1 Building bridges or building walls?

Albert Einstein once said that the most important question human beings can ask themselves is whether the world is a friendly place or an unfriendly place, for their answer to that question determines whether they live their life building bridges or building walls.

In this chapter, we ask why, when trust has never been more relevant to our lives, it remains such a neglected issue. We ask what trust is and examine its relevance today.

CHANGING THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Relationships and work would be so much more rewarding if we were better able to trust and be trusted. Not only that, but we could be more successful. Consider how it would be if we were able to change the rules of engagement so that our default position in relating to others was trust, instead of wariness, caution and circumspection.

In organisations, we may talk about the importance of trust but we rarely focus on what it really means to us, and why we might try to understand and to develop it. Yet it is one of the core elements of any relationship, whether with friends, colleagues, customers, suppliers, business partners or investors.

I once worked in an organisation where people trusted one another. Where people told the truth, shared information, did not feel afraid of getting it wrong or being a failure. When people made mistakes, they were able to admit to them openly and ask for help. Managers were more interested in what lessons had been learned from mistakes than apportioning blame. Gossip and nastiness were uncommon. People could disagree or challenge each other, knowing that it was done with positive intent. People

> Creating trust is an art. Sometimes we work at it, mostly we do not pay much attention to it – unless things go wrong, in which case problems and pain invariably result.

were open, the atmosphere was supportive, problems were solved easily, there was no need to read between the lines because you could rely on the fact that people communicated honestly and no one was 'punished' for speaking out. Because of this strong element of trust, people worked better and relationships – whether with customers, colleagues or suppliers – were stronger and more successful. It sounds like a great place to work doesn't it?

> It can take a great deal of time and effort to create trust, but only a short time and one action to lose it.

The truth is, I have not worked in a place quite like this (in common with over 90 per cent of people that we surveyed). The story is not true. The question is, could it be? It may seem unrealistic or naïve to expect or even imagine that an organisation like the one described above could exist, but isn't it about time we asked *why* this is the case, and whether it's a situation that we want to continue?

So important, so neglected

So, why, if trust is such an all-pervasive issue, do we rarely acknowledge it, especially in organisational life? Why is it something that we tend to have a *laissez-faire* attitude towards? There are several reasons:

- *It takes investment.* Trust goes to the heart of our relationships with others. We know whom we do and do not trust. If we became consciously aware of it, we would realise that when we first meet people this is one of the things we are checking out about them. We would realise how much we do to create and maintain trust with people we care about. It can take a great deal of time and many actions to create trust, but a short time and only one action to lose it. To achieve it, we have constantly to invest our time in doing those things that maintain and build trust. If we lose it, we invariably have to increase our investment massively to claw it back little by little.
- *It is fragile.* Trust is easier to destroy than to create. This could partly be explained by the fact that events and actions that destroy trust are more noticeable and obvious than those needed to establish trust. Also, people tend to put more emphasis on the trust-destroying events and to be more interested in them, so they become more powerful and influential than trust-*building* events. The media plays a large part in this. Negative, trust-destroying stories are much more widely reported than positive stories. How many stories do we read in the newspaper of people doing successful peace work, compared with the number about people committing acts of terrorism and destroying peace?

- *The slate is never wiped clean.* We tend to let our current experiences be tainted by what has happened in the past. If, over time, we have had a series of bosses who we trust, we are predisposed to assume that we can trust the next one. If the opposite is true, we are tempted to transfer our previous negative experience onto a new boss who might in fact be extremely trustworthy. The same goes for relationships of course.
- *It is not simple.* Advances in science and technology far outstrip the advances in the field of human relations. Left-brained logic dominates. Trust is a complex human issue that can be difficult to understand and develop. In the absence of simple, easy answers, we stick to issues that we can understand.

It is a difficult subject fraught with complexity and paradox. Once we mention trust, we raise questions in our own minds and others'. We start to wonder about who we can and cannot trust, and why. We feel that it is a difficult or impossible thing to change, so we do not try. When we think of people with whom we have personal relationships or those we work with, it is difficult to face the idea that we may not entirely trust them, or they us. Easier to ignore the issue altogether.

However, trusting relationships are valuable, satisfying and productive. Whether in our personal life or in business, trust is something most people value. It is at the core of all our important relationships. It creates meaning and connection. It gives relationships the potential to be satisfying, safe and creative. Investing in a relationship where trust does not exist is an empty and meaningless pursuit. Yet trust has a fragile quality that means we shy away from discussing or naming it. As if naming it could suddenly mean we lose it – especially if we talk about it to the person we trust. That person may not feel the same as we do.

In the middle of an intense and difficult project, I was once in a bar with a colleague after yet another long day. We were both tired but high from a sense of accomplishment and camaraderie. A few drinks helped us both to move our relationship along to talking about deeper and more meaningful things. We both opened up. We talked about how much we valued and trusted one another. It was a wonderful conversation. I felt much closer to my colleague having had it, and indeed started to think of her as a friend. This is some years ago and I have often pondered on that conversation. True, it raised the level of intimacy and closeness. It also raised the level of expectation on both sides. The weight of responsibility grew. I felt a bond, a sense of loyalty and responsibility that I could have inwardly denied had we not had that conversation. I am glad we did, for I value the quality of the relationship and feel privileged to be probably one of the few people she totally trusts.

Maybe this is one reason why we often shy away from such conversations. The responsibility of living up to someone's trust in us can be as daunting as it is special and valued. Whether it is someone we work with, a customer or

someone who we have a close relationship with, when they trust us they make us accountable. We have to commit to that relationship and make sure we live up to their belief in us. How much easier it is to be free of that responsibility. Of course, this is particularly true if we do not trust ourselves.

Trust starts within

We have to trust ourselves before we can trust anyone else. If we do not have faith in our own judgement about others, we could be misplacing our trust. If we cannot trust ourselves, we are not being totally responsible for our actions and ourselves – we cannot be held accountable. If we do not want to be held accountable then, others will not be able to trust us.

Trust also means feeling psychologically safe. If we do not trust ourselves and feel safe in our own hands, how can others feel safe with us? Others need to know we trust ourselves if they are to feel confident enough to put their faith in us. If we do not trust ourselves, we inhibit their readiness to trust us.

People's readiness to trust others grows with their ability to trust themselves. If you believe you are dependable and reliable and you see yourself as trustworthy, others will be more willing to put their trust in you. This sets up a positive feedback loop and creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. Of course, the opposite is also true. Those who do not trust themselves do not trust others either. Their relationships never deepen and their actions are cautious and guarded, and so their potential for taking risks and branching out beyond the 'tried and tested' is limited.

When we trust ourselves and trust other people we set up a pattern of 'giving' and 'getting-in-return' behaviour. We assume that we can trust others and we want to do so; they want to live up to our expectations, and we to theirs. This pattern is exponential. Think of a rally driver and navigator. When they first start driving together all they have to rely on is the knowledge that they can trust themselves and their desire to trust the other. As their relationship develops so does the trust. This notion of reciprocity is central to trusting relationships. We give something and we see what we get in return. If we do not get what we expect, then we usually doubt whether we can trust the other. People usually do to others what they perceive is being done to them. If they feel that the situation is one of mistrust, they eventually embark on a path of increasing destructive reciprocities that serves to make the creation of trust more and more difficult.

What we talk about when we talk about trust

When we speak of trust we tend to be imprecise in our language and what we mean. We mix trust up with predictability, dependability and reliability. This book is about the most sophisticated and 'thinking' level of trust. We are talking about an advanced form of trust that relies on commitment and

action. The table below shows the difference between what we have labelled 'faith', 'predictability', 'dependability', 'elementary trust' and 'advanced trust'. The examples in the table below illustrate the difference.

Faith	Predictability	Dependability	Elementary trust	Advanced trust
• A religious belief: trust in a deity.	• My dog will not bite me. • The volcano will not erupt. • The tree will not fall on my house.	• My car will start. • The shoes I have bought won't fall apart. • The train will show up on time.	• I am safe walking down my street. • My company will pay me every month. • The doctor is qualified.	• My partner will remain faithful to me. • My friends will support me when I need them. • My parents will be there for me no matter what happens.

What we call *advanced trust* is the type of trust that we are concerned with in this book. It is not blind trust; it requires commitment, action and boundary setting. In short, it does not just happen: we have to create it, pay attention to it and actively develop it.

WHY DOES TRUST MATTER?

One way to think about why trust is important is to think about what happens when it does not exist.

Imagine an intimate relationship where you do not trust the other person. You feel constantly on guard, wary that the person is going to let you down in some way. It is difficult to relax; you feel vulnerable, careful about what you do and don't do.

Consider the opposite. What about being in a personal relationship where you trust someone who does not trust you? It can be frustrating; you constantly feel you have to prove yourself to that person. You start to feel let down and disillusioned; no matter what you do you cannot create the trusting relationship you want. Eventually that turns to bitterness, anger, rejection and either withdrawal or the ending of the relationship.

Now consider those scenarios in the context of an organisation.

> People have an enormous need to trust and be trusted. Many leaders fail to understand that – their organisations will never reach their full potential.

What happens when we do not trust others in our place of work? The experience can be stressful because we have to watch what we say and do. We expend considerable energy managing how we are perceived, making sure we make alliances with the 'right' people and are seen to distance ourselves from the 'wrong' ones. This situation is not about captaincy and doing the right thing. At its extreme, it is about self-preservation and not doing the wrong thing. The effects for the organisation can range from missed opportunities and unfulfilled potential to complete dishonesty and, in the case of corporations, damaged customer relationships, lost business, failed partnerships, corporate scandals and collapse.

Trust: a human condition

Trust is an issue of which we are all aware. Knowing whether to trust a particular person or situation has always been important to human beings on a primitive level, as it underpins basic survival. At its extreme, misplaced trust can literally mean death.

Trust is something that we become aware of at a very early age. As children, we quickly realise which adults will keep their word, which ones we feel safe being around and which we should be wary of. We know who will make fun of us, who will put us down, who is not really interested in us and which people have our best interests at heart. We know who is genuine and who is fake. We have a raw and intuitive knowledge of this, which as adults we often lose or decide to ignore. Many other aspects of human relationships come into play. As children, we act on the basis of our cumulative experience of the people in our lives. We start to learn the value and importance of trust without consciously realising it is trust that we are dealing with.

Later, our judgement gets clouded by ambition, status, wanting to be accepted by others and to avoid any kind of pain, protecting our egos from rejection or failure. We therefore start to compromise, adapt and manoeuvre our way around people and situations.

We are all familiar with the kinds of situations described. It is something that many of us consciously or unconsciously struggle with in our social and work relationships.

Trust is important because in itself it is one of the ingredients of a meaningful relationship. It also matters because of what it can allow to be created, whether that is a psychologically healthy family life or a thriving business. Humans are fundamentally social creatures and trust is a prerequisite for social cohesion.

The paradox of trust

The paradox of trust is that if we consciously seek it, we may inhibit our ability to create it. Trust is a fragile and precious thing that is gained through

actions, not words. The person who talks about how important it is, how trustworthy they are and so on, is the one who is less likely to be trusted. Trust seems to be least in evidence when it is talked about the most.

In our survey of attitudes to trust, we found that those people who most frequently and explicitly talk about trust – chiefly politicians and, to a lesser extent, business executives – are the ones who have it the least. To trust someone we need to see actions to support the words. In developed economies we live in a world of sophisticated marketing messages and spin. In response to this, we have become more discerning in our judgements. We know a marketing message when we see it, and even if is genuine and truthful we are often doubtful and sceptical.

Trust in society and the growth of 'spin'

The role of trust as a foundation for a healthy civic society, as well as an economically prosperous one, has received much attention from academics and writers in recent years. Robert Putnam, an American sociologist, studied the effectiveness of Italian government institutions and the public's satisfaction with them.[1] He concluded that the level of social capital – the shared norms of trust, collaboration, mutual goals and expectations – was a crucial determinant both of the effectiveness of government institutions and of citizens' satisfaction with them. More recently, Francis Fukuyama has argued that levels of trust in different societies have a measurable effect on economic performance.[2]

Much anecdotal evidence suggests that we are becoming far more sceptical of governments, politicians, companies and institutions. According to a senior Downing Street adviser, the willingness of British people to trust each other has halved over the past 40 years. Other studies suggest that this is not a phenomenon unique to Britain but that America, Australia and Ireland have all seen a similar decline in trust. Among the reasons cited are the decline of the job-for-life, greater social mobility, the rising divorce rate, an increase in immigration and a more aggressive commercial ethic. The research does not mention the rise of spin as a possible cause of the decline in trust, probably because it was government funded and the sponsors would be unlikely to suggest that they themselves could be partially to blame for the decline in trust!

Spin is nothing new. People have always 'spun' the truth to make themselves or others appear to be right or doing the right thing. It is an extension of marketing: presenting products or services in the most favourable light and in a way that highlights benefits for the consumer. However, marketing does not have the negative connotations that spin does. When we talk about spin, we are not usually talking about something positive. It has a manipulative flavour. We try to figure out what the *real* situation is.

It is not surprising to us any more when governments and politicians are found to be covering up, economical with their information and spinning

the truth. Contemporary politics is full of it: remember the Chinese government's initial attitude to the SARS virus, Bill Clinton and the Lewinsky affair, food scares in Europe (the UK in particular), Tony Blair and Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. We have come to expect this as the way governments are run.

David Blunkett, UK Home Secretary, said in an article in *The Times* in July 2003: 'If there is one lasting challenge for politicians and journalists when the events of recent months have played out, it will be to persuade the public that either of us is worth trusting.' He was referring to the dispute between the BBC and the government about the events leading up to the death of UK scientist Dr David Kelly.

PR is big business now. Its role in government is increasing.

The marketers' response: authentic or spinning the spin?

Ironically, some marketers see dwindling trust as an opportunity to gain advantage over competitors and are engaging in what some have termed 'trust-based marketing'. They say this is more than just advertising campaigns with the message 'trust us', but includes creating positive relationships with customers by being more transparent, improving customer service, delivering on promises and honesty.

So how do we know who to trust, when we live in a world in which marketing, spin and PR are so pervasive? We have certainly had to become more discerning as the messages become more sophisticated, but are we more or less trusting and trustworthy than we used to be? Has our response to more sophisticated marketing, PR and spin been to become smarter, more wily and more susceptible to becoming spin doctors ourselves?

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a determinant of trust in companies. It is now a priority for companies whose reputations and brands could be damaged if they do not take it seriously. Companies like Nike and Nestlé have been criticised for their employment and marketing practices in the developing economies of the world, and are indeed taking action to show that they are socially responsible companies. Unilever now applies corporate branding on all its products as a way of making it clear who owns the brand, and so showing their accountability.

Many companies are jumping on the CSR bandwagon because they have to. There is no real commitment to it. The commitment comes when they do it because it is the right thing to do: when it fits with their values and is an authentic step. Otherwise, it is just another policy set in place to keep them out of trouble and to maintain a good image.

Real wisdom comes in the realisation that we need to go back to core values. We need to take another look at what is really important. Many books on leadership have talked about the importance of just being human. This is simple yet profound. Maintaining trust in our complex world is about staying

in touch with the simple truths about people. We want to find meaning in our relationships, we want understanding and empathy, and we want to feel psychologically secure. Organisations would do well to take note of this as this applies not only to the people that work in them but their customers and stakeholders.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF TRUST

We tend to trust people if they do what they say they are going to do, if they practise what they preach and if they tell the truth. These are the building blocks of trust, but they are not enough to create durable, positive, trust-based relationships, particularly in organisations. As well as having leaders with personal integrity there are other important elements.

The building blocks of trust

Authentic communication

People need to feel that they are being told the truth, even if they do not like what they hear; it is crucial to have transparency at all levels and up and down the organisation. Telling the truth, admitting mistakes and giving honest feedback are all also important.

Competence

The organisation needs people who are skilled and competent at what they do. This gives people faith in and respect for each other's abilities.

Supporting processes

If the processes in an organisation are based on the assumption that people cannot be trusted (for example, checking time-sheets and monitoring emails), trust will be undermined.

Boundaries

Controlling people destroys trust, but clearly within organisations there has to be agreement about what people will achieve and how they will do it. A framework of agreed goals allows people *freedom within that boundary.*

Contact

Personal contact is important because people need to get to know and understand each other to build and maintain trust.

Positive intent

Human beings intuitively sense the inauthentic. We know when someone's intention is questionable. For trust to exist it is important that we believe that the intent is positive, even if a person does something that undermines trust in some way. Paul Walsh, CEO of Diageo, quoted in *Harvard Management Update*, talks about the 'assumption of positive intent' or API.[3] He comments that: 'I try to show people that if anybody disagrees or has a violently opposed argument or fundamentally thinks another person is wrong, that the basis for their assumption is positive intent for the good of the organization.'

Forgiveness

If people are to trust each other then the organisation has to forgive genuine mistakes, otherwise over time the effect will be that people will not risk doing anything new or different – and the organisation will suffer as a result.

Trust is not something that just happens or doesn't. It requires a conscious commitment and ongoing attention. It is dynamic: it can be lost and it can be increased. Things regularly happen to compromise trust so it cannot be taken for granted.

It is not a mystical property that we have no control over. If we want it, we have to decide to give it and to commit to it.

The different contexts of trust

What is trust? How do we define it? It is something that we find hard to put into words, something we can more easily define by its absence than its presence. It is so obvious to us when we have it and yet so hard to define or describe.

Trust is not an absolute. It is contextual and dynamic. The constituents of trust are the person giving it, the recipient (this can be a person, a group of people or an institution) and the specific context in which trust is conferred.

The different types of trust at play in different situations are:

- *Self-trust.* This is the trust that people need to be confident of their capabilities and judgements in given situations. Self-trust is central to the ability to create trust because if people do not trust themselves it is unlikely that others will trust them. Mistrust is often a projection of missing self-trust.
- *Relational trust.* This is the trust a person puts in another person or group of people. This is a generalised type of trust and is usually established over time. It is not about trusting people to do something in

particular; it is believing that they have integrity and honesty. If someone you trusted sold you a car that broke down the following week, you would assume your friend did not know that there was anything wrong with it; your basis of trust has been established by evidence that you can rely on this person. Whereas if someone you had only met once sold you a car, if it then broke down you would probably assume that person was untrustworthy and had knowingly sold you a faulty car.

- *Structural trust.* This is the trust that we put in entire institutions, companies and brands. For example we may trust a country like Switzerland because of its history of being neutral, of creating one country from several different nationalities and doing it in a way that has created a safe place. You trust that *overall* the systems, policies, forms of governance and processes have integrity and can be trusted.
- *Transactional trust.* This is trust that is specific, often one-off and pertains to a particular context at a particular time. For example, you trust the travel agent's assurance that when you show up at the airport there will be a seat booked for you on the particular flight that you chose. This is a one-off situation where you only need to trust in the short-term to fulfil a particular need.

Is trust culture specific?

According to research by David Halpern of the Downing Street Strategy Unit, people of different nations vary significantly in the degree to which they trust others. In the research, they asked the question 'Generally speaking can others be trusted?' Scandinavians (Norway, Sweden and Denmark) were the most trusting, with nearly 70 per cent of people saying that they could trust others. Respondents in the USA, Britain and France were the least trusting, with less than 30 per cent saying that they trusted others. There could be a variety of reasons including:

- degree of ethnic diversity/homogeneity
- levels of crime
- levels of geographic and social mobility
- unemployment and job security rates
- poverty levels
- significant trust-destroying events such as health scares or political scandals
- influence of TV and media
- influence of popular culture.

The difference could also be explained by examining the varying values, norms and orientations of the cultures concerned.

   Fons Trompenaars' work on cultural diversity sheds light on this subject.[4] He explains such differences by examining how cultures relate to each other.

Universalism versus particularlism

For universalists, rules and procedures are applied consistently, whereas the relationship and flexibility are more important for particularists. In a particularist business environment such as Japan, there is more emphasis on the relationship than the contract. To stress the importance of the contract might seem to imply that the other party will cheat unless legally prevented from doing so. For the particularist culture the building the relationship and developing trust is more important than any codification of agreement.

Individualism versus communitarianism

In individualist cultures, people are more self-oriented than community-oriented. The individualistic culture emphasises individual freedom and responsibility. The communitarian culture puts more weight on working for the interests of the group.

Neutral versus emotional

The convention in neutral cultures is to see work relationships as detached. This is the case in North American and Western European cultures. In other cultures emotions are seen as having a place in business and are displayed all over the place.

Specific versus diffuse

This is about how much we get involved in the specific versus multiple areas of each other's lives. In specific cultures people segregate the task relationship. It is essentially about the extent to which we put barriers around the different areas of our lives.

In many cultures, a diffuse relationship is necessary before people can do business. When they get to the point of making deals, they trust their counterparts because they have allowed them into diffuse areas of their lives and developed relationships with them. This can become more important than the superiority of the product or service that they are trading.

Trust is a complex and multi-layered issue. What it means to you, and whether and whom you trust, depends on the context you are in, your previous experience and your interpretation of that experience as well as your values and beliefs. In the next chapter we explore the principles of trust in greater detail, highlighting what, when and how we need to act to actively develop trust.

A Fresh Perspective

Robin Hobbes, Psychotherapist

Trust is very important to psychotherapists. Psychotherapy does not really work unless the patient trusts the therapist, so we pay a lot of attention to establishing a relationship that encourages trust. Yet psychotherapy has at its heart a profound truth: what is at the core of trust is the ability to trust oneself. We have to move from perceiving trust as something outside us to realising it is something within us. At the outset, patients put their trust in therapists and may ascribe all sorts of capacities and qualities to them. They trust that the therapist will make them 'better'. In reality, it is the patients who do this.

I remember one young woman who was finding the normal stresses and strains of life extremely challenging and hesitantly approached me for therapy. She was both deeply suspicious and highly idealising of me. One minute she would say: 'You must have everything sorted. You know what to do – tell me.' A few minutes later she might attack me for not telling her 'the answers'. She would then see me as an exploitative person who was only interested in getting paid by her. She wondered whether she had chosen an inadequate therapist and considered finding someone who 'really knew how to help people'. Then something shifted in her, at her centre. She started to trust herself, to believe in herself. Maybe I helped by seeing her as being able to trust herself from the beginning, and held back from saying things that might imply that I thought she could not do so. Maybe it was because I was predictable, stable and not attacking her as she attacked me, demonstrating that I was trustworthy. An inner sense of security seemed to flower within her. She no longer saw her sense of trust as dependent on others. Her trusting of the world began primarily to rest in her trusting herself, her perceptions and her feelings. 'I know what's what,' she would say. This is what I mean by moving from seeing trust as something 'out there' to finding that it is within. When we realise this, there results a profound sense of inner security.

We will also explain why trust matters, what can be achieved when it genuinely takes hold and how it benefits individuals and organisations.