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Trust: The Key to Project Team Collaboration

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Trust forms the bedrock of effective software teams. Trust allows teams to communicate quickly and to respond rapidly to changes in the project. Without sufficient trust, team members waste effort and energy hoarding information, forming cliques, dodging blame, and covering their tracks. A climate of trust provides a foundation for effective team processes, adaptability, and high performance. How can we shatter the deep-seated cycle of distrust in many organizations and help this essential trust emerge? Team leaders can stimulate and accelerate trustworthiness and trusting among team members, and between the team and its stakeholders by paying attention to membership, interactions, credibility, respect, and behaviors. In this session we'll investigate ways to accelerate trust-building within teams, including a definition of professional trust, a model for team interactions that leverages trust, ways to recognize when a team has "trust issues," and skills that help teams develop greater trust.

Diana Larsen is known in the software industry for conducting project retrospectives and transitioning groups to Agile processes. She currently chairs the board of the Agile Alliance. Her publications include Agile Retrospectives, Making Good Teams Great, coauthored with Esther Derby. She consults and speaks internationally.

Trust

The Key to Project Team Collaboration

We work as a Team when we have...

- Common purpose & performance goals
- Complementary skills for interdependent work
- Shared approach to work
- Joint accountability
- Small number of people
- Mutual History

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Characteristics of Highly Collaborative Teams

- Group of peers
- Ownership & control close to core of the work
- Whole team chooses and manages own work
- Responsible for problem-solving & continuous improvement
- Prepared to deal with complexity

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"...[R]eal teams do not emerge unless the individuals on them take risks involving conflict, **trust**, interdependence, and hard work. Of the risks required, the most formidable involve **building the trust and interdependence** necessary to move from individual accountability to mutual accountability."

"**Trust** must be earned and demonstrated repeatedly if it is to change behavior."

Katzenback and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*

The Five Persistent Feelings of Superior Work Teams: inclusion, commitment, loyalty, pride, **trust**.

Kinlaw, *Developing Superior Work Teams*

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Trust is a significant factor in project success. Trust in leaders and other team members relates to higher organizational performance. The level of trust positively correlates to:

- job performance
- organizational citizenship behavior
- turnover intentions
- job satisfaction
- organizational commitment
- commitment to decisions

summarized from
Dirks & Ferrin, 2002

“The key, we believe, is trust. When members of a group trust one another’s motives, their competence, and their concern for the task, the work of any becomes the work of all. Group dynamicists know that. It’s one reason they try to build interpersonal trust from the very start.”

Lipman-Blumen and Leavitt,
Hot Groups

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high performance



Collaborative Team Communication Model

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Three Aspects of Professional Trust

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Credibility

competence, believability, integrity

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Build credibility:

- Share information openly and broadly
- Stay accessible and visible to each other
- Engage hard questions and answer them where possible
- Offer objective, candid insights about the organization or team

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Support

respect, civility, interest, self-disclosure

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Show support:

- Recognize and appreciate each other
- Exhibit sincere personal concern for each other's well-being
- Maintain civil discourse and courteous interactions

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Consistency

reliability, dependability, accountability

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Demonstrate consistency:
Follow through on promises and commitments
Preserve working agreements
Seek and offer feedback

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Signs of Professional Trust

- 1) Team members report confident expectations about each other's behavior and intentions.
- 2) Team members extend trust when others offer basic support.
- 3) Team members value and show appreciation for everyone's contributions to team's effectiveness.
- 4) Team members talk as openly with one another about work-related failures, weaknesses and fears as about competencies, strengths, and achievements.

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The Enemies of Organizational Trust

Inconsistent messages
Inconsistent standards or policies/Inequitable treatment
Misplaced kindness
Elephants in the Room (a.k.a. Dead fish on the table)
Rumors in a vacuum

adapted from Galford and Drapeau,
The Enemies of Trust, HBR, 2003

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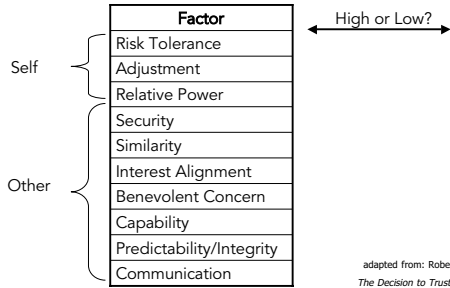
Suspect Distrust

When You See or Hear These Symptoms

Rule-bound and rigid	Payback or retaliation
Bullying	Venting frustration on people
Insensitivity to the impact of behavior on others	Misunderstandings construed as betrayals
Focus on self-interest	Over-personalized criticism
Apathy and low energy	Hiding mistakes or poor performance
Ignoring feelings	Wordy, defensive communication
Resentments	Insincerity

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Team Members Decide *When* to Trust:
The Ten Factors that Tip the Balance



adapted from: Robert F. Hurley,
The Decision to Trust, HBR, 2006

Trust is Growing

When You Notice
Two Kinds of Trust on Teams

Trusting – Team members assume each other's competence, commitment, and positive intentions. Perceptions of mutuality, dependency, and confidence.

Trustworthiness – Team members' actions are consistent, reliable, supportive, known, competent, and credible. Perceptions of respect, obligation, and responsibility.

Twenty-One Tips for Growing Trust within a Team

Team Leaders

1. Trust first—To get trust, give trust and act trustworthy
2. Set a tone for interaction and collaboration
3. Identify clear, consistent purpose and performance goals
4. Expect and allow emotional release, find (or provide) safe space to vent
5. Establish strong business ethics

As a Team

6. Communicate openly, freely, and honestly
7. Listen carefully and seek fairness
8. Develop comfort with discussing mistakes, concerns, and limitations
9. Respect each other's opinions
10. Learn about each other's perspectives
11. Decide how the team will decide
12. Create social time for the team
13. Empower team members to take risks and act

As an individual Team Member

14. Interact with the team consistently and predictably
15. Take responsibility for team action
16. Give credit to team members
17. Make yourself available, accessible, and responsive
18. Show awareness, sensitivity, and support for the needs of other team members
19. Maintain confidences
20. Watch your language
21. Visibly do what you say you'll do

adapted from K. and M. Fisher, *The Distance Manager*
and Robbins and Finley, *The New Why Teams Don't Work*

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Develop Team Interaction Skills

- Self-disclose
- Empathize
- Generously interpret puzzling behavior
- Share information
- Ask for help
- Admit mistakes
- Accept responsibility
- Give and seek feedback

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Seven team activities to cultivate trust

1. Sponsor a Project Jump Start
2. Make and Discuss Personal Shields/Posters
3. Develop **Working Agreements**
4. Hold Frequent Retrospectives
5. Plan Team Social Events
6. Explore Cultures and/or Individual Styles
7. Celebrate Small Successes

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Working Agreements for Trust

We agree to assume positive intent and give generous interpretations to actions or words we don't understand, then we seek clarity from one another.

We keep our agreements or, if we can't, we advise teammates of problems as soon as possible.

We cast no "silent vetos". We speak up if we disagree.

We seek and offer feedback on the impact of our actions, inactions, and interactions.

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Biography

Diana Larsen consults with leaders and teams to improve project performance, support innovation, and establish satisfying, results-oriented workplaces.

With more than fifteen years of experience working with technical professionals, Diana brings focus to the human side of software development. Her clients value her collaboration in building their capability to interact, self-organize, and shape an environment for productive teams.

Current chair of the Agile Alliance board, Diana co-authored *Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great*.

She writes an occasional blog post at "Partnerships & Possibilities" <http://www.futureworksconsulting.com/blog/>. Find more information about FutureWorks Consulting, Diana Larsen, and additional resources at the website, <http://www.futureworksconsulting.com>.

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