



TRUST AMONG HUNDREDS?

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Can hundreds of people trust each other? Do you believe trust is limited by the number of people involved? Is it really more difficult to sustain high degrees of trust among many people? In our work in organizations over twenty years, we have found nothing that precludes trust among members of large groups. In fact, we have watched trust grow much like a virus in organizations, the more it exists, the more it generates.

We run an experiential activity, Maximize, during [The Collaboration Conference](#) that tests the degree of trust among large groups of employees. It's a fun, large group experience that we have run for 50- 1,500 people at time for hundreds of organizations across North and South America, Europe and Asia. The exercise reliably demonstrates the different levels of trust in the organization. Following the activity we structure conversations among the participants to consider how trust occurs or doesn't occur at work. As participants recognize trust levels and as they are reminded how trust accelerates or destroys productivity, they choose to expand their circles of trust within the organization. We have watch large groups of 50-1,500 people in a conference room shift in an instant to higher levels of trust.

Trust is a choice. Too often we make the idea of building trust too difficult. Common wisdom like, "Years to build, moments to destroy," does not serve us well. Trust can be created in a moment. It simply requires the will to both offer it and accept it.

Now, there are some very good reasons not to trust in some organizations. The good reasons always trace back to decisions of the executive team. If the executive team rewards poor behavior, trust is low. If the executive team

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demonstrates poor ethics, trust vanishes. We have found the best avenue for restoring trust within the executive team is to simply create more time for substantive conversations about how the organization is running, what's working, and what's getting in the way. As the executives identify strengths and problems, the question is always, "How do we, the executive team, contribute to this strength or this problem?" Sometimes lessons in conversational skills and emotional intelligence are required to help the executive manage these conversations, but more often than not, the trick is simply to commit the time.

We challenge you to reconsider your views about how to increase trust and improve performance in your organization.