality of their workplace relationships and the perceived benevolence and fairness of the leader.

### Trust in Leader-Follower Relations: Consequences

So why should we care so much about trust? In part, the answer to this question is that trust in leaders is significantly related to a wide range of attitudinal, behavioral, and performance outcomes (see Table 2.2). For work behaviors and outcomes, trust is related to all forms of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs): altruism, civic virtue, conscientiousness, courtesy, and sportsmanship. Trust also has a relatively weak but significant relationship with job performance. Trust in leadership also significantly affects employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment and is strongly and positively associated with whether or not employees identify with their organization. Across studies, trust has sizable relationships with whether employees intend to leave their jobs, or turnover intentions, as well as if they believe information provided by the leader, and support his or her decisions. Finally, and perhaps not surprisingly, trust is also highly related to satisfaction with one's leader and perceptions of the quality of the leader-follower relationship.

### Trust as a Buffer

Trust is also important for the buffering effect it plays against negative workplace situations. For example, Bal, de Lange, Ybema, Jansen, and van der Velde (2011) investigated the relationships among trust, procedural justice, and employee turnover in a three-wave longitudinal survey among 1597 Dutch employees and found that in times of change, trust in the leader becomes essential in determining whether or not employees decide to stay with the organization.

**Table 2.2** Outcomes of trust

Theme	Key findings	References
Attitudinal outcomes	Trust in supervisor strengthens both affective commitment and organizational identification	Costigan et al. (2006), Ertürk (2010), Straiter (2005)
	Trust has a significant relationship to job satisfaction and organizational commitment	Dirks and Ferrin (2002)
Behavioral outcomes	Follower trust in the leader and identification with the collective both play an important role in translating a leader's self-sacrifice into follower cooperation	De Cremer and van Knippenberg (2005)
	Trust is significantly related to altruism, civic virtue, conscientiousness, courtesy, and sportsmanship	Dirks and Ferrin (2002)
	Trust enhances employee role enlargement and organizational citizenship behaviors	Chiaburu and Marinova, (2006)
Performance outcomes	Trust has a relatively weak but significant relationship with job performance ( $r=0.16$ )	Dirks and Ferrin (2002)
	Trust in a direct leader leads to increased ability to focus on work tasks	Frazier, Johnson, Gavin, Gooty, and Bradley Snow (2010)
	Organizational trust allows employees to focus and add value to the organization	Mayer and Gavin (2005)

Trust also plays an important role “when the boss says ‘no.’” In one study, followers who felt their manager was transformational reported a higher degree of trust and more favorable reactions to managerial explanations when the answer was not one that the followers wanted to hear. This research provides evidence that investing time and energy in developing one’s leadership style and trusting relationships pays the most dividends during more difficult times or when as the boss you have to be the bearer of bad news. These results apply to organizational change as well. Specifically, trusting senior leaders enhances employee readiness for corporate transformation. In addition, in a company that is experiencing a merger, relocating, or downsizing, higher levels of trust enhance followers’ commitment to the organization, even when employees do not feel they have much control over the change itself. And finally, findings from R&D teams of a multinational automotive company indicate that charismatic leadership and trust in top management positively impact the extent to which teams are willing and able to implement new changes. All of this research suggests that investment in the development of trust is time and energy well spent, as trust will act as an important buffer when times are more difficult, change is necessary, or new processes need to be implemented.

## Leaders Trusting Followers

As is true of other aspects of leader-follower relations, much greater attention has been paid to the importance of followers’ trust in leaders than the reverse: to what extent leaders trust followers. However, some research shows that leader empowering behavior, or the extent to which leaders are willing to share power and decision making with followers, depends on the trust leaders have in follower’s performance and integrity. This approach essentially reverses the lens, approaching leader trust as an *antecedent* of leader empowering behavior instead of a consequence, suggesting that leaders must develop a level of trust in their followers prior to a willingness to delegate responsibility or share decision making.

Effective leaders not only need to gain the trust of their followers but also learn to trust their followers. Trusting leaders develop employees who are more productive, offer and provide more help beyond the requirements of their jobs, and stay with the organization for longer periods of time. However, the reality of many hierarchical positions means that managers have little direct interaction with subordinates, thus limiting followers’ opportunities to demonstrate their trustworthiness. Therefore, leaders may benefit from extending trust to followers even before they have gained enough experience with the follower to assess their trustworthiness. In essence, this involves signaling to employees that the leader is willing to take risks and display vulnerability, despite the potential for mistakes or failure.

In addition, managers who learn to trust and act on that trust enhance their own perceived trustworthiness. That is, gaining the trust of subordinates involves first acting as a trusting manager. Coworkers also tend to place more trust in fellow coworkers who are trusted by team leaders, especially when the group’s performance is poor and things are not going well. Organizations need to take steps to

encourage managers to act in a trusting manner, such as rewarding shared decision making and delegation as well as avoiding blaming or shaming managers for the mistakes of their employees.

Status differences between leaders and followers also influence the conditions for trust development. For example, supervisors are more concerned about conditions of trust that deal with delegation and report that being open to ideas, availability, and discreteness are the most important aspects of trustworthy followers. Followers, on the other hand, report that availability, competence, discreteness, integrity, and openness are more important for trust in the leader. Further, employees are more concerned about interactional justice or perceptions that the leader communicates decisions in a fair and open manner. Different perspectives about these foundations for trust may create conflicting expectations about how to effectively build trust between leaders and followers. For example, you may be concerned that your boss is clear about why she made a decision to cut a project that you think is important, while she may be more concerned that you are open to new ideas and available when she has a pressing problem that she wants to delegate.

### **Trust in Dynamic Leader-Follower Processes: The Transfer of Trust**

While we know quite a bit about what both leaders and followers pay attention to when deciding whether or not to trust, we know less about the ways in which trust develops as a dynamic and evolving process. Trust perceptions play a critical role in the development of cooperation in both interpersonal and intergroup interactions. Overall, it “takes two to tango”: the development of mutual trust and cooperation involves an intricate dance that spirals over time and is fundamentally affected by initial moves. As a result, leaders and followers who “get off on the wrong foot” may have a difficult time developing a trusting relationship, as the initial perceptions of mistrust often lead to a reluctance to cooperate or share information, which then leads to even more mistrust.

Trusting leader-follower relationships are thus cyclical: if initial trust on the part of followers is met with supportive behaviors on the part of leaders, trust is likely to develop and grow. Thus, the earliest stages of a relationship are crucial for determining its future quality. To make trusting relationships even more complex, there is evidence that the foundations for what we find trustworthy in leaders and followers changes as the relationship develops. In other words, as we learn more about others through experiences in working with them, we begin to base our trust on different kinds of information. In newer leader-follower relationships, trust is associated with demographic similarity, for example, gender, ethnicity, and age. As the relationship develops, observations of trustworthy behavior become more important, for example, evidence that your boss follows through with his promises and supports you when you need help or resources. And finally, in long-term, mature relationships where leaders and followers have a long shared history of working together, the development of a shared perspective about the priorities and values of the organization is critical. These results indicate that how your relationships unfold over time is important to consider.

## **Mistrust and Lack of Trust in Leader-Follower Relationships**

Unfortunately, very little research focuses on “the dark side of trust” and its consequences. For example, how far are followers willing to go in terms of unethical or unhealthy behaviors to please leaders whom they trust? Even more surprising perhaps is the lack of attention to how breaches of trust can be repaired between leaders and followers. One way that leaders and followers both build and break trust is through monitoring. Monitoring in the workplace can take various forms, including “checking in” on followers or using video and other forms of technology to track performance and work (and nonwork) behaviors. Monitoring by supervisors can be both negatively and positively related to trust. For example, in newer work groups, monitoring may be interpreted as providing the footing and guidance followers need to make progress toward their goals and can form an important foundation for coaching followers and helping them when they face obstacles or get “stuck.” The challenge is how to monitor employees with benevolence and guidance, rather than signaling distrust. Imagine how you would feel if you learned that your boss had been reading your work emails without your knowledge. Now imagine that you find out that your boss has been checking the team chats periodically in order to follow your progress and help your team anticipate future problems. These two brief examples illustrate the complexity of the relationship between trust and monitoring. Previous research has shown that, when combined with fair assessment of performance, leader support, openness, and collaborative problem solving, monitoring is highly related to trust in managers. However, monitoring can easily undermine trust if not done in an open, collaborative manner. Thus, an important implication for managers is to combine careful monitoring with supportive leadership factors in order to facilitate greater levels of employee trust rather than destroying it.

## **Trusting Without Trust?**

It is also important to point out that mutually beneficial cooperative relationships can also take place without trust at all. For example, leaders and followers may decide to cooperate for a wide variety of other reasons. In many cases, working together may be beneficial in order to enhance one’s professional reputation; to fulfill contractual obligations; to conform to professional standards, because one or both parties achieve financial awards for doing so; or simply to enhance one’s professional network. Thus, it is important not to overemphasize the role of trust in bringing about cooperative leader-follower relationships, which can be mutually beneficial to both parties in the complete absence of trust. In some organizational situations, it may be less the person in the role that is trusted (or not) as much as the system of expertise that produces and maintains that role. For example, we trust engineers, doctors, lawyers, and accountants in many situations because we trust the profession and its associated code of conduct, and we therefore trust the individual

in that role to solve physical, medical, legal, and fiscal problems. As applied to leaders and followers, the individuals within the roles as a result may sometimes be less important than our overall trust or mistrust in the role that they occupy. Thus, the trustworthiness of an individual leader is based both on our assessments of his or her attitudes and behaviors as well as the general trust that we have for those in positions of authority. When you think about leaders in general, do more trusting or distrusting attitudes come to mind? How might these attitudes affect your relationship with a new boss?

These questions take on potentially great importance when we remember that trust and cooperative behaviors tend to spiral in either a positive or negative direction. That is, if we trust our leader, we are more likely to cooperate with him or her, disclose sensitive information, and give him or her the benefit of the doubt in ambiguous situations, which then increases the likelihood that he or she will trust and cooperate with us in turn. Unfortunately, the opposite is also the case, in that perceptions of lack of trust and cooperation lead both parties to pull back and avoid further risk, which undermines future trust and cooperative behaviors. One critical distinction between these two spirals may be the role of communication or other visible opportunities to cooperate. Through two-way communication, parties are able to obtain a better understanding of dilemmas and challenges the other faces, gain additional opportunities to explain and possibly reframe their behaviors, as well as obtain insights into their partner's behaviors and potential justifications or relevant factors influencing those behaviors. For example, communication may help followers to understand the complex reasons why a leader may have broken his or her promise to avoid layoffs, despite his or her best intentions to keep that promise. The result may then be maintenance of a trusting relationship, where, in the absence of communication, followers may perceive that the leader was deceitful and conclude he or she is no longer trustworthy. Finally, through communication, both leaders and followers then have the opportunity to make commitments about their future behaviors and solicit commitments or promises about the other's behavior and can jointly plan to coordinate their actions in the future so they begin to cooperate again. For example, a leader may promise to support a follower's position in a public meeting or other forum, signaling his or her commitment and willingness to cooperate in the future.

Finally, there is evidence to suggest that trust building and trust erosion involve different processes. Specifically, behaviors reflecting leader *benevolence* are more important in trust-building incidents, while behaviors reflecting leader *ability* and *integrity* are highlighted in trust erosion incidents. Followers who feel more vulnerable emphasize the importance of behaviors reflecting leader integrity or ability, and vulnerability also increases the likelihood that trust will be eroded. Other research indicates that distrust is a unique psychological construct, rather than the opposite of trust. These findings suggest that the processes involved in leader-follower trust building may be distinct from those involved in the erosion of trust and that distinctions should be made between low levels of trust versus outright mistrust in both leaders and followers.

## Conclusion

In sum, we know much about leader-follower trust, but recognize that trusting relationships may vary across contexts of more and less stable work situations (e.g., government bureaucracies versus high-tech start-ups), virtual and face-to-face relations, temporary versus stable leader-follower relationships, and local and global organizational forms. In addition, the role of cross-cultural differences in trust formation is important to consider in an increasingly global work context. For example, in a cross-national study of Canadian and Japanese students, research showed that trustors are more likely to rely on culture-consistent signs and tend to neglect inconsistent ones when assessing the trustworthiness of an unfamiliar partner. More specifically, collectivists paid more attention to situational factors and less attention to personality or dispositional factors in their initial assessments of trustworthiness, while the opposite was true for individualists. In another example, a cross-cultural comparison between Australian and Chinese followers showed that Australian followers reported higher levels of trust in their leaders than did Chinese followers, and culture moderated the effects of trust on the leadership-performance relationship. These research findings provide a useful foundation for understanding baseline differences in trust-relevant factors across cultures, as well as for developing culturally contingent models for helping both leaders and followers develop and maintain trusting relationships across cultural boundaries.

It is also critical to explore whether or not active and courageous followership requires a foundation of trust and what role trust plays in challenging leaders, “voice” behaviors, and whistle-blowing. In addition, it is important to consider potential cultural barriers (e.g., power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance) that inhibit trust and voice and discourage versus encourage followers to question authority. Other important questions include the potential role of social contagion in the spread of trust between leaders and followers, the role of a “culture of trust” in suppressing or fostering a climate where followers feel free to question those in authority, and how organizations can foster the trust necessary for constructive dialogue as a mechanism to self-correct internally before a dangerous situation occurs.

Trust plays a critical role in leadership. In fact, it may not be an exaggeration to state that trust is at the root of all “great leadership,” in that one means little without the other. In increasingly global organizations focused on knowledge work, creativity, and complex problem solving, leaders who view followers as commodities or means to an end forfeit the strategic advantage that trust-based leadership creates. Leaders who are distant and aloof from employees and avoid connecting with them are becoming much less acceptable and far less normative, further enhancing the importance of trust. As Ernest Hemingway noted, “the best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.” This potentially precarious first step provides the core foundation for the leadership relationship, and organizations must continue to explore what encourages leaders and followers to both take the risk and ultimately reap the rewards.

### Chapter Summary

- Trust is defined as an expectation or belief that one can rely on another person's actions *and* words and that the person has good intentions to carry out their promises. It is most meaningful in situations in which one party is at risk or vulnerable to another party.
- Trustworthy leaders demonstrate ability through setting a compelling direction, providing structure, and demonstrating task-relevant knowledge. In addition, they develop perceptions of benevolence through coaching behaviors that foster a supportive context. Finally, trustworthy leaders develop and sustain perceptions of integrity through justice, acting in ways that are consistent with their values, and accountability.
- Trust is not dependent on the length of a relationship, an added bonus, or even by telling employees that they have done a good job. Rather, trust is developed through a dynamic process through which each party signals to the other party that they are willing to cooperate and take risks.
- Unethical work environments and highly politicized organizations can make it very difficult to develop trusting relationships between leaders and followers.
- In times of change or when delivering difficult news, trust acts as an important buffer against turnover, stress, burnout, and lowered commitment to the organization.
- Effective leaders not only gain the trust of their followers but also learn to trust their followers in return.
- When combined with fair assessment of performance, leader support, openness, and collaborative problem solving, monitoring is highly related to trust in managers. However, in the absence of these conditions, monitoring can quickly undermine trust between leaders and followers.

### Discussion Questions

1. How might the allocation of salary, bonuses, and other resources impact perceptions of trustworthiness? How can leaders communicate policies in ways that are perceived as consistent and fair?
2. What are some of the reasons why managers may appear untrustworthy despite doing their best to be consistent in their words and actions?
3. How can organizations encourage managers to act in a trusting manner, such as sharing sensitive information and empowering employees? What are some of the penalties or disincentives for delegating power and decision making?
4. How might leaders help rebuild followers' trust after it is broken? How might followers help rebuild leaders' trust after it is broken?
5. Do you agree that trust and mistrust are psychologically distinct processes? Why or why not? What are the implications for fostering trusting relationships between leaders and followers?

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