

Trust in leadership: A multi-level review and integration

Shawne Burke, Dana Sims, Elizabeth Lazzara, and Eduardo Salas, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 2007, 18, 606-632.

Background

- Defines trust as **an attitude** which can develop (or decline) over time or quickly, based on contextual factors and need. These factors include, most importantly, the **interaction between the team/organisational member and the team/organisational leader(s)**.
- Trust in leaders is related to important **outcomes** including:
 - organisational processes (e.g., communication, cooperation and information sharing);
 - satisfaction with and perceived effectiveness of the leader;
 - increased discretionary behaviours (e.g. organisational citizenship behaviour); and
 - decreased turnover and organisational performance/stability.

Main points

- Proposes a model for understanding trust in leadership, based on the following major factors:
 - **leader** characteristics (including Ability, Supportiveness, Integrity, and Reputation);
 - **team member** characteristics, particularly in terms of predisposition/propensity to trust, and the perceived risk associated with ‘trusting’ activities (e.g., with obeying an order);
 - **team factors**, such as ‘psychological safety’, team size, diversity, and level of interaction;
 - **organisational factors**, specifically in terms organisational climate;
 - **short-term outcomes**, including behaviour and attitudes; and
 - **longer-term outcomes**, such as performance quality/quantity, retention, and adaptation.
- Leader **ability**: the ability to **set a compelling direction** (dependent on the leader’s situational awareness and understanding of the team task, its capabilities, and the environment), and to **create an enabling structure** (including design of the work and of the team, and development of appropriate norms of conduct, including self-correction, learning and open communication).
- Leader **supportiveness**: **facilitating team members’ efforts to solve complex problems**, while concurrently **developing their skills and knowledge**.
- Leader **integrity**: being **ethical, approachable, consultative**, and **consistent** in terms of the fulfilment of reward contingencies and exchange relationships (**‘firm but fair’**), and being seen as **having values in common** with team members.
- Leader **reputation**: the reputation of an individual leader, based on past performance and consistency, and of the organisation’s leaders in general.
- **‘Psychological safety’** within the team, based on an expectation that well-intentioned actions will not lead to punishment, and on members feeling free to question suggestions and decisions. Can be facilitated by team building activities, and by the downplaying of power differences within the team, including between the leader and the team, and between different team members.
- **Organisational climate**, particularly via **HRM** policies and procedures.
- **In sum**:
 - Trust is a key intangible attribute shaped by a range of organisational processes, and resulting in important outcomes.
 - Within the immediate group, the qualities of the leader will affect trust; but this can be either supported or undermined by the climate within the organisation and within the team.
- There is a **measurement issue** in trust research, due to an over-reliance on traditional survey research. Problems with this approach include: the ‘snapshot-in-time’ effect; the ‘whose-perspective-is-more-important?’ effect; the ‘poor-human-insight’ effect; and the ‘generalisation-from-one-instance-to-other-instances’ effect. New approaches to measurement are needed.