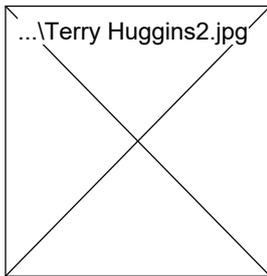


THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST IN PUBLIC SECTOR COLLABORATIONS



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When we have a choice, we collaborate with those we trust.

There are many well publicised local authority shared services which provide good examples of this. However, sometimes formal structures or circumstances require us to collaborate with those not of our choosing. In these cases, the success of the collaboration is determined by the trust between the parties.

A high level of trust within an organisation benefits its internal operation and influences the reputation it has with others. With trust being so important, it is of concern that the recent report of the Institute of Leadership and Management¹ puts trust in the public sector at such a low.

High performing local authorities tackle both the challenges of their localities and achieve financial sustainability and are those who operate collaboratively. The same is true for other public sector bodies. Collaboration might be with other authorities through sharing service delivery to make financial saving and improve standards.

Collaboration might be with other public sector organisations, tackling wicked issues over which none individually control all the levers of change, such as anti-social behaviour, obesity or joblessness. Through commissioning arrangements, collaboration might be with the private sector or voluntary sector.

Collaboration can be with communities on co-designing and co-delivering, leading to redesigned services.

Organisations which collaborate well in these ways externally, inevitably begin by collaborating well internally. Collaboration becomes part of their DNA. They have what has become widely recognised as “Collaborative Advantage²”.

¹ ILM (2014) The Truth About Trust: Honesty & Integrity At Work



Collaborative ventures comprise two elements; the deal and the relationship.

Too often, attention focuses on the terms and operation of the deal, with insufficient attention given to building and sustaining the relationship.

In examining emerging collaborations that fail to reach completion, the reason is most often a failure in the relationship.

The relationship is important and, just as in personal relationships, it needs to be worked on if it is to grow and sustain.

My experience is that once building the relationship is discussed, “TRUST” is quickly identified as the most important component. Collaboration is important to achieving public value and trust is a determinant of the effectiveness of collaboration.

Are we are a ‘sector in trouble’?

The Institute of Leadership and Management’s recent survey and research indicates a significant difference in trust levels between different sectors.

² Moss Kanter, R. (1994) Collaborative Advantage; The Art Of Alliances.

Trust is lower in the public sector than either the private sector or voluntary sector and the report describes it as a “sector in trouble”, suffering from a trust shortfall.

The survey reveals a massive difference in trust levels across sectors, with the public sector (29% net high trust) falling significantly behind the private sector (45%) and voluntary sector (46%).

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Compared with other sectors and industries, Local Government has the lowest trust from its own employees within the organisation and externally is only trusted less than the media and bankers.

The survey reveals a massive difference in trust levels across sectors, with the public sector (29% net high trust) falling significantly behind the private sector (45%) and voluntary sector (46%).

Further, 12% of public sector managers say they trust either ‘very few’ or ‘no one’ in their organisation.

When asked how much they trusted their own organisation’s managers, local and central government had the lowest level of trust at 10%, compared with the average of 40% across all industries and sectors.

The research also indicated a link between internal trust and external trust, suggesting that industries and sectors with low trust internally, also suffer from low trust from its customers and stakeholders.

Whilst this is of concern, it must be noted that the ILM survey bundles central and local government together and there is some data to suggest that the picture in local government may not be quite so bleak with regards to the trust of their local council by residents.

What then can local government do to address this deficit in trust and what skills and competencies does it need to cultivate?

Covey says that trust is based upon character and competence¹. Based upon the academic literature, the ILM identified six determinants of trust in their Index of Leadership Trust.

These are:

- **Ability** - the leader’s ability to do their job
- **Understanding** - displaying knowledge and understanding of their employee’s or reports’ roles and responsibilities
- **Fairness** - behaving fairly and showing concern for the welfare of their employees or reports
- **Openness** - being accessible and receptive to ideas and opinions
- **Integrity** - striving to be honest and fair in decision making
- **Consistency** - behaving in a reliable and predictable manner

The ILM 2014 survey didn’t use their index of leadership trust but instead sought to identify what managers considered to be the fundamental skills and qualities that leaders need in order to be trusted.

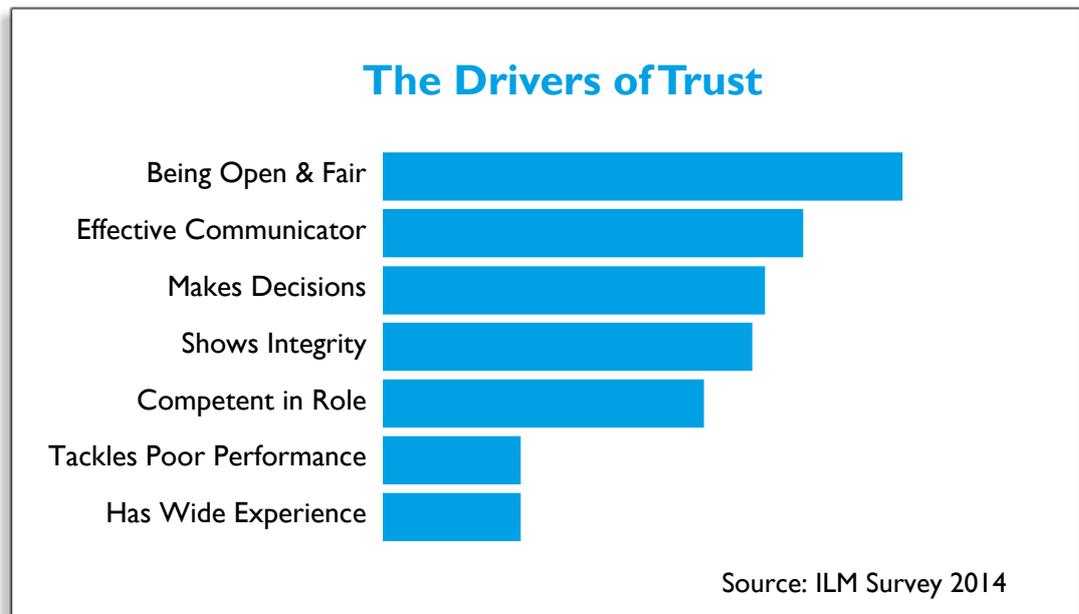
The five drivers of trust, shown above, were identified as the most important in determining whether or not a leader was trusted.

With less emphasis on individual behaviours, the LGA, SOLACE and LGComms published a report in 2013 entitled *Building Trust - An Action Plan*.

This report has a communications slant and builds upon earlier work to enhance the reputation of local government.

¹ Covey, SMR. (2006) *The Speed Of Trust: The one thing that changes everything*.

They concluded that structural reforms such as elected Mayors and more referendums will not restore trust in their own right.



It concludes that brand, leadership and strategy are the keys to building trust.

What I find most interesting is the list of benefits accruing from building trust:

1. Changes in the way services are delivered
2. Manage demand for services
3. Manage expectations of the people and organisations that you serve
4. Deliver behaviour change
5. Access capacity within the community to deliver services
6. Reduce unnecessary contact with the council
7. Increase engagement with the democratic process
8. Improve community cohesion and local places themselves
9. Improve access to and use of services

10. Boost the morale of staff and elected member

11. Improve the lives of residents

12. Better join up local public services

Will more mayors and referenda restore trust?

In 2010 the think tank DEMOS published the second of two pamphlets on trust in local government based upon their own research .

They concluded that structural reforms such as elected Mayors and more referendums will not restore trust in their own right.

Behavioural values and personal interactions are crucial to trust and local authorities need to put relationships at the centre of their activities.

Their research revealed three key drivers of trust:

- service quality,

In future, successful public sector organisations will be led by those who can effectively collaborate with others.

- the quality of personal interactions and
- the perception of fairness in the decision making procedure.

The recommendations were for local government to:

- move beyond satisfaction measures as a measure of effectiveness
- develop community capacity
- create space for individual staff to build trust
- prioritise community engagement in strategic decisions and understanding needs
- hold open days to meet middle management
- create citizen advocates
- promote the role of councillors

In future, successful public sector organisations will be led by those who can effectively collaborate with others.

Those seeking to build or rebuild their reputation for collaborative working should begin by improving their levels of trust.

The skills can be learnt and developed. Collaborative leadership by example, from the top, is key to encouraging the will to learn in others.

Rapid development that leads on to a qualification

Since organisations and partnerships need people to develop these skills rapidly, the SSA Collaborative Leadership programme (see page 15) consists of three, intensive one-day workshops.

And, if you would like to take things further and gain formal recognition of your learning, you can elect to take the Postgraduate Certificate in Collaborative Leadership at University of Derby.

Step on step off

You can handpick the workshops most relevant to you, or sign up for all three; it's entirely up to you.

If you are interested in gaining the postgraduate qualification, you can either enrol on this at the beginning, or decide to progress onto it later.

SSA and University of Derby have designed the programme to be as flexible and modular as possible.