

Why Trust Is Critical to Team Success

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Trust is “hot.” Today, more than ever, it’s increasingly recognized as an essential asset to break down silos, foster collaboration, deepen teamwork, drive engagement, and manage the never-ending process of change.

When trust is present, people step forward and do their best work, together, efficiently. They align around a common purpose, take risks, think out of the box, have each other’s backs, and communicate openly and honestly. When trust is absent, people jockey for position, hoard information, play it safe, and talk about—rather than to—one another.

In all teams, trust will be built and trust will be broken. It comes with the territory of human relationships. Trust is especially vulnerable during periods of rapid growth or change, or when the team is virtual.

It’s no secret that trust is what people most want and need at work. But despite the importance, need, and demand for stronger trust, teams struggle to build and sustain it for the long term. *Why is that?*

The intent of this white paper is to provide answers and solutions to that very question by exploring:

- Why trust in teams is nonnegotiable—the business case for trust
- Why leaders turn to trust building
- The challenge of building trust
- The Reina Dimensions of Trust: The Three Cs®
- How to use our *Reina Team Trust Scale*® to strengthen trust
- What it takes to sustain trust



Why trust in teams is nonnegotiable—the business case for trust

When we published the first edition of our book *Trust and Betrayal in the Workplace*, in 1999, few leaders and teams in the workplace were talking about trust. It was perceived as a topic that was too much on the soft side, and leaders questioned its relevance.

Today, the relevance of trust is no longer questioned. It is commonly understood that trust is the foundation of effective relationships leading to business results.

The bottom line: teams do not perform well without trust.

Our research indicates that in high-trust environments, people show up and do their best work. They are proud to be a part of the team and are motivated to produce results. They feel confident in themselves and each other. They know what is expected of them and what they can expect in return. They don't hold back. They think out-of-the-box and are willing to take prudent risks. They know they don't need to look over their shoulders, so instead they look to each other, and together they look ahead. They create and innovate and know that, if they make a mistake, their team members will support them and that all can learn and grow from that mistake. They freely share information, collaborate, and leverage one another's skills and abilities productively.

Businesses need their people to put forth their best effort, to collaborate and to produce good results by working effectively and efficiently. Those people have a need to be able to connect with one another—to be seen, heard, and understood. Trust builds the bridge between the business need for results and the human need for connection.

Conversely, when the crucial element of trust is compromised, people become withdrawn and disengaged. Their confidence in themselves and in others erodes, along with their commitment to their work and their organization. They wonder, “Do I belong here?” Confidence is overshadowed by doubt: “Do I have what it takes?” Commitment dwindles: “Is this the place for me?”

Without trust, people struggle to bring their best forward. Collaboration and productivity suffer. The lowest common denominator becomes the norm. The whole environment is weakened, with everything becoming harder and taking longer.



Why leaders turn to trust building

We know that trust is important, but what dynamics and innate challenges are at play today that causes leaders to want to strengthen trust within their teams?

Leaders may see that something is “off” within their teams. Enthusiasm is low, and members are reluctant to speak up, are playing it safe, and are attached to the status quo. At that point, leaders turn to team trust building for a variety of reasons: to deepen engagement, to foster collaboration, to adjust to growth, to drive change – and to glean faster and more accurate business results.

Deepening engagement: To help organizations retain talent and create environments that are rewarding and satisfying, engagement is needed not only to support the success of today but also the success of tomorrow. Through trust, people engage more deeply. They are happier. They bring their all.

Yet, despite exercising due diligence in monitoring and fostering engagement, organizations are experiencing declines and wonder what is causing this trend. As a consumer-product company’s vice president of manufacturing told us, “Our engagement scores have gone down for the last three years and we don’t know why.”

Fostering collaboration: A Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of a Fortune 100 company who was hired to turn around his division was concerned about a \$30 million information-technology (IT) initiative that was tanking—it was over budget and behind schedule. Teams weren’t collaborating with one another. They weren’t even sharing information or communicating with each other. Instead, they were working in silos.

“How can I get my people working together, sharing information and collaborating with one another?” the CFO asked us.

While leaders such as this CFO know efficiency and effectiveness need to be strengthened, they face a paradox: team members have all the raw ingredients they need—skill, talent, expert knowledge, commitment to the business, and a general respect for one another—and yet, they don’t collaborate, creating the dreaded “Silo Effect’.

One senior executive in the financial services industry saw this situation playing out on his team and sought a solution:

Team members are driven, ambitious, capable and influential. Yet, they tend to work independently and compete with each other. They are reluctant to give up control, and are not inclined to tap into each other’s expertise. They hold themselves back from their full collective capability and potential.



Here, team members were focused on their individual success, rather than on their mutual success. Silos need to be broken down, channels of collaboration opened, and the direction of work shifted toward a common purpose.

Adjusting to growth: People often assume that trust-related challenges come with a downturn in business. However, growth can equally strain trust. On one hand, business is exploding: people are producing, and products and services are more than meeting their mark. Yet, on the other hand, people tire from increased work and stress, and teamwork suffers.

Double-digit growth for five years led one pharmaceutical company we worked with to emerge as the global leader in its industry. The priority of the chief executive officer was not the growth of the business but the sustainable health of team relationships, about which he expressed concern:

I wonder how long people can keep up. I am not seeing the same enthusiasm. People are getting work done and beginning to pull back at the same time. What do we need to focus on to sustain this level of teamwork?

Driving change: At these times, teams experience their landscape changing. And leaders may reinforce any unease by inadvertently sending the message that change is here to stay and that more change is coming, without putting in place a structure to support their people during what can be a turbulent time.

Effective leaders recognize this need for support during change and recognize the need for trust. As one insurance company CFO put it:

I want people to come to work and bring their whole selves to work. I want to create a work environment where people want to show up and want to work. And I know that takes trust.

The behaviors that build trust are the very behaviors that manage change. Trust building helps teams step into the ambiguity, to stay committed to managing the unknown with confidence, and to embrace change as an opportunity to learn, grow, and do great work together.

The challenge of building trust

Teams face issues and business dynamics today that are challenging: needing to increase productivity and speed to market while streamlining processes and lowering production costs. High trust is essential to address these needs. Yet, trust comes with its own set of challenges. Trust is complex, meaning different things to different people, and while it can be positive or negative, it is emotionally provocative.

In this complex web of needs, research done by the Center for Creative Leadership suggests that outcomes in three areas can be used to measure team effectiveness. Results, or action-oriented indicators of effectiveness include the achievement of *team results* (in contrast to individual results) on required aspects of the team task, *supporting the team* by engaging in citizenship behaviors directed toward other individuals, and *supporting the organization* by

engaging in citizenship behaviors directed toward the organization. Feeling-oriented indicators of effectiveness include how *satisfied* team members are with the team and fellow team members and the *commitment to and identification with the team*. Learning-oriented indicators of effectiveness include the *efficiencies created* by the team, the extent to which effectiveness is *improved over time*, and how effectively a team's *approach is adapted to changing conditions*.

Levels of trust in the team directly impact the ability of the team to realize these outcomes. Learning is impeded, measured by reduced effectiveness, when trust is low. “Energy and creativity are diverted from finding comprehensive, realistic solutions, and members use the problem as an instrument to minimize their vulnerability...[whereas] in high-trust groups there is less socially generated uncertainty and problems are solved more effectively.” Identification with the team is strengthened when levels of trust create a team environment that is safe for risk-taking, “a sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject, or punish someone for speaking up. This confidence stems from mutual respect and trust among team members. (Edmondson, 1999, p. 354)

The question for team members and team leaders is a practical one. What actions can they take that will develop trust in the teams they are part of? Are there steps that one can take? Can the process of trust building and trust repair be made more tangible than vague suggestions like “look me in the eye” or “that was a weak handshake”?

Held as a value rooted in beliefs or principles, trust is often viewed as soft, intangible, and abstract. However, when you compare the results produced by teams having high mutual trust with the cost of teams having low mutual trust, you immediately see that trust is necessary for success and can be effectively measured.

What do teams need most to build trust? Three components are needed:

- A foundational understanding of trust and its importance on teams
- An understanding of the behaviors that build trust and how team members practice those behaviors in their relationships with one another
- Tools to measure and monitor trust-building efforts



Dimensions of Trust: The Three Cs®



The Reina Dimensions of Trust: The Three Cs

We dedicated the last twenty-five years to research focused on producing practical solutions to these components. The first step we took in doing our research was to develop a trust model.

Our model, the Reina Dimensions of Trust: The Three Cs® ("3 Cs," for short) has three dimensions and sixteen behaviors. The model provides a practical, behavioral-based framework that helps people raise their awareness of trust. Derived from our book *Trust and Betrayal in the Workplace: Building Effective Relationships in Your Organization*, this model takes the complex and makes it simple, concrete, and practical through illustrating the interrelationship of three dimensions of trust: Trust of Character®, Trust of Communication®, and Trust of Capability®.

The model equips teams with a shared understanding of what trust means, how it is built, how it is broken—subtly and not so subtly—and how it is rebuilt. It also gives teams a common language to talk about trust-related issues constructively, to take thoughtful action on them, to sustain trust over time, and to enable them to take trust to the next level.

Trust of Character sets the tone and direction of teamwork. This dimension of trust represents mutually serving intentions and is the starting point of a team relationship. When teams have Trust of Character, each member has faith that the others will behave as expected. Team members care about one another as people and hold each other's best interest in mind. This is the foundational dimension of trust teams need to be effective. Team members build this trust when they do what they say they will do, engendering a mutual view of reliability and trust within the team. Any member who can't deliver steps up, renegotiates the task and is supported.

Trust of Communication fuels collaboration and makes it safe for team members to talk with each other directly—not only to provide information to one another but also to work through issues and concerns and offer feedback in the spirit of deeper learning and growth. Through Trust of Communication, teams practice transparency—they communicate openly and honestly. Members feel safe to admit mistakes and know where they stand with one another. Trust of Communication creates an environment of collaboration that teams need to thrive.

Trust of Capability opens the door for team members to contribute, to use their knowledge to make a difference. Members build this type of trust by leveraging the skills and abilities of one another, seeking each other's input, engaging in decision making, and teaching of new skills. Trust of Capability enables the innovation teams need to be competitive.

Together, these three dimensions of trust help teams understand the behaviors needed to build and sustain trust and foster their trustworthiness.

Armed with the awareness and a behavioral understanding of trust, team members are poised to make choices about how they behave. Next, they need to know where trust stands in their team—they need data, and that's where the Reina Team Trust Scale comes in.

Using the Reina Team Trust Scale® to build trust

The Reina Team Trust Scale is a research-based, statistically valid and reliable, self-reporting, Likert-type assessment designed to measure the Three Dimensions of Trust and the sixteen behaviors that build them. Developed through independent research conducted at the Reina Trust Building Institute over twenty years, the Reina Team Trust Scale is a measurement tool built on the Reina Trust and Betrayal Model®. Teams use the Team Trust Scale to increase efficiency, optimize performance and achieve business results through trust building.





How the Team Trust Scale works

The Team Trust Scale is administered through a secure online server, which enables people to answer survey questions anonymously, and therefore honestly. The results take the guesswork out of determining levels of trust within a team. No longer needing to rely on assumptions of trust, team members know where trust stands along the *Three Dimensions of Trust*.

Benefits of using the Team Trust Scale

The Team Trust Scale results help team members:

- Gain a shared understanding and a common language to talk about trust, and a behavioral framework for open and honest dialogue.
- Learn their Total Trust Score and specific behavioral areas where trust is *high*, *moderate*, *low*, and *very low* within their team.
- Raise the awareness of how team members' behaviors collectively contribute to team trust and productivity.
- Discover what they are already doing to build trust (strengths they can leverage) and what is getting in the way (opportunities to improve).
- Commit to specific actions to achieve their potential through strengthening trust every day.
- Gain a tool to measure and monitor progress in developing collaborative, trustworthy relationships that produce results.

Through the Team Trust Scale results, teams know where to focus their energies. They become aware of what actions they can take to spark the greatest impact on teamwork, productivity and move trust to the next level.

As teams take trust to this next level, their members work with, rather than against, one another, giving each other the benefit of the doubt and rebuilding trust when it has been compromised. People understand and care about one another and are inspired to work together efficiently and produce. They know trust building takes conscious effort, steady focus, and compassion. Teams are committed to reassess to monitor their progress, celebrate gains and sustain trust.

Below are just a few **results** teams have produced through committed action, emerging from using the *Reina Team Trust Scale*.

Financial services Fortune 100 company: The CFO mentioned above who had inherited a failing \$30 million systems-integration initiative was handpicked by the board to turn its finance division around. He knew that, to get the initiative back on track—on schedule and within budget — he needed to get people collaborating.

Twenty teams, consisting of 389 members in total, throughout the division



engaged in assessments of trust among their members to understand behaviors that were supporting, and those that were getting in the way of, trust and performance. Each team committed to specific actions to strengthen collaboration, not only with one another but also across team functional lines. Six months later, trust-building behaviors *increased* by 63 percent, while trust-breaking behaviors *decreased* by 80 percent. One year later, the initiative was delivered on schedule and within budget; along the way, employee-engagement scores increased by 25 percent. Team members shifted from working against to working with one another.

These quotes elucidate the value team members garnered from engaging in trust assessment of the team:

There is a greater sense of community spirit present, where people are able to come together and talk things through. It's these intangibles that have really made a difference.

If we had not had this trust-building process in place, our integration would not have been as positive as it was. We learned a new way of being as a group. [from the CFO]

People are dealing with people more directly vs. talking behind their backs. We're more transparent in our communications.

Operations team of a global airline: The team was charged with managing a major change effort to install an IT integration system. Rather than working as one, team members worked at odds with each other. There was infighting and backstabbing, critical issues were not addressed, and the rumor mill was alive and well fueled by the gossip of the day.

The team engaged in the Reina *Team Trust Scale* assessment to gain a better understanding of the issues the team was experiencing. Armed with the assessment results, the team was able to pinpoint what was undermining collaboration within it: while team members respected one another's skills and abilities and were committed to producing results, they did not talk with one another, particularly about issues or concerns. With the Team Trust Scale results, the team members learned where they needed to focus their energy—Trust of Communication—and used trust building to achieve that.

Nine months later, the team did a follow-up assessment. The results showed the team had increased its score in



all forty-eight behaviors assessed, from 2 to 117 points above the original scores. The team's trust had risen two levels, from very low to moderate. By taking trust in their relationships to this new level, the team members saved \$1 million in associated strategic planning costs. Employee engagement scores also went up, by nine points, which was double the commitment the team had made to the organization. Team members enjoyed working with one another.

Among the quotes from the one-on-one interviews with team members about the progress they had experienced are the following:

The Team Trust Assessment helps us to have real discussions. To talk about real issues and to work through concerns. We are more willing to call something or someone out now with the best of intentions; previously people took issues personally; now it is more safe—the safe zone.

We talk openly and honestly with each other. Things are easier now that we can put issues on the table. Our communication has shifted from “us and them” to we—we’re in this together. If there is an issue with someone, we have a conversation directly with the individual rather than bringing it up to the whole team.

We are more aware and accountable to each other. We’ve got each other’s back; we don’t stab each other in the back. We make decisions much more quickly and are more focused. There is more respect for each other and the courage to speak up.

Finance team of a multi-billion-dollar communications organization: The team was experiencing a problem so severe that it threatened not just the division but the entire organization. Relationships between employees and management had deteriorated so badly that employees personally sent the CFO a letter voicing their concerns. This letter—signed by every non-management employee within the division—was an unprecedented act of frustration within the organization. At the root of their frustration, employees felt undervalued and underused. Management, they said, didn’t seek their input, appeared indifferent to issues they raised, and micromanaged to such a degree that the managers essentially were redoing the employees’ work.

For more than a year, the human resources department worked with the division, conducting culture and engagement surveys and implementing various training and team-building programs, but the situation continued to worsen. Engagement scores were at an all-time low, and team members pushed back on team-building programs, saying the sessions were superficial and didn’t get to the problem’s root. Leadership needed a solution that would surface and solve the root causes of the division’s unrest—that would help to name and address the elephant in the room.



The team decided to go to work on trust. Using the Reina *Team Trust Scale*, the team members learned where trust stood within the team. Together, they went to work on trust in their relationships with one another.

Six months later, relationships had been transformed within the team. Eighty-two percent of negative, trust-breaking behaviors had been shifted to positive, trust-building ones. Team members had learned to behave differently, developing the courage to try out new ways of interacting with one another. Instead of acting on blind assumption when there was a break down, they gave each other the benefit of the doubt and compassionately talked directly with those with whom they had issues. Instead of pointing fingers, they took responsibility and reached out for help when they needed it. And instead of holding on to past hurts, they let go and moved on. Team members had effectively redirected how they engaged with one another and with management and had learned how to trust again. And those in management learned how to relate to their people and to one another:

Employees are not micromanaged and are allowed the freedom to make decisions. There is less tension and more collaboration.

The good results we have as a team and as individuals are linked to the level of trust we have in the team.

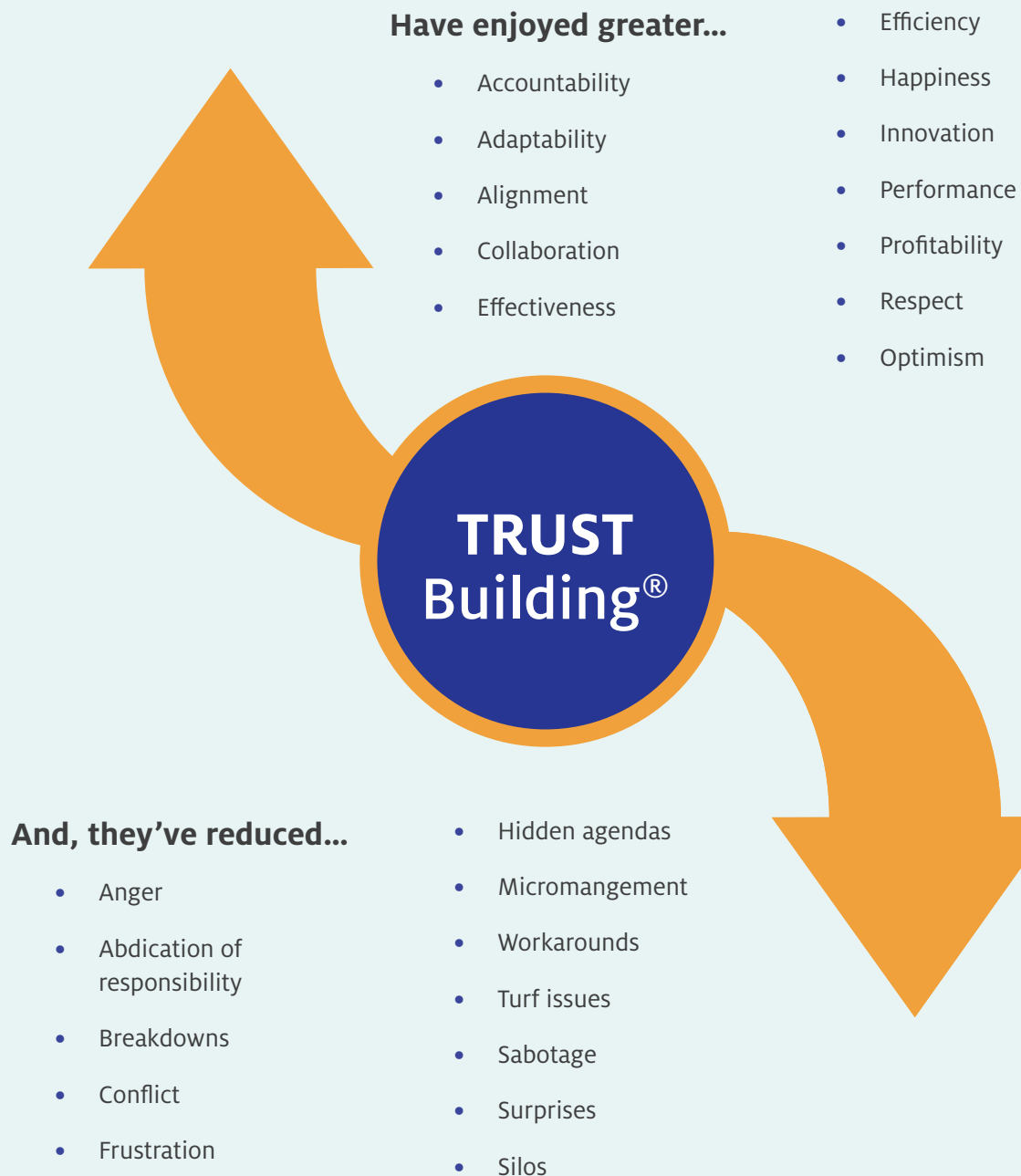
Performance across the division had gotten back on track in time for the new operational system rollout. The team's ability to turn out a superior product on or before deadline has become a source of pride.

Pharmaceutical/Biotech Joint Venture (JV): A major pharmaceutical company teamed with a small biotech to develop a promising molecule. When the combined medical team first became engaged, a great deal of “noise” caused by differences in organizational culture, leadership styles, role conflict and geography created distrust and significant roadblocks to progress.

Team Trust Scale assessment results gave the team perspective. They discovered strengths to leverage to build trust and to make progress. Over time the team achieved success: the molecule became a 1 billion dollar product. A Knowledge Management “post-mortem” study of why the JV was so successful identified trust as a driving factor.

Renewal of Trust™

Through the focused action emerging from the Team Trust Scale results team members...



Conclusion: Sustaining trust

While it's commonly accepted that trust is a nonnegotiable aspect of a high-performing team, raising this awareness is only the starting point to building and sustaining trust. Leaders who turn to trust building realize that people who are supposed to be working together as a team need the team to truly function as such—not just in name, but also in spirit. To help team members connect with one another on a human level and to forge supportive, meaningful relationships that produce results. That takes trust. Trust in themselves. Trust in one another.

These leaders also realize that the need for trust presents itself in different ways, such as a need to deepen engagement, foster collaboration, drive change, or support a team through growth.

To *build* team trust, people need to understand how trust really works in teams—and to extend compassion to the complexities and challenges that naturally come with it. They need to know where trust stands in their own team, and be prepared to embrace opportunities to learn, grow and develop and to live the conviction trust building takes. And they need to be prepared to rebuild trust when—not if—it gets compromised.

Trust building cannot be viewed simply as a one-off initiative. Rather, sustaining trust requires continued effort on behalf of all team members.

To *sustain* trust, leaders can use the data collected from the Reina *Team Trust Scale* to help teams create a concrete action plan to build trust, and take teamwork and collaboration to the next level. Follow-up team trust assessments help teams monitor progress, celebrate gains and continue with focused action with sound intent.

The honesty gained through using the *Team Trust Scale* opens the doorway to having breakthrough conversations, developing deeper connections, and aligning action based upon mutual understanding, caring, and trust within the team every day.

Dennis Reina, PhD., and Michelle Reina, PhD., co-founders of Reina, A Trust Building Consultancy, specialize in helping leaders deepen engagement and leadership effectiveness, manage change, raise productivity and create environments of open and honest communication through trust. Speakers, consultants and coaches, they are co-authors of the award winning, bestsellers, *Trust and Betrayal in the Workplace* and *Rebuilding Trust in the Workplace* (Berrett-Koehler). Their suite of statistically valid and reliable trust assessments that measure trust at the leadership, team and organizational levels support healthy relationships and superior performance. Among their clients: American Express, Johns Hopkins, Harvard University, Johnson & Johnson, Lincoln Financial Group, MillerCoors, Qantas Airlines, Turner (CNN), U.S. Treasury. Their work has been featured in *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, *Fast Company*, *Bloomberg's Business Week*, *Harvard Management Update*, *Inc.com*, *Time*, and *USA Today*.

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