

Leveraging Manager Trust



What you should learn from this article:

- What is trust?
- The science behind trust
- Steps for improving manager trust

BACKGROUND

Trust is vital for the health of the employee-manager relationship and leads to a variety of positive work outcomes. In fact, trust is one of the main contributors of quality organizational relationships (Krot & Lewicka, 2012), and manager performance ratings are significantly affected by trust (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). Research also shows that when employees trust their manager it leads to work commitment, productivity, and more effective communication, while a lack of trust leads to negative work behaviors and turnover (Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, & Dineen, 2009). Overall, trust has a huge impact on work outcomes.

WHAT IS TRUST?

According to Krot and Lewicka (2012), there are three aspects to trust:

Competence – you trust someone when you believe that they have the ability to complete the tasks you give them, or know they can do the job

Integrity – you trust someone when the way they behave aligns with your values

Benevolence – you trust someone who is committed to help you and genuinely has your best interests at heart

Robinson (1996) summarizes these aspects of trust and defined trust as, “One’s expectations, assumptions, or beliefs about the likelihood that another’s future actions will be beneficial, favourable, or at least not detrimental to one’s interests,” (p. 576, as cited in Tzafrir, Harel, Baruch, & Dolan, 2003).

At work, there are different types of trust relationships (Krot & Lewicka, 2012):

Horizontal - between coworkers; peer-to-peer

Vertical - between employees and managers

- This relationship is especially complicated because of the imbalance of power. Managers impact performance ratings and compensation
- Most research on vertical trust focuses on manager trust, that is, the trust that employees have in their manager

Institutional - between organization and employees

THE SCIENCE BEHIND TRUST

Researchers found that oxytocin, a neurotransmitter released when an animal can safely approach another, plays a role in feelings of trust (Zak, 2017). In one study, trust was measured by a participant sharing more money with another. This could result in mutual gain or end up benefiting the other person. Participants had to trust the other in order to make the decision to share their money (Kosfeld, Heinrichs, Zak, Fischbacher, & Fehr, 2005). They found that sharers had higher levels of oxytocin. A follow-up study found that when participants were given nasal spray of oxytocin (vs a placebo), they, again, shared more money with others. This is evidence that the release of oxytocin can cause feelings

of trust. Because oxytocin is associated with feelings of trust, engaging in activities that release oxytocin can increase trust. According to Zak (2017), asking for help, building social ties, and the lack of stress and uncertainty help promote the release of oxytocin.

HOW MANAGERS CAN FACILITATE TRUST

Researchers have also found that a variety of organizational and manager strategies can increase manager trust.

- Ensure that there is open communication across the company (Tzafrir et al., 2003).
- Promote fairness in organizational processes and procedures as this impacts perceptions of trust (Tzafrir et al., 2003).
- Give employees autonomy, increasing empowerment, and reducing hierarchical structures (Tzafrir et al., 2003).
- Make it clear to your employees that you trust them (e.g. tell them)! (Brower, Lester, & Korsgaard, 2017).
- Increase knowledge sharing as this indicates to employees that you trust them (Brower, et al., 2017).
- Encourage employees to explore and initiate organizational change. This shows employees that you trust their ability and ideas. This also involves the team in decision making (Brower et al., 2017).

Recently, three main factors were identified for building manager trust (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). Think of these when trying to develop trust within organizational relationships:

"Positive Relationships" – manager gives team members feedback, facilitates communication, and participates in conflict resolution

"Good Judgment/Expertise" – manager provides quick responses to problems, gives quality advice and knowledge

"Consistency" – manager follows through on their commitments, and is a leader the team admires

CONCLUSION

Trust is imperative for effective communication at work and leads to a variety of positive work outcomes. Trust involves competence, integrity, and benevolence, and is defined by having positive expectations about one's future actions. Having open communication, giving employees autonomy, reducing hierarchical structures, and increasing knowledge sharing, are just some of the initiatives associated with increasing manager trust. Managers should focus on employing some of these strategies to increase trust between them and their team members in order to improve relationships as well as overall organizational performance.

References

- Brower, Holly H., Lester, Scott W., & Korsgaard, M.A. (2017, July 5). Want your employees to trust you? Show you trust them. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2017/07/want-your-employees-to-trust-you-show-you-trust-them>.
- Brower, H. H., Lester, S. W., Korsgaard, M. A., & Dineen, B. R. (2009). A closer look at trust between managers and subordinates: Understanding the effects of both trusting and being trusted on subordinate outcomes. *Journal of Management*, 35(2), 327-347.
- Kosfeld, M., Heinrichs, M., Zak, P. J., Fischbacher, U., & Fehr, E. (2005). Oxytocin increases trust in humans. *Nature*, 435(7042), 673.
- Krot, K., & Lewicka, D. (2012). The importance of trust in manager-employee relationships. *International Journal of Electronic Business Management*, 10(3).
- Robinson, S. L. (1996). Trust and breach of the psychological contract. *Administrative science quarterly*, 41(4).
- Tzafrir, S. S., late Gedaliahu H. Harel, Baruch, Y., & Dolan, S. L. (2004). The consequences of emerging HRM practices for employees' trust in their managers. *Personnel Review*, 33(6), 628-647.
- Zak, P. (2017, January-February). The neuroscience of trust. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2017/01/the-neuroscience-of-trust>.
- Zenger, J. & Folkman, J. (2019, February 5). The 3 elements of trust. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2019/02/the-3-elements-of-trust>.