

Why should anyone trust you?

 By [Daniel Munslow](#)

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TORONTO, CANADA: Why does trust among leaders in an organisation matter? Who trusts who in the post-recession workplace? How can mistrust be repaired? What the communicator's role in building organisational trust? These were the tough questions tackled by Professor Veronica Hope Hailey of the Cass Business School, in City University London.

Hope Hailey says the recovery from tough economic times is not going to be the solution to trust problems. Trust problems started long before the recession and will continue long after, although the recession did bring about more challenges in the increased levels of distrust.

"The benefits of trust are myriad - increased information sharing, exchange and superior problem solving; better sales, better profits; organisation change and people's readiness for change", says Hope Hailey. She says trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions of behaviour of another.

Change is constant

Organisations are constantly undergoing change, which is a personal and risky period of transition. People predominantly feel vulnerable but also dependent on others to assist them in getting through tough times. "In the workplace, we need leaders we can trust in order to manage the transition process", says Hope Hailey.

The drivers of leadership in 2010 have been shown to be about integrity, benevolence, and ability. These are drivers that have been challenged lately, as a result of global mistakes in the highest echelons of business. Employees are more distrustful than ever of their leaders, especially in large multinational organisations where. The help leaders get back on track, they need to be shown how to display and regain the trust of their publics.

The Change Management Consortium is a piece of research conducted by Hope Hailey and associates since 2009. The research explored the changing levels of trust, and perceptions of organisational justice around the world. The ongoing impact of mergers and acquisitions and globalisation activity on these organisations has been seen to be impacting on leadership, who started to be seen as remote and therefore raised distrust. People felt that management was inaccessible and influenced by other global agendas, to the extent that they had no control over any developments. All of this is in addition to the underlying problems of the recession; hence, coming out of the recession will not, on its own, solve these problems.

Corporate changes need to be relevant and in language locals understand

In many instances, corporate change initiatives are not translated into local language or made locally relevant; and many campaigns that were launched were never completed. This usually happens when communicators do not customise messages to specific audience categories or simply rely on traditional, old-fashioned communication platforms. These contributed largely to a significant loss of trust in the organisations' leaderships. Training management to share the right messages, in the right way, with the right people, is a key to addressing this area of concern.

Progressive organisations are starting to realise that traditional communication tools, on their own, and without other strategic input tactics, are not able to deliver outcomes or impact.

There has been a disconnection of senior managers with lower levels of management and employees in general. They are perceived as being unaware of lower level employee issues, which in turn raises even more communication issues, and therefore trust is also questionable.

You need to have two heads

In Hope Hailey's research, a simple question was asked: are senior management well informed about what people at lower levels think? Over 80% of respondents in organisations said No! The majority of managers were under the delusion that they were effective communicators and said 80% of staff did know about organisational direction.

There was extensive criticality of local middle managers, as leaders in larger, complex and geographically dispersed organisation. This meant that the island community is breaking down and the workplace cannot sustain this degree of connectivity.

Middle managers need to act as a two headed Janus - looking up and down at the organisations. Trust in line managers is high - at around 80%; compared to much lower levels of trust in senior leadership - in a public sector organisation, less than 10% of staff trust senior managers. These managers need to think about who the real leaders are, where the trust lies, and who is really listening to whom.

Effective trust in organisations is almost wholly based on line management representation and the trust they engender as a result of connecting with all staff regularly. "In change, trust is significant. You can restructure and reduce head count without trust, but you cannot change perceptions and get buy-in without trust", concludes Hope Hailey.

ABOUT DANIEL MUNSLOW

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