

# trust in leadership

## Role-modeling, competence and communication skills of senior management

Trust in leadership, particularly trust in senior leadership, consistently proves to be one of the strongest predictors of employee engagement. Trust helps to create and facilitate cooperation and relationships, and provides a very strong foundation for influencing others. Trust in leadership also increases employees' willingness to go above and beyond what is needed to get the job done. However, trust can deteriorate more quickly than it can be built. Once trust has been abused, people are particularly slow to trust again and substantial effort is required to rebuild.

## suggested actions

- **trust in employees** Trust begets trust. Demonstrate trust in employees by consulting and involving them in decision-making, and allowing their views to impact decision outcomes. Share the organisation vision and strategy, and rationale for decisions. Express confidence in the capabilities of employees, recognise effort and achievements and invest in staff development.
- **common identity** Similar attitudes between leaders and employees about what is ethical, right, and important are related to trust in leadership. When leaders clearly communicate shared values and goals, and evaluate decisions using these organisational values and goals, employees feel more confident that they understand leaders and what they want.
- **visibility and accessibility** Help employees get to know leaders through communication and visible action. Develop leaders' verbal communication skills. Increase frequency, quality, depth and variety of communication and interaction. Suggestion schemes, attitude surveys, mentoring, town hall meetings, regular newsletters, and senior management visiting front-line staff will promote two-way open communication. As organisations grow, webcasts or videos can be a practical way of supplementing (but not replacing!) face-to-face contact. Role-modeling behaviour so that words and actions are consistent will demonstrate integrity.
- **supportive environment** Create and maintain a workplace where employees feel supported. This may entail making some short-term sacrifices in order to support others and build trust, such as leaders sacrificing some of their time to mentor staff. Listen, show empathy, and express understanding. Encourage staff to collaborate, rather than playing off competition between employees which can lead to questions about motives. Show sensitivity to differences between people, individual needs and desires. Consider the feelings of employees before acting.
- **fairness** The importance of integrity grows with leadership seniority. Leaders must keep their promises and treat employees with respect and dignity. Give adequate feedback on tasks and decision-making processes. Explain to employees the criteria for performance related benefits, such as rewards, raises and promotions. When procedures such as performance appraisals are consistent and transparent they are more likely to be perceived as fair.

## case study

Each year Roche Pharmaceuticals conducts Voice Engagement Surveys to determine the key drivers of high engagement for their employees. In recent years they have invested a lot of time into Leadership as it is one of the two top drivers of engagement at Roche. Despite significant organisational change, Roche continued to achieve high levels of trust in leaders, with 90% of staff rating Roche as a well managed company. These great leadership results are “due to four leadership practices”, says Director of Prescription Medicines, Kirsten O’Doherty.

Firstly, Roche leaders involved employees in organisational change decision-making. They ran focus groups and surveyed all employees asking them what changes they would make to the organisation. Employee recommendations were made available on their website, including the outcomes. O’Doherty says, at Roche the “transparency and involvement in decision making is not lip service, it’s real”. Secondly, clarity of direction is important. Regular town hall meetings enable the business plan to be understood by their employees. This allows employees to effectively be involved in the change process.

Thirdly, Roche recognise and reward high performance. Roche “value everybody that contributes but particularly value high performance”. Recently, they have created detailed descriptions of high performance to clarify Roche’s expectations and promote fairness when allocating rewards.

Lastly, Roche invest in their leaders by providing ongoing leadership skills training for managers in local and global programs. Organisational change and leading that change is important at Roche. Skills developed include, for example, how to be a leader in the change process, and the guidance of career development as a manager.

O’Doherty highlights the importance of leading by ‘doing’ rather than by ‘telling’: “People rate you on what they see, not what they hear!”

## useful resources

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