

# Trust is under ~~Overrated~~

*GMD helps you take the Cynicism out of Organizational Development initiatives by Linking Values to Real Business Issues. In this issue we cover "TRUST".*

Creating value is the name of the game in organizations across the world. In the last 75 years or so, business leaders have come to recognize that the people component of leadership is arguably the most important. As this realization has grown, we have developed ever more sophisticated models linking business strategy, cultural values, and people to drive value creation.

In this article, we would like to cover the subject of Trust as an organizational value. Let's be clear: a value is not a soft and fluffy thing that Human Resources "owns", but a description of what gets done on the work floor every day. So, what does Trust look like in an organization?

Professor David Amistead describes the value of Trust in

organizations this way: "Trust each other again and again. When the trust level gets high enough, people transcend apparent limits, discovering new and awesome abilities for which they were previously unaware."

This is true; the advantages of Trust are astounding and the value created by giving each other the benefit of the doubt, as well as the faith in each other to get things done, can have tangible business paybacks.

However, organizations often miss out on its benefits because they tend to disconnect hard business strategy issues from values and the effect on people is cynicism. It leads to perverse situations where "values" are handed off to Human Resources and, without a

fundamental link to business strategy, they become "soft", detached, and purely aspirational.

Typically, values that have not been grounded in the business strategy are served in one recognizable dish called TRIP: Trust, Reliability, Integrity, and 'People'. Before being served, this dish may get some spices (like: Profit or Customers) and sprinkles (like: Innovation or Sustainability), but it is a pretty recognizable serving in any business where the dominant view of values is "soft, nice, and optional".

## **Dissecting "Trust"**

The "T" in TRIP wouldn't be so unpalatable if we really understood what it could mean. Too often when we talk about Trust in business we focus on virtuous aspects like

Benevolence, Openness, and Honesty. Are these good things? You bet; and if you don't have them in your organization, you'd best find a way to do it – your competition will.

Like any value mentioned in this article, all have a helpful and serious role to play in business. The problem is that they are disconnected from business; once that happens, "Value Initiatives" are a by-word for Cynicism Creators. In other words, people read the poster hanging in the hallway about Trust as a fluffy aspiration, imagine themselves displaying this Trust in a meeting or project, and think, "Yeah, right."

Luckily, there are steps you can take to avoid the impression that 'living the values' is a Career Limiting Move (CLM).

So, Benevolence, Openness, and Honesty are good things, but they are only a part of Trust. What is missing is Consistency and Competence. This is the "hard side" of Trust and is usually what business leaders feel is omitted in value discussions.

The unbalanced presentation of Trust fosters cynicism, skepticism, and sometimes a feeling of entitlement in employees that, "managers now have to be nicer or they're violating the values." This corrupts the discussion and hinders implementation of values that could lead the business to a

high performing culture of value creation.

Approaching Trust in a balanced way brings value we can really use to enhance communication, cooperation, and openness for enhanced business performance.

### Full Implementation

In any culture initiative, it is imperative that you define what your values are. Equally, employees should understand what they are not with specific examples and business-relevant stories.

If you are considering the corporate value of Trust, start with these five components:

**Benevolence:** A general inclination toward helpfulness and goodwill.

**Openness:** Decisions are inclusive and characterized by transparency as well as shared & objective criteria.

**Honesty:** Interactions are characterized by straightforwardness and truth.

**Consistency:** Reliable and principled delivery of business obligations.

**Competence:** The motives, abilities, and skills to get your job done in line with business expectations.

Now that's the way to start the Trust dialogue in an organization that not only cares about healthy relationships, but also about ensuring healthy interactions between competent people who deliver on promises to increase business value! ❖

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