



TRUST IN THE WORKPLACE

ZOOM INTERACTIVE EVENT

On 29th July 2020, CRF members gathered for **Trust in the Workplace**, a Zoom Interactive Event. **Professor Veronica Hope-Hailey**, President of Strategic External Engagement at the University of Bath, discussed how organisations maintain or repair trust in the face of a crisis. What challenges do organisations face

as they implement redundancy programmes, restructure, nationalise, or retrench after a crisis, and how do they rebuild and recover? One part of the answer is ensuring a sustainable economic recovery, with a renewed focus on justice and fairness for employees and contributing to the common good of society.



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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Trust has been defined as an individual's expectation that some organised system will act with predictability and goodwill. It is slow to be built, but quickly lost.



Ability is about having the competence to manage the organisation, through good times and bad. Benevolence asks whether organisational leaders are self-serving or concerned about others, such as society, communities, and their workforce.

To repair trust after a major breach, several immediate actions are needed. These include: apologising and taking responsibility, expressing regret for others, ordering an immediate and independent investigation, exiting all those involved or tainted at senior levels by the scandal, and working, visibly and tirelessly, to demonstrate trustworthiness.

There are three key practices to maintain employee trust during a crisis.

1. build bridges to the future based on continuing core values and purpose,
2. care for and support employees emotionally and practically, and
3. empower employees and treat them fairly.



SOME TRIUMPHS OF THE CRISIS THUS FAR INCLUDE THAT SOCIETAL ISSUES HAVE BEEN PUSHED FRONT AND CENTRE FOR SENIOR LEADERS, DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN ENABLED BY NECESSITY, HR HAS BEEN ELEVATED, AND LEADERS AND HR HAVE HAD A CHANCE TO SHOW THEIR HUMANITY.

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There are four key drivers that enable us to build trust:

1. ability,
2. benevolence,
3. integrity, and
4. predictability.



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INTEGRITY IS THE SET OF VALUES OR MORAL CODE THAT GUIDES LEADERS' DECISIONS. PREDICTABILITY ASKS WHETHER THE ORGANISATION OR PERSON CAN BE TRUSTED TO DISPLAY ABILITY, BENEVOLENCE, AND INTEGRITY ON A RELIABLE BASIS.



To repair trust over the medium term, it is necessary to publish results of the investigation into the failure, face questioning about it, determine whether the failure was a 'blip' or a system failure, and, if a system failure, transform the culture, including selection, promotion, reward, and career development systems for leaders.

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The COVID-19 crisis has sparked many challenges of trust: swift decisions have to be made in complex and uncertain environments, social inequality means that not all employees are experiencing the crisis in the same way, there are trade-offs to be made between multiple stakeholders, and mental health and wellbeing are under strain for many.

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Organisations, and the HR function, have done a good job of showing benevolence through this crisis. But we will need to be mindful about how we show our ability and competence going forward, in an uncertain world marked by new ways of working, restructuring, and economic hardship.

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AUDIENCE Q&A

Q What kind of behaviours would you encourage senior leaders to display, and which should they not, in their organisation? Involvement and visibility are important – but what else?

A We can take some lessons from looking at the ways CEOs have responded to the Black Lives Matter movement. It's not helpful for white, male leaders to say 'I understand your feelings and where you are coming from'; instead, it's more effective to acknowledge – 'I can't understand, but I am going to listen'. Leaders should not make assumptions about what's going on for other people. The idea that we are 'all in this together' is no longer going to wash. Don't assume you understand other people's experiences, and don't assume you know the answers. Listen, but still guide and lead – be able and competent. Listen to your people's experiences and needs.

Q People are reticent to come back to the workplace. Are we seeing a lack of trust from senior leaders?

A Senior leaders have had to learn to trust downwards. They couldn't micromanage through the crisis, and many have realised they can actually trust their people. Learning to trust downwards means you have to stop monitoring people. It can be useful to look at the data to bolster arguments – for example, contrary to expectations, productivity was not negatively affected by work from home for many organisations. In fact, in some cases it was boosted.

Q This is all fascinating but internally focused. How about building trust with customers?

A Building trust with customers during a crisis is essential. An example of good practice is how banks took the decision to open their branches during the crisis. This was done primarily for those who only deal with cash, which in many cases means the elderly. That action was a real trust builder with customers. Taking it another step, Santander did 10,000 customer calls, mainly targeting elderly customers - just to check in that they were ok and could get the services they needed. In general, we've seen lots of negotiation to enable us to all get through this together.

SPEAKER



✉ EMAIL

PROF. VERONICA HOPE-HAILEY

is a respected leader with senior management experience in higher education. She also has significant experience and knowledge of leading and implementing change across a range of organisations in the private, public and non-profit sector. In her different roles as manager, consultant, board member and trustee she has developed practical skills in governance, strategy development, and organisational design. She has worked internationally and has insight into the challenges faced by organisations working globally. As a mother of five daughters Veronica has particular interest in developing opportunities for girls and women around the world. She is acutely aware of the challenges they face and how organisations of all kinds need to develop cultures and policies that support women in work.

FURTHER READING

Professor Veronica Hope-Hailey's slides can be found [here](#).

Beaudin, Guy M. 2019. **The Importance of Leadership in Uncertain Times**. RHR International. <https://www.rhrinternationalconsultants.eu/thought-leadership/blog/importance-leadership-uncertain-times>

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