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# Re-establish trust at work

## TRUST IN THE WORKPLACE CONTRIBUTES TO GOOD RESULTS.

PROF NICO MARTINS

**(r)** Research in the field of trust has indicated that trust is the main component of any

relationship. To define trust is not so easy, but it can be described as the belief that those on whom we depend will meet our expectations of them. In South Africa, with its sharp upsurge of change efforts including merging of companies, so-called outsourcing and downsizing, early retirement packages or retrenchment packages, trust in organisations is affected, which in turn might impact employee satisfaction negatively.

### IMPACT OF CHANGES

Thousands of employees on all levels have been offered early retirement or retrenchment packages, resulting in a loss of enthusiasm, commitment, loyalty and trust with stressful manifestations and even feelings of guilt among so-called "survivors". Under these conditions employers can hardly promise employees job security, advancement, recognition and a stable work environment.

Young employees of the new millennium tend to feel entitled to tangible and intangible rewards, such as fair remuneration, leisure time and family life, as important aspects of their careers.

The conflict of interests regarding the economic survival of companies and employee expectations, often leads to the devastation of trust relationships between employees and employers.

### VALUE OF TRUST

Trust is an essential ingredient in most business ventures and involves trust between companies as well as within a company. Trust is founded on:

- ❖ achieving results;
- ❖ acting with integrity; and
- ❖ demonstrating concern.

This scenario challenges human resource professionals to consider a shift from old paradigmatic views in which it is believed that job security results in loyalty, towards finding new ways of gaining loyalty and commitment among employees. There also appears to be a misconception among management that distrust only results from dissatisfaction with remuneration, conditions of service or working conditions. A better understanding of the building blocks of organisational trust should, in no small measure, help employers and employees to create avenues towards reconciliation and, therefore, trust among the most important stakeholders of any company. This should also help South African organisations to understand the nature of changing employee values and the customisation of managerial strategies according to these needs.

### INVESTIGATING TRUST

A number of studies in South African organisations have highlighted interesting results regarding trust, such as:

- ❖ an increase in personal trust leads to more job attachment and involvement;
- ❖ communicating openly and honestly is the number one trust builder;
- ❖ there is a strong relationship between aspects of transformational leadership and trust;
- ❖ trust influences employee support for change and the probability of successful change;

- ❖ mistrust between teams promote defensive behaviour;
- ❖ mistrust in management leads to destructive behaviours such as neglect and in extreme cases sabotage; and
- ❖ mistrust leads to a lack of co-operation between and within teams.

The results of these studies highlight the important role of trust during periods of change. The studies confirm that high levels of trust support change and also create positive expectations of the "new environment". Distrust on the other hand can lead to neglect and sabotage.

A study by Development Dimensions International in the USA ranked the five highest trust-building behaviours as:

- ❖ communicates with me openly and honestly, without distorting any information;
- ❖ shows confidence in my abilities by treating me as a skilled, competent associate;
- ❖ keeps promises and commitments;
- ❖ listens to and values what I say, even though he or she might not agree; and
- ❖ co-operates with me and looks for ways in which we can help each other.

### THE FUTURE

It seems as if organisational trust assessments can assist management to manage change more effectively and with less "damage" to employee relations and organisational commitment. It is also crucial to monitor trust relationships throughout the entire course of the employer-employee relationship. (HR)

### Reference

Special edition on: Organisational change and trust. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 28:4 (2002).

