

Developing Team Trust

Until the 1980's, most of the thinking in corporate America was competitive, and based on an underlying philosophy of individualism. Only in the sports arena were the concepts of team and teamwork accepted. For years, Edward Deming tried to introduce his 'team theory' as a new way of doing business, but his concepts fell on deaf ears in the United States. So in the 1960's he took his 'team theory' to Japan where participatory decision-making, teamwork and continuous improvement became the bywords. This completely changed the paradigm of products marked "Made In Japan" and Japan discarded its 'cheap-junk' reputation for one of high-tech, high-quality expensive products.

Japanese manufacturing dominance sent a wake-up call to corporate America and by the 1980's, teamwork was being rewarded. Collaboration and teamwork dominate today's work environment. Michigan State University Extension's (MSUE's) Area of Expertise Teams is an example of how self directed work teams have reached into higher education as well as business.

Deming's theory emphasized that the skills, gifts and assets of each individual are valuable contributions to the team's work. The guiding principle is that together, everyone achieves more; no one of us is as wise as all of us. This principle has been developed and applied to community-

based work [\(1\)](#) and provides the foundation for the process and content of much of our work.

Developing Team Trust is the first in a series of modules being developed by MSUE'S community leadership development team, called *LeadNet*. *LeadNet* is a professional network of Extension Educators sharing an interest in learning about, practicing, and helping others practice community-centered, issue-focused, shared leadership for collective action. One of the ways *LeadNet* encourages the development of this type of leadership is through 'learning labs'--informal sessions focused on various topics of interest. This module was created for and tested in such a session.



The series of modules will focus on various dimensions of team building, community leadership, and facilitation. The purpose of the modules is to provide MSUE educators with tools to help their teams, groups, committees, boards, organizations, and communities function more effectively. Each module will be presented in a train-the-trainer workshop format. The following is a tentative list of possible future modules; we are open to exploring these and other ideas for modules.

The development, nurturing and maintenance of effective teams. This is often referred to as the team orientation: Why am I here? Do I want to be here? What do I have to contribute? What is our purpose or meaning? Can we make a difference? This is the dimension that creates the sense of belonging, ownership, and acceptance. It is the 'table setting'.

Defining team goals and making effective decisions. Sometimes the team has a specified charge, but often the team has freedom to choose what it will do. There has to be a way to generate those ideas, prioritize, clarify, and make decisions. The central task here is to decide what the team will do. Getting consensus assures that everyone feels ownership of the work of the group.

Developing effective action plans. How will we get things done? How can we plan, track, and evaluate what we do? Who does what by when? Answering these questions avoids confusion and

misunderstanding, and frees us up to do the work rather than wonder.

Managing differences and conflict in teams. Not everyone is going to be happy with every decision and even the best functioning teams need to learn strategies to deal with conflict. Facing conflict and working through differences takes honesty, openness, and courage, but it will ultimately bring the team closer together.

Facilitative leadership. How can we share leadership? How can we work together most effectively? What works for a newly formed team may be totally different for a high functioning team. Many LeadNet members and others have immersed themselves in the area of facilitation and facilitative leadership techniques. Using them within the team and community context will be explored.

The Importance of Trust in Teams

Teamwork is a challenging venture in which members with diverse knowledge, experience, opinions, and values face complex, often ambiguous tasks requiring a high degree of interdependence and cooperation. To be successful, teams must learn to develop a vision and goals, work through conflict to overcome differences, share leadership, make decisions, carry out coordinated action, and assess their performance. The foundation of all of this difficult work is **trust**. Trust is an interwoven thread throughout the stages and cycles of a team's life, and must be continuously monitored and nurtured.

In "The Team Performance Model" Drexler, Sibbet, and Forrester⁽²⁾ describe a seven stage model based on the four basic concerns people bring to all social interaction: acceptance, communication, goal formation, and procedures for accomplishing goals. The model clearly shows that teams do not progress through the stages in linear fashion, but rather cycle back to earlier stages as unresolved issues block effective performance. Trust building, the second stage, can be interpreted as the key to moving through the first stage and essential to all other stages.

Trust can be defined as: "a state involving confident positive expectations about another's motives with respect to oneself in situations entailing risk"⁽³⁾ In other words, trust is expecting good from another (or others) who could potentially cause harm. Trust exists between people, in *relationships*, and is a reflection of their quality, strength, and effectiveness.⁽⁴⁾

Among team members that trust each other, communication, consistency, and action are indicators as well as builders of trust. *Communication* is open and honest, information flows freely, and power is shared. Members are committed to facing and working through conflict while respecting their differences. *Consistency* is an indicator of individual trustworthiness and integrity. It is evidenced in follow-through: members share responsibility and keep their commitments. Coordinated, competent *action* is both the outcome of clear communication and consistent follow-through, as well as an important reinforcer of trust. A team that accomplishes something worthwhile can enter a powerful synergistic 'zone' which leads to an upward spiral of motivation and trust.

On the other hand, trust is not always possible and may even be dangerous. Sometimes conflicting interests, motives, and agendas cannot be aligned. We learn from experience when to distrust, and to guard against the potentially destructive and harmful actions of others.⁽⁵⁾ In the community groups

Extension Educators work with, members need to think strategically and work collectively to develop common ground with opposing groups and power structures.

Developing Team Trust Module

Trust is slow to develop and quick to lose. Trust is built in a team over *time*, through shared experiences in which members show themselves trustworthy by communicating openly, following through with commitments, and acting effectively with and for the team. This process can be supported by engaging a team in activities and processes specifically designed to enhance trust. This module consists of five types of trust-building activities: exploring the concept of trust, physical activities, building relationships, creative problem solving, and team self-assessment.

1. ***Exploring Trust.*** Having team members consciously think about their experience with trust in groups they have been a part of can be a very powerful learning experience. Each person has a wealth of knowledge about trust, and examining and sharing this knowledge can lead one to more deliberate application to current situations. The activities included in this section all explore various ways of looking at trust in teams, and involve participants in thinking, brainstorming, and sharing.

2. ***Physical Activities.*** When team members find they can trust their peers for safety in a physically demanding challenge, it often becomes easier to have faith in them in many other settings. Then overtime, the evolution of trust, trustworthiness, and confidence in each other can fully develop. Providing for the development of these qualities can propel a team rapidly forward in their ability to efficiently interact on a daily basis. The activities included here require no special physical ability and are suitable for adults.

3. ***Building Relationships.*** Team work approached from a 'business only' perspective often leaves members feeling unconnected and depersonalized. As team members come to know each other on a more personal level, their respect for each other grows, and therefore so does their trust. Relationship building activities allow members to share things about themselves, and often get them laughing together, an important element in creating a sense of community. The activities included here range from more superficial (sharing hobbies, likes dislikes) to deeper (sharing passions and values).

4. ***Creative Problem Solving.*** Creativity involves sharing ideas and passions, which requires a fairly high level of trust. Knowing that their ideas are not going to be shot down frees people to be spontaneous and intuitive. Problem solving also requires team members to rely on each other and value the contributions of everyone. Creative problem solving requires members to overcome limiting expectations and competitiveness, and to develop accepting and encouraging attitudes. The activities included in this section are either fairly quick discussion simulators, or longer, more elaborate challenges leading to rich debriefing discussion.

5. ***Team Self-Assessment.*** A team's openness in its assessment of its own functioning can lead to a very high level of trust. The exercises included in this section help a group clarify expectations, diagnose weaknesses, bring concerns into the open, and rate their effectiveness on any number of variables. All of these activities are critical factors in the development and maturation of an effective, empowered team.

Included in this module are complete instructions for trust building activities of varying complexity and time needs. All are appropriate for use with adults, and most could be successfully used with youth. Some of these activities are original or of unknown origin, but many are adaptations, variations, or reformatted copies of published materials. Reference information is given for any taken from published sources.

1. Kretzmann, J., and J. McKnight. 1993. *Building Communities from the Inside Out*. Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University.

2.

Drexler, A. et al. "The Team Performance Model" in W. B. Reddy, ed., **Team Building: Blueprints for Productivity and Satisfaction**. 1988. San Diego: NTL Institute for Applied Science and University Associates.

3.

Boon and Holmes, quoted in Lewicki, R. and B. Bunker. 1996. "Developing and Maintaining Trust in Work Relationships." In R. Kramer and T. Tyler, eds., *Trust in Organizations: Frontiers of Theory and Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

4. Reynolds, L. *The Trust Effect: Creating the High Trust High Performance Organization*. 1997. London: Nicholas Brealey.

5. Shaw, R., *Trust in the Balance: Building Successful Organizations on Results, Integrity, and Concern*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.