STRATEGY: TRUST: STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

Practically, trust is one element that squarely affects organizational behavior, strategy, and professional relationships. Neglecting to acknowledge and develop a strategic plan to ensure trust methodologies are evident and adhered to may negatively impact every organization. Theoretically, trust is one element that is sometimes perceived as evident, a given, relationally. Conversely, human and organizational effects often point reference to one possible reason of failure is attributed to mistrust. The intent of this article is to discuss the element of trust and provide strategies for organizations/stakeholders to ensure strategic plans involve and measure trust, organizationally.

KEYWORDS: Strategic Management, Organizational Behavior, Organizational Psychology, Strategic Human Resource Management

INTRODUCTION

Defining Trust

Trust is known as an understanding that an event, human interaction, etc. is valid/reliable, stemming from honest intent. Specifically, trust is inevitably a result of human involvement. Given this, does organizational commitment to employees depend on the level of employee allegiance? This dyad can sometimes be viewed as a 'cat-and-mouse' relationship; however, depending on such factors as the structure of an organization (unionized), specialization of stakeholders, and leadership characteristics, among others, truly define successful/trustworthy organizations from others. What effects does a lack of trust have on stakeholders and organizational success? This article proposes to discuss outcomes and strategies squarely stemming from trust, representing an intangible strategic element, when existing may potentially yield tangible results.

Communication of Trust

There are many reasons traced to failure of relationships, which can range from personal to professionally. For example, a personal relationship between a husband and a wife may be compromised if one breaches the trust of the other. The same is true of professional relationships; often trust is known to be difficult to gain back once lost. When trust is lost, regardless of a professional or personal relationship, desired objectives are almost always negatively affected. According to Liu & Wang (2013), organizational commitment involves a psychological connection/bond between an employee and organization. There are many gestures of trust; for example, two relatives/friends may hug/exchange a kiss to represent trust, while others may conventionally shake hands. One such intent/purpose of a handshake is to show support/connection; while an opposing view may be a sign of being political and not necessarily agreeing, per se. The salient question remains to what degree is shaking of hands politically accomplished, with no emphasis of trust? A reflection of this question shall remain as one primal leadership objective. Stakeholders trusting leadership is a very important element (Lawal & Oguntuashe, 2012).

Select Organizational Strategies

Organizations often develop and communicate fiscal strategies, often represented in metrics fashion. Sample goals may be to increase profits; increase/decrease functions, etc. All such functions require the involvement and commitment of stakeholders, ranging from such levels as governing boards to line-level associates. In reviewing organizational trends of select organizations of varying sizes and locations/types, the strategies often are similar. The strategies may focus on increasing sales, expanding abroad, etc. A lack of strategies focusing on intangible elements, such as building of trust amongst stakeholders, which potentially may support achieving of desired objectives/goals, is not very evident. Additionally, a tracing of reasons why organizations fail to achieve desired metrics/results may not often focus discussions on organizational trust.

Effects of Trust

Basic levels of stakeholder needs vary, but to some degree may involve the need to have job security, promotional opportunities, valued, and engaged with a level of respect and trust. These examples further vary depending of factors, such as the organization being unionized or not and skilled-levels of associates. A unionized organization may encounter many challenges of the membership not trusting the organization; hence, affecting allegiance. There may be protective clauses, which would further challenge a unionized organization to impose any type of 'force' towards a movement/action due to the need to adhere to contractual language. Conversely, a skilled organization, comprising of specialty skilled/highly educated workforce may confront similar challenges without the involvement of trust in practice, organizationally. Either environment would find it difficult to 'force' function without trust/adherence of its stakeholders. It would not be as easy as perhaps an organization where less-skilled workers exist, often replaced if not complying with organizational strategies/objectives.

Sociological Culture of Trust

Regardless of sociological culture, all functions of trust revolve around people respecting one another…in theory. Acts and intends of sincerity of wanting to be trusted and trusting vary within society. Specifically, some stakeholders may simply 'trust' leadership/stakeholders much akin to one trusting his/her parents. This is often the case, until trust is breached; once this happens, trust is very difficult to gain back. According to Suh, Chang, & Lim (2012), trust levels amongst political institutions in United States and across Asia and Europe have declined since the 1960's. Such movements may impact organizations within the respective countries as well. The multinational organizational landscape crosses numerous cultures, whereby requiring an increased level of trust. Organizations are challenged to ensure effective organizational communication is in practice. This process is challenged when trust is compromised.

Trust Building Strategies: Once a commitment and intent of being sincere is evident, the following shall promote building and promoting trustful organizational and professional relationships. Often misinterpreted, psychologically, trust is innate and limited as a result of such psychological shortcomings, such as insecurity, jealously, etc. It is virtually impossible to be considered as trustworthy and contributing to building trust, organizationally, if such psychological limitations are evident in leadership.

Build Professional Relationships: First impressions make all the different, in many cases. Given this, regardless of a new employee, neighbor, etc., to begin the trust-building process, we shall look to building a professional relationship by being genuine. This shall not be a one-time, political stance, but continuous. Communication, both formal and informal,

depending on the relationship, shall be regular. For example, a leader at the office shall have responsibilities to learn of/understand each respective associate. Hold natural, regular conversations, and most importantly, demonstrate an exemplary level of support related to the position. Contrary to this is a leader or a neighbor, etc. functioning politically with communication/engagement. When this occurs, a superficial relation, if at all, develops. This can be the case many times, which is one reason organizations find it a tremendous challenge in times of change, extra duties, evaluation, etc. The relationship shall not be perceived any less than one of 'family or friends,' if one wants to build trust in a working relationship; this is no different than a relationship with a significant other at home.

Communicate Regularly Outside of Objectives During Non-Threatening Environments: Getting to know individuals, regardless of neighbors or employees, naturally informs us of their interests, goals (internal/external to work) and activities. While not everyone may be interested to communicate out of bounds of work, engaging periodically demonstrates a function of trust. One of the most challenging positions of a leader shall be serving as organizational ambassador.

Proactively Support Functions During Informal and Formal Observations: A lasting impression occurs during the most time of need between leaders and associates. An observational discussion of performance review shall not focus on limitations, but on commendations. Giving the person the 'benefit of the doubt' is one function of building trust. Building on trust may result better performance outcomes from the employees.

Regulate Positive, Supportive Behavior: Exemplification of positive behavior and support shall not be isolated, but regular with consistency. It's in time of 'need' a leader must be looked at as a first-person for advise/support. Conversely, leadership shall, via regulation of interactions with stakeholders, support and build trust. This is not without true intent or political agendas, superficial interactions. Nothing is often identified more easily than non-realistic interactions, often referenced as political, which do more harm than good, on building and maintaining trust.

Humble Yourself and Identify, Build Upon and Recognize Positive Attributes in People. What better to truly and sincerely do this than in-person, then building upon it, where naturally possible, in groups? Often, those 'listening' to effects of trust are ones losing trust. Specifically, a leader may praise an individual in public; however, the effects/sincerities are noticed by others within the participating group. Nothing is more evident than interactions being an extension of previous communications or isolated, politically. The effects may be to increase morale and such, but the counter may actually be resulting.

Organizational trust inquiry: A reflection on the inquiries, below, shall identify our own position with respect to organizational trust and providing a basis for discussing and devising/implementing a strategic plan to build and maintain trust, naturally, within the organization, which will have a positive effect on organizational objectives, benchmarks, attitudes, and the like.

- Do we have biases? If so, what are they? How can they affect human interactions and decision-making at work?

- Have I/we solicited for feedback and implemented and/or communicated the lack of to stakeholders?

- Have I/we demonstrated an occurrence/situation where improvement was needed, but also contained positives? Specifically, italicizing the positives with improvements needed? Have we solicited for input from individuals/organization as to improving or validating functions as opposed to our direct input?

- Have we measured reactions and compliancy based on value of our input from stakeholders? Or have we expected a top-down construct?

- How would the possible least trusting in me/us individual(s) provide feedback based on trust? Would they point reference to any reactions, communication, behavior, function we've demonstrated? If so, which and why? Validated? Was there a more effective method we could have handled the situation? How would we function should we have to do the same with someone else, if differently and why?

- How do we differentiate a political relationship (or requirement) as opposed to a natural interaction? How can we evaluate our professional relationships with everyone and determine which they classify under? How can we alter/change the political, non-natural relationships?

- Do we have less engaged stakeholders? If so, why? How has our interactions/relationship been with them? What would be their perception of us, if asked? Do they 'trust' us? If not, why? Why is my/our interaction limited with them? How can it approve without an expectation of a performance benchmark in return?

- What's my/our frequency of interactions, naturally, with stakeholders? How do we determine what to 'chat' about, briefly, without being 'intrusive? If we've not functioned like this before, how do we move forward with our change of behavior without them feeling a malicious intent, possibly?

- How can I/we direct and italicize formalized dialogue, such as performance evolutions to focus on positive outcomes, both with rankings and discussions? Can we expect different outcomes by not having a trustworthy professional relationship with stakeholders if functioning differently?

- Am I/we trusted by all? If not, why and how am I/we going to change this, positively and sincerely, not politically--with frequency?

CONCLUSIONS

Concluding Thoughts: Leadership shall priorities conducting a trust analysis and strategically planning to build and incorporate trust methodologies into practice. Avoid 'clicks' and make it know. Involve the least likely to participate stakeholders, supporting them to become the most involved. Conventionally, humans want to feel valued and their contributions are listened to, as a result of implementation. Specifically, implement knowledge contributions into practice.

Leadership must analyze their own intents and psychological state of mind limitations. It's extremely difficult to culminate politics, insecurity, jealously, with positively communicating and building/maintain trust. When we are able to identify our state of mind, it constitutes the first step in moving forward to alter our own behavior in order to positively communicating and presenting ourselves in a more trustworthy fashion to all. Tangible results can be expected when factors and methodologies are instituted and maintained, aimed at squarely building and maintaining organizational trust.

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