

Trust is Simply More Efficient

I agree with one of Steven Covey's basic points that trust is now a critical element of all business relationships, and particularly important for leaders. Different cultures put different emphases on the various elements of trust (e.g. Integrity, Competence, Alignment, Benevolence etc.) and so global leaders need to learn the 'language of trust' in different countries. In Germany, proof of competence is typically important, whereas in Mediterranean cultures personal openness may be more important before people take the decision to trust.

My experience suggests that people and teams can compete and collaborate at the same time provided they are not involved in a 'zero sum game'. Sales teams may be a good example of this, when they compete to be the best sales team, but help each other out when necessary. Unfortunately, in business and in politics it is sometimes necessary to negotiate and do business with people we do not trust; most wars end this way. Such interactions require huge levels of effort and structure if they are to yield positive results, necessitating long and detailed discussions, legal agreements, and high levels of monitoring and control. Interactions based on trust, on the other hand, require much less of the legalistic approach and so are simply more efficient - and more rewarding! Many good things can flourish in an atmosphere of trust, including innovation, engagement and agility.

I think of trust as a resource that exists in the space between people, both one to one and in groups. Just like a financial resource it can be built up over time and squandered very quickly. As with a company's balance sheet, trust can be measured, managed and advanced by focusing on trust-building behaviours. In WorldWork we have produced an instrument for measuring trust within teams and work groups, and this is being used in a range of organisations to measure trust levels and identify the blockers that can be worked on in order to grow trust – details [here](#). We are also working on a similar instrument based on the concept of 'Trustworthy Leadership'.

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