ABCD Trust Model

Idea In Short

Ken Blanchard, an American management and leadership guru who developed the Situational Leadership Model together with Paul Hershey and wrote the International best seller The One Minute Manager, also designed the ABCD trust model. According to Blanchard, the common elements that decide trust are Ability, Believability, Connectedness and Dependability.

Trust is important for effective relationships and is crucial for effective leadership. It doesn't come naturally, but needs to be earned through trust-building actions and behaviors. Similarly, it can be easily lost through trust-breaking actions and behaviors.

> To build may have to be the slow and laborious task of years. To destroy can be the thoughtless act of a single day (Winston Churchill)

Misconceptions

Many believe that trust spontaneously occurs in a relationship, but this is a drastic misconception. Trust is earned through certain deliberate and clear actions and behaviours. Any two individuals can develop trust between them, regardless of their prior relationship. Most people often do not even consider the trust levels between them and another individual until trust is broken. Furthermore, very few people consider themselves untrustworthy; therefore, they expect others to trust them and take others' trust for granted, even though there is no objective basis for such expectations. As a concept, trust is subjective in nature. We all have a different perspective of what trust looks like. Therefore, it is up to organisations to develop common frameworks and definitions of trust systems, so that individuals can discuss and repair trust-based issues.

Ken Blanchard's Interpretation of Trust

Ken Blanchard is a management and leadership guru, author and researcher with decades of experience writing about leadership and management. For him, words are inadequate. Trust must be supported by actions and behaviour if one were to flourish as a Leader. In his view, the behaviours of trusting individuals are made up of four distinct components, represented by the acronym (language of trust) ABCD:

- Able
- Believable
- Connected
- Dependable

For leaders to be successful in developing high-trust relationships, they must choose their actions and words in alignment with the elements of ABCD. If anyone of these factors is not strong, it may result in what Blanchard calls Low T (Low Trust). A few causes of Low T may include:

- An individual taking responsibility for another's work
- An individual avoiding or trying to shift blame or responsibility
- An individual showing inconsistent or unreliable behaviour
- An individual not meeting their expectations or obligations
- An individual spreading falsity or joining in with ‘gossip'
- An individual not rewarding or recognising others' achievements
- An individual withholding important information from another

Able

For leaders, being able is all about demonstrating their competence at a task, or tasks. An example of this is demonstrating one has the required expertise to be good at their job. This can often be supported by such objective facts as having all the necessary skills, competencies, knowledge or credentials to be able to fill the role. It could also be supported by their track record; leaders have achieved successful results expected of someone in their position. Consistently reaching goals establishes Thought Leadership, builds trust and inspires others to believe in one's ability to perform. These individuals are not necessarily required to do all of the necessary work themselves, but are also often skilled at facilitating results in others, much like a successful manager of a football club. They do this by developing credible plans, processes and delegation systems that aid other team members

or employees in reaching their goals.

Believable

To gain the aura of believability, a leader is required to act with integrity. This can mean many things. However, not lying to others, keeping promises, not gossiping and not making claims that cannot be backed up. These leaders have unbreakable consistency. They possess a set collection of values and systems which they follow day-to-day with no alterations. Believable leaders will also treat all the individuals within their team with the utmost respect, and in an entirely fair manner. This does not mean treating everyone exactly the same. Circumstances can vary, but it does mean treating every individual personality appropriately and justly in each unique situation and being observed by all others to be doing so.

Connected

It is invaluable that leaders are connected to their employees, colleagues and team members. This is achieved by showing care and concern for other individuals. It has often been shown that those who exhibit the highest emotional intelligence, often make the most effective leaders. Research from Ken Blanchard Companies has shown that connectedness with the leader and connectedness with a colleague are 2 of the 12 most important factors in developing passion in a job. Both rely on trust as a key element. Connected leaders are open with their team members about both themselves, their organisation and their roles. They are, likewise, trusting of their employees to use this information in a suitable manner and developing a mutual trust system. Connected individuals will see their employees as the most important asset to any organisation and will thus put them first with regards to their allocation of resources and support. They work to integrate themselves with employees and aim to develop a rapport and open communication with others. This can be as simple as taking an interest in others as individuals, rather than purely as another nameless cog in the organisation's machine. Successful, connected leaders will often encourage happiness and this rapport by rewarding individuals for their contributions to the business and their key goals.

Dependable

Dependability is partially synonymous with reliability. It is related to believability in the sense that this is all about following through on promises which one has made to individuals and

reaching targets one has set for themselves and for others. Leaders who do as they say they will i.e., those who walk the talk gain a reputation for consistency and trustworthiness. To gain this reputation for dependability, leaders must be incredibly organised with strict deadlines and standards, always meeting with people, responding to queries and fulfilling tasks in a timely fashion. This dependability can be carried over to others. Dependable leaders also expect and inspire others to take responsibility for their actions and ensure that they are achieved within deadlines.

Becoming a Trustworthy Leader

Trust cannot be earned overnight. Trustworthiness is a journey; not a destination. Trust in personal and professional relationships is an ever-evolving concept that shifts with every action.Therefore, it is crucial that leaders act and respond in a manner that maintains high trust levels. If you behave in a way that clearly conveys that you are Able, Believable, Connected and Dependable, others' trust levels in you will grow, in both new relationships, old, and those which you may once have believed were irreparably damaged by past events. High levels of trust will ultimately prove incredibly beneficial to both yourself and those reliant on your leadership for guidance and to facilitate their development.

Summary

According to Ken Blanchard, trust is expressed in actions and behaviour. Words alone are inadequate in earning trust. He also distinguishes between trust breakers and trust makers. Trust breakers systematically dismiss other people''s work and ideas. On the other hand, trust makers recognize others' work, appreciate and support them. Ken Blanchard''s ABCDs of trust says that trustworthy people are Able, Believable, Connected and Dependable [ABCD]. They also feel more personally included at work, make better leaders and build better relationships. These skills can be learned.