

Management of Cognitive and Affective Trust to Support Collaboration

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INTRODUCTION

Cognitive trust focuses on judgments of competence and reliability, and affective trust focuses on interpersonal bonds among individuals and institutions. Both cognitive and affective trusts play an integral role in organizations and institutions that rely on collaboration among individual members to achieve their goals and realize their vision.

Collaboration is increasingly important in the knowledge-based economy, as well as in scientific research and development where no one individual has all the prerequisite knowledge and resources to solve complex problems, develop sophisticated products and services, or complete multi-faceted work tasks. Collaboration is not possible without cognitive or affective trust. Yet cognitive and affective trust may be more difficult to manage in organizations and teams that are geographically distributed (i.e., not physically collocated), because mechanisms, such as informal face-to-face interactions and observations that typically are used in building and maintaining trust, are not universally present. Previous research has shown that when organizations are geographically distributed, trust among members is negatively impacted (Handy, 1995; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1995; Rocco et al., 2001).

BACKGROUND

Definitions of Trust and Distrust

There are many definitions of trust arising from different disciplinary perspectives. When synthesizing these definitions, Rosseau et al. (1998) found that scholars fundamentally agree that trust is a “psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (p. 395). Trust involves risk (the probability of loss) and interdependence (reliance on others).

Distrust can be defined in opposite terms (i.e., negative expectations of the intentions or behavior of another) (Lewicki et al., 1998; Sztompka, 1999). It involves a lack of

risk and no dependence on others. Trust and distrust can exist simultaneously in individuals (Lewicki et al., 1998). They can be conceptualized as a continuum with high trust to high distrust as endpoints; that is, a continuum from high trust to low trust to low distrust to high distrust.

Evolution of Trust and Distrust

Feelings of trust and distrust can change over time (Jones & George, 1998; McKnight et al., 1998). These changes occur as a result of observation of and reflection on behavior (Whitener et al., 1998). That is, trust and distrust are not behaviors, but psychological conditions that influence an individual’s behavior.

An individual’s behavior influences others’ behaviors, both of which may be assessed by the individual (Figure 1) (Sonnenwald, 2003). This assessment is often based on prior experiences, knowledge of the context in which the behaviors occurred, and beliefs. The results of the assessment influence perceptions of trust and distrust, and future assessments (through the modification or reinforcement of prior experiences, knowledge of the context, and beliefs). Thus, trust and distrust shape one’s own behavior and others’ behavior, whose assessment in turn shapes trust and distrust.

Two Types of Trust and Distrust: Cognitive and Affective

Two types of trust—cognitive and affective—have been identified as important in organizations (McAllister, 1995; Rocco et al., 2001). Cognitive trust focuses on judgments of competence and reliability. Can a co-worker complete a task? Will the results be of sufficient quality? Will the task be completed on time? These are issues that comprise cognitive trust and distrust. The more strongly one believes the answers to these types of questions are affirmative, the stronger is one’s cognitive trust. The more strongly one believes the answers to these types of questions are negative, the stronger is one’s cognitive distrust.

Affective trust focuses on interpersonal bonds among individuals and institutions, including perceptions of

colleagues' motivations, intentions, ethics, and citizenship. Affective trust typically emerges from repeated interactions among individuals, and experiences of reciprocated interpersonal care and concern (Rosseau et al., 1998). It is also referred to as emotional trust (Rocco et al., 2001) and relational trust (Rosseau et al., 1998). It can be "the grease that turns the wheel" (Sonnenwald, 1996).

Interaction among Cognitive and Affective Trust and Distrust

Cognitive trust and distrust may exist in conjunction with affective trust and distrust (Table 1). High cognitive and affective trust typically yields tightly coupled collaboration in which tasks and ideas are openly and frequently shared. Scientists talk of friendship and of liking each other when affective and cognitive trust is high. Risk and vulnerability caused by collaboration is perceived as low.

In comparison, high affective distrust and high cognitive distrust can be sufficient to dissuade individuals from collaborating at all. No friendship exists or develops, and individuals may proactively limit their interaction with others they cognitively and affectively distrust. Collaboration and interaction is perceived as high risk with a high degree of vulnerability.

EVERYDAY MANAGEMENT OF TRUST AND DISTRUST

A trust-distrust match between cognitive and affective trust can yield problematic situations that require explicit management. Feelings of high cognitive distrust and high affective trust will serve to limit collaboration. Primarily,

non-critical or unimportant tasks will be given to individuals that are cognitively distrusted. However, friendship as a result of affective trust may exist or emerge. Controls to monitor task completion and support task completion efforts may be used. For example, mentoring and training may be employed to help a friend who is not cognitively trusted.

Feelings of high cognitive trust and high affective distrust can result in competitive collaboration, which can be managed through discussions that identify issues and perceptions. Specific data should be presented and goodwill expressed to counter perceptions. Solutions include changes in work plans and information, and equipment sharing. Controls to monitor and constrain task or work activities can be employed to manage affective distrust. The saying, "Keep friends close and enemies closer" appears applicable in these types of situations. Professional relationships may exist or emerge, but friendship and the perception that the collaboration or interaction is fun may never emerge. Affective distrust can be reduced or accommodated, but may not disappear for some time.

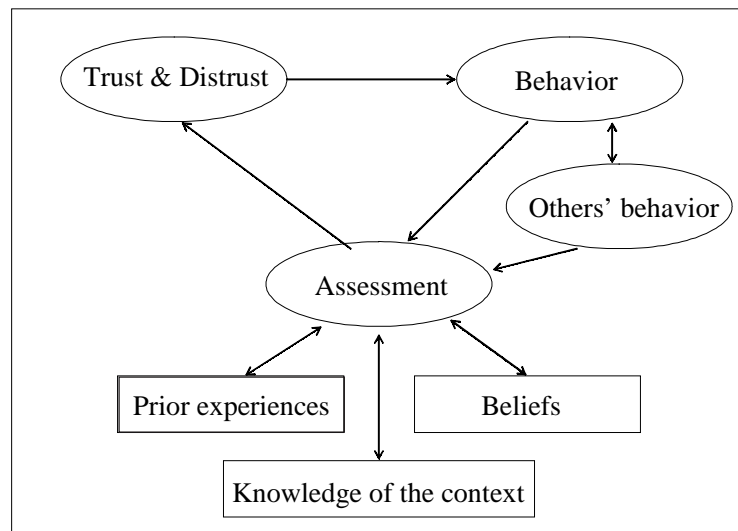
THE ROLE OF INFRASTRUCTURE IN MANAGING TRUST

Organizational Structure

Cognitive and affective trust throughout an organization or team are implicitly encouraged when management exhibits high levels of cognitive and affective trust towards each other and members of the organization. The example provided by leadership sets expectations for others.

To encourage trust and to help resolve issues regarding trust, a management team that includes a site coor-

Figure 1. The evolutionary nature of trust and distrust



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