

LEADerShip at a Glance

CHLNet’s “Top Three” Suggested LEADS Readings for COVID-19

Introduction:

This month’s Top Three focuses on the issue of leadership and trust: personal, interpersonal, organizational, or societal trust. Partly because of COVID, but also due to multiple societal factors extant in modern society, trust dynamics have entered into what our first article (Dirks & Jong, 2022) call a third wave; and the challenges to leaders are profound. They reference the [Edelman Trust Barometer 2020](#) which shows evidence that trust is eroding in many societal institutions such as health care. Their findings (see p. 17 and 63 of the *2020 Barometer*) indicate that public enterprise CEOs have a significant challenge in creating trust within their own workplaces, as well as within society as a whole.

This only becomes exacerbated in the 2021 report [Pandemic Puts Trust to the Test](#) that focuses on the impact of COVID 19 on institutional trust. One highlight is that “Improving our healthcare system” has the highest change in importance from the past year—+62 points (p. 17)! This is compounded negatively by the drop in trust in the Canadian government: -11 from a year ago (p. 5).

These reports provide a wealth of information about the state of affairs as it relates to leadership and trust. In order to understand better the dynamics of trust in today’s society, I have reviewed three articles that help make sense of the above data, and that highlight how important a deliberate, focused effort on building it will become in the future.

The first article focuses on trust in the workplace; the second, on trust as related to societal ability to deal with the COVID 19 pandemic; and the third, from the Harvard Business Review, a treatise on the elements of trust: i.e., what leaders need to do to actively build trust in the arena in which they are working.

Article 1:

Dirks KT, de Jong B. Trust within the workplace: A review of two waves of research and a glimpse of the third. [Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior](#). 2022;9.

Summary:

Over the past quarter century, trust has emerged as a core concept in organizational psychology and organizational behavior. The authors review the body of research amassed over that period using a field evolutionary lens and identify two “waves” that have shaped and progressed the field in specific and important ways: Wave 1, establishing foundational building blocks; Wave 2, questioning assumptions and examining alternatives. For each wave, they identify what has been learned and identify key questions that still need to be addressed. They also suggest researchers will need to evolve the fundamental questions asked in order to maintain the momentum of the literature into the next quarter century, and they speculate about what these might look like. Finally, as a result of recent organizational developments and societal disruptions, they anticipate the emergence of a third wave, aimed at examining their implications for trust in the workplace.

Article 2:

Lenton TM, Boulton CA, Scheffer M. Resilience of countries to COVID-19 correlated with trust. [Scientific Reports](#). 2022 Jan 6;12(1):1-5.

Summary:

Trust within society is positively correlated with country-level resilience to COVID-19, as is the adaptive increase in stringency of government interventions when epidemic waves occur. All countries where > 40% agree “most people can be trusted” achieve a near complete reduction of new cases and deaths, but so do several less-trusting societies.

By contrast, countries where governments maintain greater background stringency tend to have lower trust within society and tend to be less resilient.

The authors characterized > 150 countries’ resilience to COVID-19 as the nationwide decay rate of daily cases or deaths from peak levels. Resilience to COVID-19 varies by a factor of ~ 40 between countries for cases/capita and ~ 25 for deaths/capita. As the pandemic progressed, resilience tended to decline, as adaptive increases in stringency also declined. These results add to evidence that trust can improve resilience to epidemics and other unexpected disruptions, of which COVID-19 is unlikely to be the last.

Article 3:

Zenger J, Folkman J. The 3 elements of trust. [Harvard Business Review](#). 2019 Feb 5;87(2):1-2.

Summary:

As a leader, you want the people in your organization to trust you. Zenger and Folkman looked at data from the 360 assessments of 87,000 leaders and were able to identify three key clusters of items that often predict the foundation for trust. They also looked for correlations between the trust rating and other items in the assessment and after selecting the 15 highest correlations, performed a factor analysis and identified three primary factors creating trust. Further analysis showed that the majority of the variability in trust ratings could be explained by three elements.

The three elemental clusters of trust were (1) positive relationships; good judgement/expertise; and consistency. The authors go on to explain each and the degree to which they individually and collectively contribute to the building of trust.

It should be noted that this study was completed in 2019 and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and during what our first authors would call the ‘second wave’ of trust. Readers need to explore the current context (outlined by the first and second papers) to determine in what way these three factors need to be operationalized in order to build trust.

Link to LEADS:

Many of the domains of LEADS identify trust as building blocks of effective leadership: e.g., (drawn from the *Bringing Leadership to Life in Health: LEADS in a Caring Environment* by Dickson and Tholl, 2020).

Lead Self: “you can only **trust** others when you trust yourself in their presence” (p. 77).

Engage Others: “Micro-managers control every aspect and detail of another’s work. Micro-management is a pathology of poor leadership. It radiates **distrust**,” and “One study found that leaders who demonstrate high levels of authentic leadership create increased **trust**, greater congruence in the areas of work-life balance and fewer adverse patient outcomes” (p. 104).

Develop Coalitions: “Being purposeful about developing **trust** is also necessary when building a coalition” (p. 153).

Systems Transformation: “A scoping study dedicated to understanding complexity leadership suggests that leaders acknowledge change is not a linear process and requires risk taking, **trust** and permission to make mistakes” (p. 176).

These three articles identify the challenges facing leaders in acting in a trusted manner and the need for each of us, as leaders, to (1) explore the existing context in which we work to ensure the most appropriate and situational leadership actions are employed in order to maintain or build trust; and (2) deliberately exhibit the behaviours that will grow that trust.