

## 12.1.9: Trust Across Cultures

### Learning Objectives

1. Describe how leaders can build trust across cultures

### Why Does Trust Matter?

*Without trust we don't truly collaborate; we merely coordinate or, at best, cooperate. It is trust that transforms a group of people into a team.*

—Stephen R. Covey from his book, *The Speed of Trust*

Trust is an essential part of a successful team. Without trust, it is impossible for a company to reach its maximum potential. Building trust requires time and patience but is definitely worth the effort. Many teams that work together every day can build trust organically. However, when working with countries and cultures from around the world, building trust may require more effort. Since many international companies operate remotely, and meet with their teams through virtual communication platforms, leaders may not have daily interactions with their team. Therefore, building trust may take a long time. Trust must be earned over time through genuine and supportive words and actions. Most importantly, once trust has been established, it is essential for leaders to continue to nurture and develop trust in their relationships with their team.

### How to Build Trust Across Cultures

First and foremost, to successfully earn trust, managers must believe in the importance of building trust. If managers do not value trust, they will never put forth enough effort to establish it. There are multiple ways to establish and earn trust. It is important to understand that trust-building looks different from one relationship to the next and may require differing amounts of time and energy to establish it. Building trust requires patience and understanding and is not something that can be built overnight. Understanding your employees' and colleagues' cultures and backgrounds can help managers gain insight into how others build trust. A 2019 article from the Harvard Business Review suggests asking the following questions to gain insight into the trust cultures of other countries:

1. How trusting is it?
2. How performance-oriented is it?
3. How hierarchical and autocratic is it?
4. How do people in that culture build trust themselves?

Having an open dialogue around trust can help managers to better understand how to establish trust in their teams. However, it is important to know when and where to have these conversations. In some cultures, these types of conversations should be held in a private, one-on-one setting. In other cultures, employees are not comfortable discussing their supervisors, as they follow a hierarchical approach to business.

There are two key foundations to building trust across cultures: results and character. For example, when someone performs their job duties well and yields great results, people are more trusting of them. In other cultures, a person's character is valued above their performance. Understanding different cultures, and their definition and understanding of trust, is the first step in building it.

### PRACTICE QUESTION

Which of the following correctly identifies the two key foundations of building trust across cultures?

- Age and reputation.
- Results and character.
- Honesty and transparency.
- Personality and experiences.

### Answer

**Results and character.** Individuals who get results are considered more trustworthy than those who fall short. Some people value character above results and decide whether or not a person is trustworthy based primarily on their character.

## Additional Strategies

### Recognition

It is important to give people credit for their work. Managers who recognize their team for their efforts are able to build rapport and trust with their teams. However, it is important to understand how other cultures receive recognition. For example, some people may not be comfortable getting recognized in a group setting. To avoid making people feel uncomfortable in these cases, managers can praise groups for their efforts in a public setting but provide individual recognition in private.

### Respect

Respect is a key component to trust and should be highly valued. Managers can foster respect through transparency and strong expectations. To promote a respectful work environment, managers should prohibit disrespectful behavior and help to bridge the gap between cultural misunderstandings.

### Consistency

Trust takes a long time to establish and only a moment to break. Consistency is key to maintaining and nurturing trust. Managers should handle similar situations in similar ways. Consistency helps to build trust and respect because it allows employees to predict the actions of their managers.

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