

THE SECRET

INGREDIENT

OF SUCCESS?

TRUST

Without trust, many elements of our working lives would not function. It has huge potential to help us navigate the challenges of change and the accelerated pace of digitalisation. Trust is a positive expectation, encouraging a feeling of security while giving us greater autonomy in our work. With so many diverse priorities competing for attention, it is more important than ever that organisations are clear and reliable in their communications so that they can earn trust and retain it.

EXPERT ARTICLE

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The digital transformation is confronting businesses with a brave new world. Socio-economic circumstances are changing. There are ever-more ways of interacting; faster and more flexible working; and alliances that span the globe. If management does not take on these challenges, it will become stuck. Often mentioned as one of the keys to success here is trust. Trust enables managers and staff to handle the complexity of new ways of working by developing positive expectations. It makes people more willing to take risks and overcome uncertainties. Trust is also the very foundation of team performance. Its importance grows as geographical distance increases.

The pandemic rang in a new age of virtual productivity and remote working on a scale we could scarcely have imagined a short time ago. According to a survey by analysts Gartner, 88 per cent of companies required or encouraged their staff to work from home, compared with only around 10 per cent pre-COVID. The pandemic aside, in the future more than a third of us are likely to continue to work remotely. In many companies, it may even become the norm, as they downsize office space and have up to 65 per cent of staff working at external locations, according to Statista.

Trust, despite the distance

With more people working from home, some employers have tightened up the way they monitor their employees, digitally. If they do not have everyone physically present on site, they are less able to check up. Even where employees are producing the goods, and more, the trust is not always there. Companies want to be certain that their staff are genuinely productive. One way of doing this is to use software that tracks keystrokes, mouse movements and website visits. The data can then be compared with the individual's output, revealing how productive they really are.

Does this make sense, though? And does it build trust? Control leads to micromanagement, disaffection among staff and higher stress levels for all. More important than short-term productivity studies is mental health. It is a simple truth that if we feel good,

we are motivated to do more. Added to this, of course, is that employee surveillance is much more time-consuming and expensive than trust.

As they become accustomed to remote and hybrid working, organisations are increasingly seeing a range of side effects that have the potential to damage workplace relations. These include a growing silo mentality, only sporadic information-sharing, less communication, unresolved conflict and the cultural alienation of the workforce from the company. Stripped of non-verbal clues, an increasing reliance on email and other digital channels means that context is lost and tone can be misinterpreted, distorting the intended message. In addition, where teams are separated it is more difficult to maintain transparency surrounding decision-making. This eats away at morale, the work rate slows, team spirit wanes and the output of the entire organisation ultimately slackens.

Experience shows that efficient teams display a higher degree of trust than less successful ones. It will therefore become increasingly important to engender and encourage trust as the foundation of team success. That begs the question of what management can do to build trust in their organisation.



PASSION, PROFESSIONALISM AND AUTHENTICITY

Many companies owe their origins to the passionate drive of their founders simply to do things better than anyone else - whatever those "things" are. Their vision is to make a real difference by offering customers a better product, better service or better experience than others before them. In many cases, they also set out to be the manager they never had themselves but always wanted. These forward thinkers surround themselves with like-minded people who believe in the same vision and identify themselves with their mission.

Like trust, passion is hard to quantify. In most cases, however, you will recognise it in the energy that sparks from someone when they are sharing their message.

The passionate ones appear to have it all. They love what they do, have a fantastic track record and a gift for achieving the supposedly impossible. They are also infectiously enthusiastic. The task of management is therefore to inspire peak performance in those around them and, by extension, in the company as a whole. To do this they must lead by example.

Passion and connection that is shared between people, enterprises, products and services generates trust. Anyone who identifies with a company and what it offers, be they customer or employee, is willing to listen and is interested in interacting with that company. That interaction might take any form: making a purchase, doing a business deal or taking a job, for example.

FOCUS AND CLARITY

Short attention spans are a real challenge in today's age of digital overload. That makes it all the more vital to build up a lasting emotional connection with your employees and customers.

The pandemic has led to longer working hours and rising levels of job-related stress. According to new studies by FlexJobs and Mental Health America (MHA), more than half of workers are overloaded and almost 40 per cent feel close to burnout. Managers must therefore be clear about the responsibility they hold, what they stand for and what they expect. They can then communicate their intentions precisely and credibly. This strength of focus is also a useful opportunity to recognise the time and attention that employees devote to their work. Aims and expectations should be defined in a way that gives staff a sense of security, the confidence that their hard work is generating value and the knowledge that everyone is pulling together. They want to help shape the company's future, its products and its services. Especially in times of uncertainty, they want to feel secure and to know what they can expect from others. Clarity and focus together create the trust to take positive steps forward.

It is crucial to understand the measure of a company's calibre, in terms of what its workforce and customers expect. And it is essential that those expectations are met every time. You achieve that through constant dialogue, openness and regular feedback. Everyone should have the same opportunity to have their say; whether encouragement or constructive criticism. The company should also be easy to do business with and to recommend, if you like what it does.

RECOVERY AND GROWTH

Organisations must present themselves to their employees with a people-centric approach. They must recognise the challenges that have been overcome in the past year. At the same time, they must record the innovations, lessons and achievements that have come out of the pandemic and celebrate them together.

It is important to pay equal attention to growth and to resilience, without forgetting rehabilitation. There is still much talk about the enormous strain of lockdown and the restrictions on our lives. In fact, it can be turned into a source of strength. From the biological perspective, after all, we humans are designed to develop as a result of trauma: according to evolutionary science, it is the fittest and most flexible who prevail to grow and evolve.

As part of their trust strategies, organisations should also ask themselves how their hard-won insights can be applied to their own evolution. Those who are able to shine a light not only on their successes and advances but also on their failures will learn and flourish. Good leadership demands the strength of character and determination to do the right thing at the right time, for the right reason. Managers cannot build trust if they do not keep their promises and act on them.

DEMONSTRATE HONEST INTEREST AND GOODWILL

Various indicators point to a decline in employee trust as a result of the pandemic. It doesn't have to be that way. Authentic companies that really want the best for their staff maintain and expand that trust by demonstrating that they are interested and that they care.

The way to do that in practice is with a clear declaration of intent by which all subsequent action can be measured. It sets responsibility for trust in stone, communicates intentions transparently and leaves nobody in doubt as to your motives. With that in mind, it is worth giving some thought to the way you show that you really do put people first. You can then act to fulfil that promise.

Companies that do not care can hardly expect their staff to commit fully to their agenda in return for a salary alone. Intuition, empathy and understanding are valuable qualities that create connection. Employers need to show their employees that they are trusted outside of an office with a manager peering over their shoulder. The more trust we show, the more trust we are shown in return. />



“TRUST ENABLES MANAGERS AND STAFF TO HANDLE THE COMPLEXITY OF NEW WAYS OF WORKING BY DEVELOPING POSITIVE EXPECTATIONS.”

_GABRIELA KELLER, CEO, ERGON INFORMATIK AG



_GABRIELA KELLER IN ERGON'S THIRD LOCATION, WHICH OPENED IN 2020. IT IS LOCATED ON FALKENSTRASSE AND RIGHT NEXT TO STADELHOFEN STATION

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