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# Trust

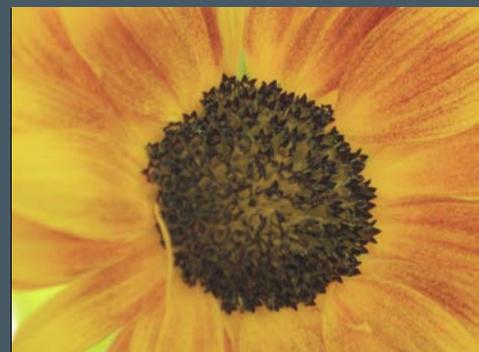
The foundation of successful teams

*sowing seeds*

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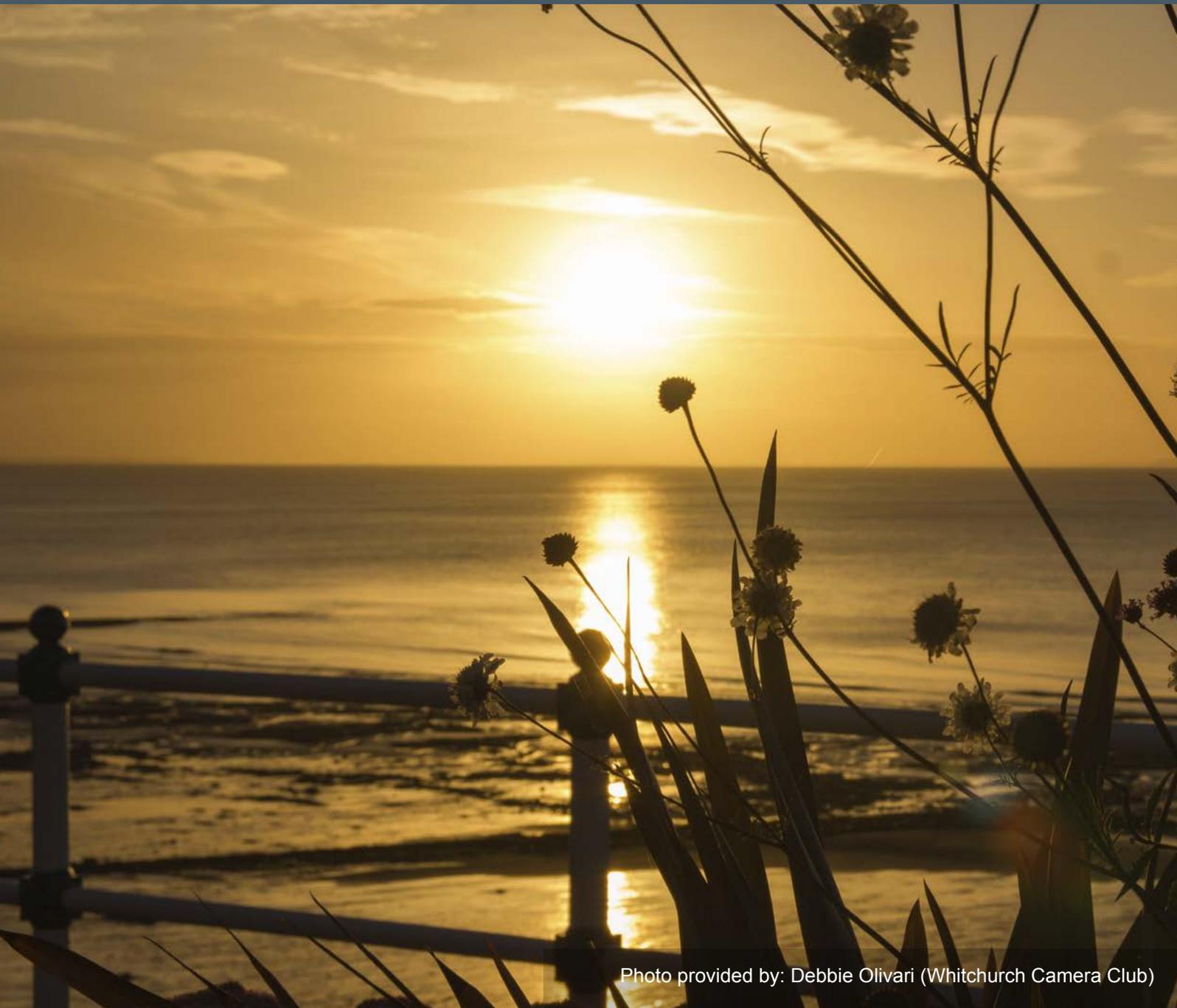
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# Introduction

Public service organisations in Wales are constantly striving to deliver the highest quality services in the most effective ways, focussing on using all resources available in the best way possible and by using tried and tested methods to make this happen: strategic planning, restructure, streamlining, service design, job planning and so on.

While all these 'hard' systems support organisational development, there is a growing body of research that suggests a more inside-out approach to improving performance of individuals and organisations. This edition of Sowing Seeds invites you to consider the concept of trust within this context, to explore the impact that trust – both its presence and absence – has on our teams and organisations, and identify practical ways in which we can, both as leaders and individuals, influence and benefit from a culture of trust.



# Trust – where did it go?

“Trust impacts us 24/7, 365 days a year. It underpins and affects the quality of every relationship, every communication, every work project, every business venture, every effort in which we are engaged; it is the key leadership competency of the new global economy. ”

*Covey, 2008*

In a 2017 report into what is described as a crisis of trust across the world, global communications and marketing firm Edelman finds that ‘two-thirds of the countries we survey are now ‘distrusters’. Fewer than 50 percent trust in the mainstream institutions of business, government, media and NGO’s to do what is right, down from just over half in 2016.

This may not come as a surprise when we consider that we are living through a time where we regularly see political and industry leaders embroiled in scandal, where global corporations are exposed for unethical practices and where some of the richest and most influential in our society have facilitated the biggest economic crash in the western world for generations.

However in their 2012 report ‘Where has all the trust gone?’, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) report that this breakdown of trust preceded the financial crisis and was already prevalent within both public and private service sectors. They suggest that the reported decline in trust levels ‘may also be symptomatic of deeper concerns in the UK about the nature of employment, the intentions of employers towards their workforces, and changes in employees’ expectations of both their employers and senior managers in the twenty-first century’ (Hope Hailey et al, 2012).

A later report from the Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM) also showed a pronounced difference in trust levels across different industries and sectors. ‘The public sector is suffering from a trust shortfall with just 29% net trust compared to the private (45%) and third (46%) sectors, suggesting that budget cuts, wage freezes and mass redundancies experienced have had a real impact on trust levels. (2014)

If we accept, as countless headlines, expert practitioners and academic researchers suggest, that trust is indeed being eroded from our organisations, we must ask ourselves what does this mean for public services, what needs to be done to restore trust and how can we influence this?

## It's not all bad news!

Recent research has shown that while we are less likely to place our trust in institutions, such as government, banks and so on, we are increasingly likely to trust strangers. Oxford University's Rachel Botsman (2012) suggests that rather than trust being eroded, we have simply changed how and who we decide to trust. She argues that a shift is underway from the 20th century defined by 'institutional trust' towards a 21st century that will be defined by 'distributed trust' across huge networks of people, organisations and intelligent machines.

To illustrate, Botsman points to the examples of companies such as AirBNB or TaskRabbit to show how we are routinely choosing to put our trust in strangers whether to stay in our homes, to provide us with safe accommodation or to take care of our personal errands.

Edelman's report of 2017 appears to support this claim having found that 'A person like yourself is now routinely deemed to be as credible as an academic or technical expert, and far more credible than a CEO or government official'. He goes on to state that, 'As trust in institutions erodes, the basic assumptions of fairness, shared values and equal opportunity traditionally upheld by the system are no longer taken for granted. [Trust] is now the deciding factor in whether a society can function.'

So, while our propensity to trust in established institutions appears to be swiftly declining, there is evidence to suggest we're shifting towards a different type of trust which is based more on peer-to-peer relationships than traditional authority and power. Understanding this movement in attitudes and beliefs around trust will be vital for public service organisations as they prepare to deliver for, and through, our future generations and will require bold and courageous leadership approaches to build and retain the trust of modern citizens.



Photo provided by: Debbie Olivari (Whitchurch Camera Club)

# Trust and trustworthiness

Trust can be defined as ‘a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another’ (Rousseau et al, 1998), or to put it another way, trust is ‘choosing to make something important to you, vulnerable to the actions of someone else’ (Brown, 2017).

Both these definitions highlight the role of the ‘trustor’ – the person who gives their trust. However, the role of the ‘trustee’ is at least equally as important in the trust relationship. Philosopher, Baroness Onora O’Neil challenges the notion that what we need is more trust per se suggesting that this is merely a response. A more sensible aim, in her view, would be to focus instead on increasing trustworthiness as this is what we are called on to judge.

“...we need to think much less about trust..., much more about being trustworthy, and how you give people adequate, useful and simple evidence that you’re trustworthy.”

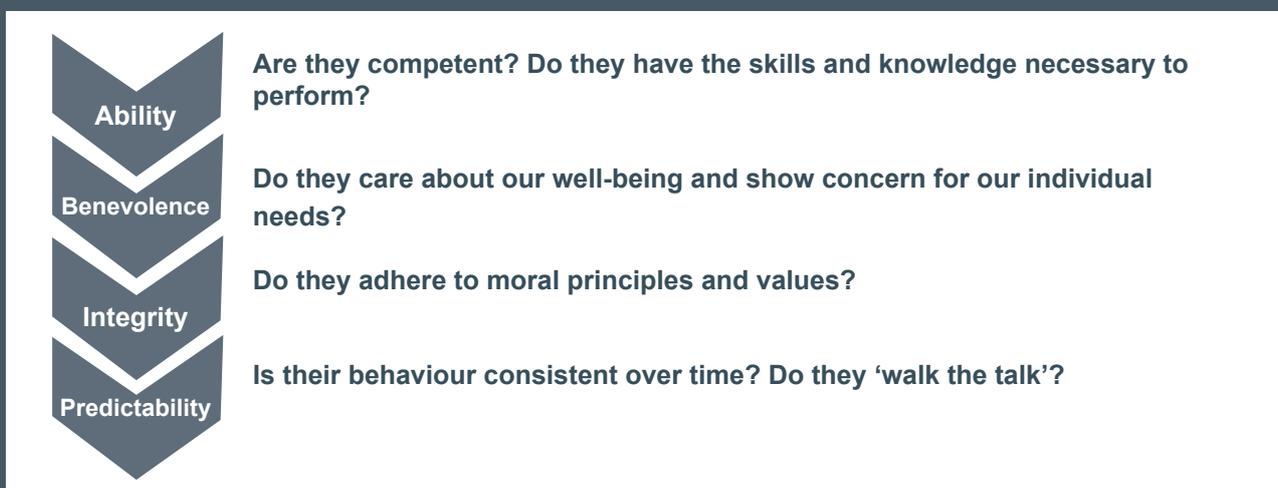
*O’Neil, 2013*

## Four pillars of trustworthiness

“While followers often forgive a lapse of ability and competence, they are much less forgiving in situations where integrity and morality are lacking.”

*Elsbach and Currall, quoted in CIPD, 2012*

Research has found there are four important characteristics that we look for when deciding whether or not a person is trustworthy.



*Adapted from: Hope-Hailey et al, 2012: Where has all the trust gone? CIPD.*

Harvard social scientist, Amy Cuddy (2016), suggests that many people, especially in a professional context, believe that demonstrating ability is the more important factor in building trust. However, her research has shown that it is in fact our perception of warmth (akin to benevolence) or trustworthiness in motive (akin to integrity), that forms the primary element in how we evaluate people. We need to quickly believe they care about our well-being in order to feel secure about their motives. This is not to suggest we should underestimate the importance of ability in the trust equation however, particularly in a workplace setting, as this is likely an essential factor in achieving results and without results, we damage our credibility.

“A person of integrity that does not produce results is not credible. If you are not credible, you are not trustworthy!”

Covey, 2008

Furthermore, our perception of another’s level of control over their behaviour or impulses has a strong, positive link to how trustworthy we deem them to be. While our belief in someone’s character (benevolence and integrity) may assure us of their motivation towards us, it is their ability – to exercise self-control – that gives us the confidence they will be able to override their natural self-interest impulses (Righetti and Finkenauer, 2011).

This suggests that in terms of our own development, it would make sense to place at least an equal emphasis on developing our character strengths as our abilities and ensure that these are demonstrated to others. As the CIPD point out, the uncertainty people are finding themselves in is leading to a demand for more demonstration of trustworthiness, ‘it is not enough to think kind thoughts in one’s head’ (Hope-Hailey et al, 2014).

## ‘But I’m not naturally trusting’

Alongside our perceptions of another’s trustworthiness, neuroscience has identified factors within ourselves that can make us more or less prone to trusting behaviour.

In a study of the neurological signals that indicate trust, researchers found that the presence of the brain chemical oxytocin, led to an increase in trusting behaviour. The level of oxytocin present in an individual’s brain was a reliable indicator of their willingness to trust – even in experiments involving strangers. Our oxytocin levels can be affected by many things, both in a positive and negative way. High-stress, for example, is a potent oxytocin-inhibitor whereas activities such as providing positive encouragement to others or assisting them with a difficult task can contribute to raising our levels. As an additional benefit, oxytocin also increases our trustworthiness and empathy with others (Zac, 2017).

Greater amounts of oxytocin hormone levels appear to be associated with greater relaxation, more willingness to trust others, and general psychological stability.

(Psych Central, 2016)

So, as public servants we must acknowledge that simply relying on our abilities will not be enough to build the trust we need from others to tackle our future challenges. We must make a conscious choice to develop our trustworthiness by demonstrating integrity, by consistently ‘walking the talk’ and by practicing benevolence to others and ourselves – demonstrating our warmth and positive motivations.

# Trust and organisations

Compared with people at low trust companies, people at high-trust companies report: 74% less stress, 106% more energy at work, 50% higher productivity, 13% fewer sick days, 76% more engagement, 29% more satisfaction with their lives, 40% less burnout.

*(Zac, The Neuroscience of Trust, HBR 2017)*

While it is easy to understand the importance of trust in our close relationships, there exists a widespread agreement that many leaders have dismissed its importance as a critical enabler of organisational success for too long.

Research is now proving that a culture of trust is indeed an essential component of high-performing organisations and has wide-ranging implications for costs, efficiency, engagement and growth.

Organisations have long understood that high engagement among staff consistently leads to positive outcomes for both individuals and organisations. So how do we increase employee engagement? According to neuroeconomist Paul J Zac, of Claremont Graduate University, building a culture of trust is what makes a meaningful difference.

“Employees in high-trust organisations are more productive, have more energy at work, collaborate better with their colleagues, and stay with their employers longer than people working at low-trust companies. They also suffer less chronic stress and are happier with their lives, and those factors fuel stronger performance.”

*Zac, 2017*

It is perhaps no surprise then, that the financial cost alone of a low-trust culture is significant.

In ‘The Speed of Trust’, author Stephen M R Covey highlights a compelling business case for trust: that it is not merely a social benefit but inevitably leads to a strong financial advantage. Trust, he argues, is a performance-multiplier. When you have high trust, everything speeds up and as a result the costs go down – a phenomenon he likens to a trust-dividend as opposed to a trust-tax.

“While these trust taxes don’t show up on the income statement, they’re still there, disguised as other problems: redundancy, bureaucracy, politics, disengagement...”

*Moon & Dathe-Douglass, accessed online September 2017*

This view is echoed by the CIPD (2012) who suggest that the breakdown of trust in an organisation can create real and significant costs. In addition to the more immediate, observable costs of managerial time spent on monitoring activities, reduced productivity and higher turnover, trust in the workplace also has a distinct link to innovation, a critical factor in restoring growth and opportunities within the UK. However, they argue, people are unlikely to be willing to take the necessary risks unless they feel safe to do so i.e. they have the backing and support of their organisation. Innovation is of increasing importance to the public sector in the face of continuing cuts to service budgets: ‘managers will have to rethink the way they deliver services – we need people to spend time re-inventing forms of delivery, not simply hacking away at the size or volume of existing practices.’

Despite the many potential challenges involved in generating a culture of trust at organisational level, there is much that leaders and managers can do to influence organisational results by focussing on building and developing a strong culture of trust at a local level.



Photo provided by: Debbie Olivari (Whitchurch Camera Club)

# Trust and teams

“ If ground-breaking work is to be achieved that is better than the ‘sum of the parts’, a team must be functioning at its best. The most successful teams are likely to be those that enjoy a high level of trust, are mutually supportive and enjoy working together. ”

*Ghislaine Caulat, Ashridge Consulting, 2006*

Through his research into team dynamics, business consultant and author Patrick Lencioni identified that when organisations fail to achieve genuine teamwork, it's because they have fallen prey to 5 pitfalls, outlined in his work *The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team*. The first and most fundamental of these is an absence of trust.

He suggests, however, that we differentiate between two types of trust that are often present within teams:

**Common Trust:** the confidence / belief that a co-worker or team member won't break generally accepted laws, norms, policies, etc. Belonging to the team typically grants you this type of trust.

**Vulnerability-Based Trust:** a much deeper confidence that you can be vulnerable with teammates. He defines vulnerability as the belief that you can do things like take risks, ask for help, admit mistakes, or confront and hold others accountable without fear of retaliation, humiliation or resentment.

Without vulnerability-based trust providing a strong foundation on which to build, a team will fall prey to further dysfunctional behaviours.

The link between vulnerability-based trust and high performance is clearly understood and acted upon in some organisations widely recognised as world-leaders. Paul Santagata, Head of Industry at Google identifies this 'psychological safety' as the one thing that high-performing teams have in common. "In Google's fast-paced, highly demanding environment, our success hinges on the ability to take risks and be vulnerable in front of peers."

*(HBR, August 2017)*

## Dysfunctional versus Cohesive teams: how to recognise the difference

Dysfunctional	Behaviours		Cohesive
<b>Absence of trust</b>	Team members feel unable to be genuinely open with each other about their mistakes and weaknesses.	There is confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group. They can admit their mistakes, their weaknesses, and their concerns without fear of reprisal.	<b>Trust one another</b>
<b>Fear of conflict</b>	Many people avoid conflict in order to try to keep some sense of harmony. Instead, it results in tension where people are not able to openly speak up. This ends up creating more politics and the formation of cliques.	Team members feel safe to engage in productive conflict focussed on concepts and ideas. This conflict becomes a means for debating different perspectives and landing on the best possible solution.	<b>Engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas</b>
<b>Lack of commitment</b>	Without having aired their opinions in the course of open debate, team members rarely, if ever, buy in and commit to decisions though they may feign agreement during meetings.	There is clarity around decisions and complete buy-in from team members. Teams that achieve commitment use a common language to engage in healthy debate and support decisions even if everyone does not initially agree.	<b>Commitment to decisions &amp; plans of action</b>
<b>Avoidance of accountability</b>	The need to avoid interpersonal discomfort prevents team members from holding one another accountable. They feel unable to call peers out on performance or behaviours that may harm the team.	High-performing teams set high standards for themselves. Holding team members to account for their responsibilities helps establish respect among peers and guides the team to live up to their expectations. However, holding people accountable for results only is not enough, behaviors must be included – they often precede results issues .	<b>Hold one another accountable</b>
<b>Inattention to results</b>	This occurs when team members put their individual needs (such as ego, career development or recognition) or even the needs of their divisions above the collective goals of the team.	The goal of every team is results. By building a foundation of trust, engaging in productive conflict, achieving commitment, and holding team member's accountable, teams never lose sight of their collective goals and can achieve their peak performance.	<b>Focus on achieving collective results</b>

*Adapted from Lencioni and John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2017*

# Developing a high-trust team

If trust is a necessary foundation for successful teams, it is essential that an environment is created where trusting relationships can grow and flourish: where team members have the opportunity to both display trustworthy behaviours and see these demonstrated in others. For this to happen, team members must be able to connect with each other – not just on a purely professional level but also on a more intimate, human level.

Caulat 2006, suggests that managers can help facilitate the development of team relationships by providing space for such human connection to be made, 'Deadlines and goal-driven meetings offer little room for the messy, loose, animated conversations that help develop human connection and the all-important personal touch that is critical in developing intimacy, a key ingredient of trust.'



Photo provided by: Debbie Olivari (Whitchurch Camera Club)

# Eight management behaviours that foster trust

Zac (2017) suggests eight behaviours managers can adopt to develop a high-trust team.

<p><b>1. Recognise excellence</b></p>	<p>Ideally recognition should be immediate, tangible, unexpected, personal and public.</p>
<p><b>2. Induce ‘Challenge Stress’</b></p>	<p>Assigning a team a difficult but achievable job produces a moderate level of stress which releases neurochemicals [oxytocin &amp; adrenocorticotropin] that intensify people’s focus and strengthens social connections. Challenges must be attainable and there must be a concrete end point.</p>
<p><b>3. Give people discretion in how they do their work.</b></p>	<p>Being trusted to work things out is a big motivator. Autonomy also promotes innovation as different people try different approaches.</p>
<p><b>4. Enable job crafting</b></p>	<p>When organisations allow employees some choice over what they focus their energies on, people will choose those about which they care the most. Clear expectations are essential in such situations as is accountability so that contributions can be measured and rewarded appropriately.</p>
<p><b>5. Share information broadly</b></p>	<p>Uncertainty about an organisation’s direction can lead to chronic stress, which inhibits the release of oxytocin and undermines teamwork. Openness is the antidote.</p>
<p><b>6. Intentionally build relationships with your team and help them do the same with each other</b></p>	<p>It is tempting, particularly at times of high-stress, to prioritise a focus on ‘task’ rather than ‘relationship’. However, research has demonstrated that managers who genuinely express interest in and concern for team members’ success and personal well-being outperform others in the quality and quantity of their work. Also, when people care about each other, they perform better because they don’t want to let their teammates down.</p>
<p><b>7. Facilitate whole-person growth</b></p>	<p>High-trust workplaces adopt a growth-mindset when developing their people, helping them to grow personally as well as professionally. This investment in the whole person has a powerful effect on engagement and retention.</p>
<p><b>8. Show vulnerability</b></p>	<p>Asking for help is a sign of a secure leader. Being asked for help also demonstrates trust and stimulates oxytocin in others, increasing their trust and cooperation in return.</p>

*Adapted from The Neuroscience of Trust, Zac, 2017*

# Trust and leadership

“ Trustworthy senior leaders are always as able and competent as other senior leaders but they put an extra emphasis on the importance of the process and practice required to generate and maintain strong relationships with their followers. ”

*Hope-Hailey and Gustafsson, 2014*

Research from the Institute of Leadership & Management (2014) reveals that the more distant an employee feels from their boss, the less likely they are to trust them. It is perhaps not surprising then that employees in the largest organisations report the lowest levels of trust with managers in organisations of over 1000 staff reporting just 27% net trust.

Over one in ten (12%) public sector managers say they trust ‘absolutely no-one’ or ‘very few’ people in their organisation.

*(Institute of Leadership and Management, 2014)*

Their research also showed that first-line managers are the least trusting of all management levels. This, they claim, is a major concern for organisations as it is this group of managers that lead the teams who interact with customers on a daily basis and manage the majority of employees within an organisation. This group are therefore crucial to organisational performance and reputation.

In a 2017 study to measure the impact of leader trustworthiness within the workplace, trust was found to have a significant impact on employees intentions to:

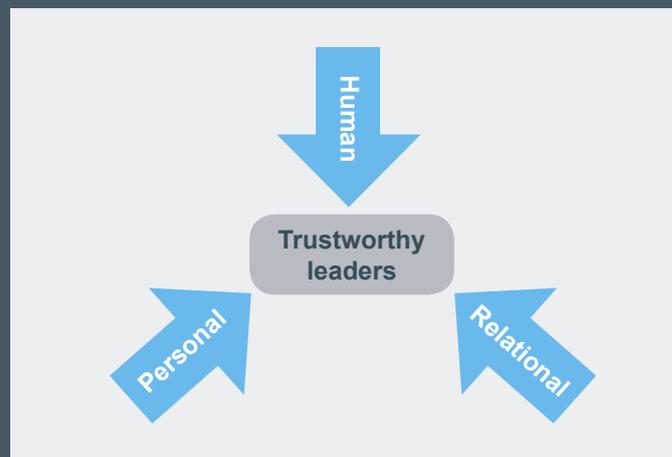
- exert discretionary effort on behalf of the organisation
- perform and achieve their work goals
- endorse the organisation
- remain with the organisation
- be a good organisational citizen and protect its assets.

The study concluded that ‘when individuals have trust in their leaders, they also have higher intentions to remain with their organisation, put forth discretionary effort on behalf of their organisations, endorse the organisation as a good place to work and behave in ways that benefit the organisation’ (The Ken Blanchard Companies, 2017).

The link between high trust in our leaders and positive intentions towards the workplace could be said to be intuitive, but the question remains: what makes us trust a leader in the first place?

70% of respondents to an ILM survey (2014) ranked 'openness' as one of their top 3 drivers of trust.

As part of their series of reports into trust in organisations, the CIPD explored what it means to experience trustworthy leadership from the perspective of their followers. They found three characteristics that contributed to a positive experience of leadership – human, personal and relational.



**Human** – ...followers do not trust their leaders because they always know the answers or have everything under control. Quite the opposite - followers want to be led by people who are as human as they are.

**Personal** – Trustworthy leadership is experienced by followers who feel that their leaders are 'real people', who do not hide behind a veil but share their personal background, values and what is important to them as well as their vulnerabilities with their followers.

**Relational** – ...when leaders take on a relational mindset, they create a sense of inclusion and support for their employees.

Relational leaders see relationships as a central component of being human and also as being of primary importance in effective leadership. They take 'the time and courage to really engage with the people around them on a human level'.

In very large organisations, this can present a particular challenge for the most senior leaders as structural and geographical divides, large teams and remote leadership reduce the potential for strong visibility across the organisation, making it difficult to ensure these behaviours are demonstrated to everyone they lead.

However, if they wish to increase the level to which they are perceived as trustworthy by their employees, senior leaders must take steps to mitigate these barriers and find ways to visibly demonstrate their leadership qualities. They must show that they are 'capable, honest and principled' (Institute of Leadership and Management, 2011).



Photo provided by: Debbie Olivari (Whitchurch Camera Club)

## The space for trust: A note about followership

“... in highly trusting cultures followers feel that they too have responsibilities for trusting their leaders.. they must be willing to take a leap of faith...”

*Covey, 2008*

From an organisational perspective, in order to have high vulnerability-based trust, the following components must be present:

- 1. leaders who make themselves vulnerable to their followers**
- 2. followers who make themselves vulnerable to their leaders**
- 3. leaders who allow their followers to show vulnerability**
- 4. followers who allow their leaders to show vulnerability**

Therefore, creating a culture of trust also needs followers who are willing to make themselves vulnerable and offer trust to their leaders. It must be considered a two-way street.



Photo provided by: Debbie Olivari (Whitchurch Camera Club)

# Conclusion

With all the challenges currently facing public services, it is becoming ever more crucial to invest in building strong foundations of trust within our teams to support engagement and innovation as we strive to design sustainable models of service delivery, reduce costs and create services to meet the needs of our existing communities and future generations.

It is clear that trust plays a critical and fundamental role in how our society functions but as we have seen, we can no longer rely on traditional authority or institutional expertise to command trust. Instead, our focus must be on developing and demonstrating behaviours that inspire trust from others. Our aim therefore, as organisations, leaders and individuals, is to increase our trustworthiness and, ultimately, to be deserving of trust.

## Where can I start?

### For yourself:

- Practice Relational Leadership – find or create opportunities to connect with your team/s on a human level.
- Seek feedback from colleagues or team members: how well do you demonstrate your ability, benevolence, integrity and predictability?
- Increase your levels of oxytocin by offering positive encouragement and support to others – you will not only increase your trustworthiness but also your own propensity to trust.

### For your team:

- Consider how well your team compares to Patrick Lencioni's description of a cohesive team. Where could you be better? How can you overcome any barriers?
- Allow space for relationships to be built by facilitating connection between team members. For example, you may allow time at the start or end of a meeting for informal catch-ups to take place.
- Consider what behaviours you demonstrate to others. If you are reluctant to share any personal information or ask for help, your team might decide that these behaviours are not valued or acceptable to you.

### For your organisation:

- Over invest in your first-line managers. This influential group is critical to organisational performance and reputation
- Consider how processes or procedures could be adapted to increase individual responsibility or autonomy to promote engagement
- Continuously monitor and assess your organisational culture – what behaviours are 'rewarded'?

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Sowing Seeds: Trust

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.