

Mutual trust between managers and their teams is hard to find: can we increase it?

It is not easy for managers and their teams to trust each other. In their study, Brower et al. (2009) observed that, in the hotel and resort industry, only 26% of teams showed both a high level of leaders' trust in their collaborators and a high level of workers' trust in their leader. Our study was conducted in centers for the attention to people with intellectual disability, and we also found that this high level of mutual trust was only observed in one out of every five centers studied. However, it is crucial to establish these ties of trust because they improve the quality of the relationships between leaders and their work teams, producing a positive effect on well-being and performance.

Why is it so difficult, then, to create relationships of high mutual trust between managers and their teams? An important part of the problem is that mutual trust requires the implication of both parties at the same time. In other words, if one party trusts and the other does not, we cannot really talk about mutual trust. Therefore, reciprocity is essential in understanding the reasons for mutual trust. The quality of the relationship greatly depends on whether each party gets something perceived as valuable from the other. However, in the working world, what makes us trust depends on the position or role we have. On the one hand, managers base their trust mainly on the performance of their team members, given its importance in achieving the organization's objectives. On the other hand, for teams it is especially relevant that managers have decision-making power about aspects that directly affect them (for example, promotions, salaries, or task distribution), and so integrity, dignity in the treatment they receive, and transparency in decision-making are key issues. These aspects are included in the concept of interactional justice climate (justice in the treatment teams receive from their supervisors).

The participants in our study were 93 managers and 746 workers from 93 centers for attention to people with intellectual disability. We asked the managers about the level of trust they had in their teams of collaborators, whereas the teams had to indicate their level of trust in the manager of the center. Mutual trust includes both level and agreement. In other words, the optimal situation is one where managers and teams agree that there is a high level of trust between them. We calculated two mutual trust indicators that reflected, in both cases, the level of trust and the level of agreement. In addition, the managers evaluated the performance of their teams of collaborators, and the latter evaluated the justice in the treatment received by their managers.

The results indicated that the positive relationship between justice in the teams' treatment and mutual trust was intensified when these teams reciprocated with a high level of job performance. Therefore, the combination of a high interactional justice climate and high team performance is the proper *breeding ground* for optimal mutual trust between managers and team members. To achieve mutual trust, each party contributes to the relationship in a different way: the manager should treat the team members fairly, and teams should display satisfactory performance. Organizational members should be aware that building mutual trust requires each of the actors

involved to make the necessary effort.

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