

Building Trust – Stage Two, Responsibility with Authority

At Stage One we discussed the need to develop a common goal that all can subscribe to and which provides a focus for activity and the start point to build trust – on the basis that you can involve and energise people in a common vision and they will work together to help you achieve it. This second stage explores the opportunity to strengthen the mutual bond by encouraging people to work together to that common goal by providing responsibility with authority.

How many times do we see the marketing department, for example, given a particular customer focused responsibility but little authority, only to be stymied by the finance department that has a lot of authority but little responsibility for actually delivering the goods? This is reflected on a larger scale today by the relationship between the MOD and the Treasury.

So why don't we get responsibility with authority?

It would seem that there are a number of reasons why responsibility and authority are managed separately: A belief that people are intrinsically ill-intentioned, poor communication or no buy-in to the common goal, an apparent loss of power, status or control, or a mix of these.

Yet on closer examination, it is the senior person who has failed to deliver: whether clear thought, clear communication or a failure to get buy-in. In each case people, unaware of the common goal, will act according to their own instincts as to what they imagine is right for the organisation, possibly making mistakes – but not because they are ill-intentioned.

How might trust be further developed?

Trust may be further developed by the senior management of the organisation leading according to the explorer principles: a clear goal, clear benefits for those involved, clear communication and the courage to let others make decisions. It is this courage that opens the mechanism for trust.

A normal position for dialogue is that people tend to treat you as you treat them; if you trust them to do the right thing (responsibility and the authority to do it), they will start to trust you.

The second step is to trust people enough, as adults, to give them both the responsibility and the authority to autonomously manage the tasks appropriate to the goal of the organisation.

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