

## **Trust: the missing ingredient**

Think of most companies' current HR priorities recruitment, talent management, performance management, change management, employee engagement, employer brand. The success of all these activities is dependant upon trust. Yet trust is rarely discussed or tackled as an issue. Is it that this fact has not occurred to the HR community or that it is perceived as so difficult to achieve that they focus on the development of principles and processes instead?

It raises the question of the significance of companies' values statements. Do they remain just that – statements on a piece of paper? Most people would not argue that trust is important, fewer would be able to tell you what specifically they do to build it.

Until recently I worked as an in-house change agent. My job was to build a collaborative trust-based culture across separate business divisions. Trust was to be a corner stone but we did not write about it, bring it into conversations, raise it as a specific issue it or run workshops on it. These were perhaps obvious activities to engage in but we chose not to for a few reasons. First, who is going to argue that trust is a good thing? It is so obvious to most of us but a conversation is just a conversation. It is an intellectual pursuit. It does nothing to change what people actually do. Second: it's about actions not words. You can talk to staff until the cows come home about values but talk is meaningless. It is action that counts. Third, the strange thing about values is that they are so deeply ingrained that people are not usually consciously aware of the values that they hold.. Ask someone what their values are and most people won't be able to come right out and tell you, They only become aware of them when experiencing their presence or absence in a particular context.

Here's an example. A couple of years into my efforts to create a collaborative culture I talked to a couple of sales people from different business units who had recently worked together on a cross-sell. I asked them about their experience and what it was that worked and led to a successful outcome. They told me that the main reason for their success was that they had got to know and trust one another before they embarked on this project. They each knew that the other one would be honest about how well the parts that he was responsible for were going and would support the other in front of the client. Trust had meaning for them because it was a value that they had experience in a particular situation. They were able to pinpoint it as a determinant of success because they said it was absent in the majority of their other relationships.

All too often in companies trust stays as a statement of values. Those who want to develop productive relationships with colleagues and clients need to work out the extent to which trust exists and how is demonstrated every day, especially by the leaders who are always the role models. They need to figure out how to create a climate of trust *in actions not words*.

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