

5 Easy Ways To Create Trust In The Workplace Culture

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Take the Next Step

Culture. This has become a near-mythical business concept, conferring benefits ranging from greater employee engagement to increased innovation. But, let's get serious. "Culture" is squishy, subjective, and probably impossible to measure. But if you put humans in a group, they will create norms of behavior—precisely the cornerstone of culture. Your business has a culture whether you like it or not.

What is a performance-seeking manager to do?

Neuroscience experiments—many from my lab—have proven that one aspect of culture profoundly improves business performance: interpersonal trust. And here's the good news: The science has identified the eight building blocks of trust and developed a way to measure them. This means that leaders can now actively manage organizational culture for high performance. (Two cheers for science!)

Throughout our evolutionary history, we cooperated to bring down large prey, to raise children, and to protect our clans from invaders. This has made humans neurologically predisposed to [form teams](#) to work to solve problems. People have the capacity to be good organizational men and women, but factors that inhibit trust dull these impulses. Managing culture for performance means removing barriers so that people will do what comes naturally to them: work together effectively.

Here's why the science matters: You might guess/think/hope that some policy will increase trust and thereby improve teamwork. You might be right or you might be wrong, but since changing policies is costly, you need assurance that changes will improve performance.

Testing, refining, and testing policies again until they work is just what my lab has done at for-profit, nonprofit, and government organizations. We have built a trust dashboard so leaders can see just how to change policies to improve teamwork. Managers who have access to culture data can manage it like any other business process, making continuous improvements so that employees more effectively work together.

Five easy-to-apply “trust builders”

My analysis shows that companies that sustain cultures of trust have improved business outcomes in as little as six months. Many of the interventions that build a culture of trust cost little or nothing, so now is the time to press on this performance lever.

My favorite trust builders are:

- Start meetings with “gratitudes” that recognize those who have helped others.
- Have leaders start a new project by discussing what they do not know.
- Ask people for help rather than demanding results by using the word “please.”
- Pay attention to the emotions you see in others by articulating the feelings you see in their faces.
- Create opportunities for personal growth through peer-led classes.

There are many more scientifically valid ways to build trust. You should start building your own culture of trust by measuring the eight trust-creating factors and intervening on the lowest one to get an immediate performance boost. But don't stop there: A culture of trust is most effective when it is lived every day. For maximum impact, “trust others” must become the default way that people engage with each other.

The science of creating trust shows that it is a process and is built step by step, day by day. Even former General Electric CEO Jack Welch, as much of a hard-nosed by-the-numbers business leader as ever existed, has come around to this view. As he said in a [2015 interview](#), “Leadership 2.0 is all about...truth and trust.”

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About The Author

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