

World Changers podcast

Ep.10 A question of trust



Elle Bradley-Cox

Welcome to World Changers, a podcast exploring the trends making an enduring mark on our world of work, and how business leaders, HR teams and internal communicators can stay one step ahead.

Elle Bradley-Cox

For too long, the perception of getting the job done was tied to visibility. If an employee was in their seat and they must be doing their job, right? We can debate the rights and wrongs of presenteeism. What we can't deny is that it is rife in business, or it certainly was pre pandemic. Now, the challenge facing employers is a different one. Alarmingly, it resulted in a sales boom of monitoring software. Now, as we find ourselves in considering hybrid working models, how will the relationship between employee and employers shift? How do we maintain trust for those working remotely, particularly as some colleagues returned to the traditional line of sight? Can trust ever be truly equitable? And what part does internal comms play in helping build that sense of colleague confidence? Senior Writer Patrick Halkett chose this theme as his World Changer for our 2021 report. Later in this episode, I chat with Rob Briggs, director of Graystone Communications to explore his contribution to the IABC global handbook, looking at the different components of organisational trust. But before that, Patrick and I got together to talk trust.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Hello, Patrick. Thank you for joining me.

Patrick Halkett

Hi, Elle. Thanks for having me.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Interesting that you wrote about Trust in our 2021 World Changers report and, sneak preview for anyone who's looking out for the 2022 report, Patrick's also writing about Trust. Are you not a trusting person?

Patrick Halkett

I think what's become clear from this is that I clearly have some psychological issues that I need to work through. No, I guess I'm probably more on the cynical end of the spectrum than the optimistic end of the spectrum. But I think, certainly in the case of 2021, World Changes report, I was particularly interested in trust,

because it felt like it was a real watershed moment. In terms of working culture, when people were working remotely. Now, obviously, things have moved on a little bit since then. But it just seemed to me, at the time, that it was the first time where remote working had really taken off on the scale that it had. I guess that sounds a little bit obvious, really, doesn't it? But we were going from a model where people were expected to be in the office from nine to five, Monday to Friday, most of the time. And we were going from that model to people being at home throughout the working week. And it just seemed to me that it was a real watershed moment. And that businesses were going to have to place their trust in their employees. Because we were going from a model where people working typically nine to five, in an office where there was a clear line of sight to, all of a sudden, being spread out all over the world, doing their own thing. And businesses had to really come to terms with the fact that they needed to trust their people in order to get the results that they wanted.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Thinking about it, some businesses really leaned into that. But others didn't and as you wrote about in your 2021 report, you know, you talk about people who fought off these persistent allegations about spying on colleagues, because we we did see reported rise in the sales of monitoring software, because some companies chose to do that. I mean, do you think that was part of a sea change that will continue as some people continue to work from home with hybrid world? Or do you think it was just kind of a knee jerk, gut reaction at the time where organisations thought "we must have this monitoring software?"

Patrick Halkett

Probably the pessimist in me, again, speaking here, but I don't think this is going away. No, because I think that as we transition to perhaps a more hybrid model of working, where people split working from home with working in the office, I think organisations who perhaps have low trust in their employees will probably still want to know what their people are up to, on the days when they're at home. And I just think that that trend is going to continue, and I don't see it changing anytime soon.

Elle Bradley-Cox

It's interesting. I read something in the Atlantic recently. It was an employee perspective from somebody who had been at the sharp end of being monitored. And what struck me, she actually said that her boss turned on her own monitoring software, because it was this kind of moment where she was like, "Well, if she's asking me to do something awful, at least she is actually doing it yourself." You know, I just want to ask you about leaders because I know in your report, you talk about different types of managers. What's your take on that?

Patrick Halkett

I think you can broadly split leaders into two groups, really. You've got groups that trust their people and expect them to get on with their work. And they don't really need to monitor them, check in with them too much. There are other leaders who perhaps want to stay closer to their teams and think that to get the best out of their teams, they need to be visible, and they need to be in touch, and they need to be quite hands on. And I think that one of the key things in during remote working and certainly in hybrid working as well, this won't change, I think it's really important that leaders take a look at themselves and really do some thinking about what kind of a leader they are, who they want to be. And think about how that affects their team and what works best for individual members of their team. I think it's really important that people tailor their approach to understand that colleague a might like to do their own thing. And they might really value autonomy and space

and time to think. Whereas colleague B might be someone who enjoys the fact that they've got a manager that checks in with them, say, on a daily basis. I just think it's really important that leaders do that thinking, and tailor their approach to reflect the needs of their team.

Elle Bradley-Cox

I think so too. I've definitely been managed by both types, every leader, and for me personally, feeling settled in my job and feeling like "I've got this, don't worry about me", I'm definitely veering into the autonomy camp. But maybe, if I think back, maybe at the start of my career, I needed a bit more support from my manager. And I think your point about changing it up, not just having a blanket leadership style, maybe it's a good one,

Patrick Halkett

I don't think it needs to necessarily be black and white. And I think you do need to listen to what your reports want from you, as well. I think I probably fluctuate between the two ends of the spectrum. I think sometimes there's certain tasks and certain projects that I work on that I'm happy to go away and do my own thing. Whereas I think we've others, I appreciate a sounding board and a manager who checks in with me, and I can run ideas past and all of that kind of good stuff. So yeah, I just think it's about it's about being agile and adapting your approach to your team so that you can get the best results, essentially, for your team and for the business.

Elle Bradley-Cox

I guess, as we sit here in late October, many, many organisations are moving to hybrid models. So when they've got some people in the office, some people at home, and in fact, some of my clients have said, "what can we do to encourage people to go back to the office" and I'm always interested in what exactly is driving that? I think some of it's about good collaboration, definitely. Some of it is about making sure we don't have empty buildings as well. But do you think that those organisations that are going hybrid really risk, a trust bias, even unconsciously, when it comes to those people who are in the office, full-time, hybrid, or not at all?

Patrick Halkett

Yes, I do. I do think that there's going to be a potential unconscious bias when it comes to hybrid working. I think that what we're in danger of, with hybrid working, is that we may fall into some of the old practices that we used to have before the pandemic, as things start to get back to normal. It wouldn't surprise me to see businesses and people revert to type and actually start to view people being sat at desks as a sign that they're doing their work. I can understand it, I can I do understand it. But obviously presenteeism, it's something that it's not present to you as presenteeism is a pretty negative phenomenon, I think. And the more we can do to break that cycle and stop thinking like that, the better for businesses, for colleagues, and for everyone from a wellbeing perspective, from a productivity perspective, I think that we really need to make an effort to draw a line in the sand and say, "actually, you don't need to be in the office for me to know that you're doing your work."

Elle Bradley-Cox

I completely agree. And actually, I've made a real point, more recently, if I'm not feeling whatever I'm doing, just to say "I can't do this, I'm just I need a minute, I need to go and get some headspace." I don't think productivity is an output of 'the longer you sit at something, the more it'll happen'. I actually think I'm at my most productive when I acknowledge that I'm not being productive and go out and get some fresh air or do whatever gets me

back on track, whether it's a coffee, whether it's a chat with another colleague, and it didn't used to matter in the workplace before because we were all in and we just naturally fell into that rhythm. We didn't even analyse it. We just did it and maybe we've maybe overthought a little bit as we've been away from the office. What else do you think can help foster trust apart from, in my example, just being honest and saying I can't do this right now? What else? What are the other indicators of trust that your employer can give you or or you can give your employer.

Patrick Halkett

I think that we're all adults. And I think we should all we should all just be more mature when it comes to this stuff. Very early on in lockdown, my manager said to me something along the lines of "if you need to go for a walk, if you need to take some time out, and you can manage your time and do the work that you need to do, then you have my blessing". And it only ever becomes an issue when people start to take the piss. Actually, a lot like a lot like driving. I think that if everyone just doesn't take the piss and behaves considerately towards others, and is a grown up about it, then bad things won't happen. Productivity will stay high, you might get certain dips on certain days, if someone's not really feeling it. But then I think if you're mature enough to know that your employees can be trusted, and they will do their best, and they will do a good job, then it doesn't necessarily matter. If they're sat at their desk from nine till 5:30. Actually, people can be more agile, they can break off to go and do other things and come back and you know, put in extra hours when they need to, I think I think there just needs to be more maturity from everyone really across the board, when it comes to that kind of thing.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Yeah, I completely agree. I'm sort of slightly smiling because the Team's transcription bleeped out the word 'piss'. But something I have noticed about Teams actually, recently, I don't know if you spotted this, but when you have an online meeting, it gives you an attendance report after you've had it. And, gosh, if that isn't just technology and sense of presenteeism? I mean, what do you think? Is it a force for good or for bad when it comes to trust?

Patrick Halkett

I think technology in general, is probably a force for bad when it comes to trust. I think that it's very hard to ignore the link between technology and surveillance. I think that at work and in our personal lives, we know that there's this kind of paranoia around Tech, I think, when you think that your phone's listening to you. We've all been there when we've been talking about something in a private conversation and then we go on to our social media, and we've had a targeted advert. And there's no way in a million years that's a coincidence. And I think there's a growing distrust when it comes to technology and our personal data, and all of that kind of thing. That going to create more and more into the workplace. Because like we said at the beginning with surveillance software, and the fact that I don't see that going away, I think that companies like Microsoft and Google need to take a long, hard look at themselves when it comes to this sort of surveillance that they're putting in place that will allow employers to monitor their employees. I can only see it going in one direction, I'm afraid.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Yeah, I completely agree. So interesting you make that point, though, about like technology taking over. I've just recently done some work with Rolls-Royce. They have an ethical framework for AI that they have just released free to the world, called the Alethia framework. And I think companies are starting to wake up to the fact that

ethics and bias and all of those things are supremely important in getting humans to trust tech in any way. And proving that there aren't there aren't hidden biases or unconscious bias in the software that we have will become ever more important for companies but actually really interestingly, as you as you make the point for employers as well listening to your colleagues, whatever they're saying, they're going to be saying it at the watercooler. They're going to be saying it at the breakout room. And I don't know if it does actually much good. Like you said there's a certain level of maturity that's just needed for everyone to do a good job. I mean, internal comms, we kind of have our finger on the pulse anyway. If the mood in the company you ask any internal communicator what's the mood like in your business?" and they'll be able to answer it. I guess in that way, they can also have like quite a key role in building and maintaining trust. And for me, I guess it's all about being the voice of the people and the honesty that the business shares and opening forums for people to speak openly. But what do you think of the role of IC in this debate?

Patrick Halkett

I think IC has got a really important role to play. But I think it's important to say that actually, IC doesn't shape policy. It often is the vehicle, it's the part of the business that helps to inform and engage colleagues in that policy. But actually, when it comes to shaping the policy, it might not have much of a say in what happens. So it's a challenging position to be in because it could be that as an IC team, you maybe don't believe in the policy that the businesses has built, but you kind of have to make the best of it. Because that's what we're here for. So I think that in those challenging circumstances, where IC teams are asked to share policy, I think it's important that they're as honest as they can be. I think people don't want things to be sugar coated. They don't want IC teams to be disingenuous, and perhaps to try and suggest something's a good deal when they know it isn't. And it's not easy. But I think it's really important for senior stakeholders in IC teams to push back to their peers on leadership teams, to actually really get them to think about how internal communications plays its part because it's no good handing an IC team a policy and asking them to share it if they don't believe in it. It's really important to engage one another in a conversation about policy as early as possible and think about a strategic way of sharing it with the organisation. Because you can't just ask them to just push any old thing out,

Elle Bradley-Cox

Quite, and any HR teams or policymakers listening. One thing I do know is that your IC team will be will hold the mirror up and will be the voice of the colleague and say, "Why should I care?" And it's the question I ask every time I write anything, to be honest, why would my audience care? Why do readers give a hoot about what people should ask themselves that question before they start communicating, whether it's mass emails that you're not expecting, whether it's things that happen, kind of without the IC team's knowledge that just happened in the business? If they asked us in the first place, they would certainly hear the voice of the people.

Patrick Halkett

Definitely. And I think on that point as well, it's really important, isn't it, that IC teams take the pulse of the business and use measurement and two-way conversations to make sure that they're on top of the general mood and taking a temperature check across the organisations to find out how thing landed, and adapt policy to reflect it where possible.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Well, look, thank you for your insights. Appreciate your time. This has been a really good conversation and we'll catch up soon.

Patrick Halkett

Thanks Elle.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Robb Briggs, owner and director of Graystone Communications has a handle on the somewhat nebulous topic of organisational trust. His contribution to the International Association of Business Communicators or IABC Global Handbook brings together expert insights from IC professionals providing a snapshot of trust in the midst of a huge global crisis, and discusses what such upheaval means for culture and communication in the workplace. I caught up with Rob to explore his findings in more depth.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Rob, as I mentioned in your intro, thanks for joining me, you contributed a section on organisational trust to the IABC Global Handbook. I mean, it's abstract. It's about behaviour. It's about people's choices. I'm completely fascinated by it. So props for getting your arms around it, particularly as you wrote it while we were all living in this kind of crazy situation where you didn't know what you could trust from one day to the next. I'm really interested, what are some of the things that you found out while you were writing it?

Rob Briggs

So a couple of things, and thanks very much for the for the intro Elle, it's so great to be here. A couple of things. I think one was about the US Navy team, the Blue Angels. So, very similar to our own Red Arrows, this is a display team. And whilst we may feel that trust is important in organisations, imagine flying high speed, wingtip to wingtip with a colleague. How much trust do you need there? So they have a very specific system. This is one of the things that I found out that they thought was particularly good particularly useful for generating trust. And this comes from a guy called Captain George Don. And he says, there are five C's. These five C's are Character - do I actually do what I say I'm going to do? Commitment - does my team believe me when I say that I'll be with them when times are rough? Competence - do they think I'm competent? Do they think that I'm doing everything I can to consistently improve my skills and stay relevant? Connection - does my team believe that I actually understand them? So, it's different from belief. I have to emphasise that. But do they genuinely think they understand the topics of issues that they're concerned with, and finally, Communication, which is obviously what this is all about. So, am I clear, concise, consistent and direct enough to be understood? I think that sometimes, depending on the culture, and particularly in terms of intercultural relationships, and communication, that can be a challenge. So the other thing, though, that I would touch on the other element, was really interesting was the influence of culture and micro-culture, on trust in organisations. So, by culture, I mean how an organisation interacts with its employees and how they interact with each other. This goes on at different levels. So that can be from an organisational perspective, it can also be from a national perspective and local perspective, and from the micro-culture perspective, a team based perspective, and we all, I think, occasionally have worked with support teams in our businesses like HR, like marketing, like IT. And those interactions only tend to come into place when there's either something we specifically need, or there's something gone wrong. So understanding what the actual culture of an organisation is, what the actual culture of a team is, rather than perhaps relying on assumptions and stereotypes, I would say, is something that is

essential for building trust. So that was one of the things that came through. I think, as I was doing my research,

Elle Bradley-Cox

I'm just completely interested in those five C's. I feel like they are going to be pretty important. Like you say, when you're flying wingtip to wingtip. Did the people that you interviewed feel like they actually were really useful tools to help them? Did they feel like things changed when they adopted that model?

Rob Briggs

I didn't ask them that to be completely honest. I didn't ask them what they thought of that specific model. My interest was more from a cultural perspective, because, as I'm sure you know, IABC is a global communications, professional association. So whilst I didn't ask them specifically what their thoughts were on a model like that, what I was interested in from the international perspective was, "okay, so how does trust work with you and your culture?" I don't know about a lot of your listeners but I've been very fortunate to have an internationally focused career and lived and worked in many different countries. And what I find wonderful about that is understanding how trust works in those different countries. And what the best way of helping to both influence people outside of your normal sphere of control, and helping them to influence others. So you get to a mutual position of support.

Elle Bradley-Cox

That is really interesting. Does it change then, depending on internationality or location?

Rob Briggs

Yes, very much so very much so. So I was quite surprised when a friend of mine, Paulo Suarez, who works for a mining association in Brazil, told me that trust - and I appreciate this may be a little bit of a generality - but he told me that trust in Brazilian organisations of working relationships can be ambiguous, because sometimes if in that culture, (I'm only talking from his perspective here). If somebody says "yes", they may not necessarily mean yes, they may, mean no. And we've all heard for instance, of interactions with different cultures where body language and gestures are different. Where somebody may be telling you "okay, I understand you" and they may be nodding furiously, and they say "yes". And we interpret that yes as being "Yes, I understood you" when in actual fact what the receiving person means is actually, "yes, I've heard your question" or "I've heard what it is that you're saying". It doesn't mean I'm necessarily understood. It doesn't mean I've got to do something about it. But yes.

Elle Bradley-Cox

How interesting. Thinking about the pandemic, I know you touched on it a little bit. Do you feel like organisational trust has been strengthened or weakened? I kind of feel like I'm in both camps here. I've seen examples of both. But what do you think?

Rob Briggs

I'm going to completely agree with you. I was thinking about this just before we came on air. And I'd say that it's both strengthened and weakened. In terms of strengthened, by working from home, for instance, I think that organisations have found that when they've given their employees the capabilities to work from home. I know,

I'm benefiting from this myself at the moment because my current client is based in London, and I actually live in Edinburgh. But it's possible for us to interact and to work quite closely. And previous clients have had this during the pandemic similar kinds of setups, I think, companies have realised that they can actually trust employees to get on with the work when they're outside of an office environment. But by and large, it's not going to go for everybody. By and large, there are challenges with the working from home model, and then the hybrid working model. For instance, you know, if you have personal issues, home-based issues that you need to deal with, how flexible is the organisation going to be? This, as well, differs by national culture. So for instance, I'm aware that with some of the financial services institutions in the US, there's been a drive from top management to get everybody back into the office. Whereas even parts and divisions - Citibank is a good example - of these organisations in the UK who said "no, let's do hybrid working, It's better, it's working for us." So there's a cultural angle to how you set up your working historically, from a trust based perspective. Sadly, I'm old enough to remember when Facebook actually came in, when LinkedIn actually came in. And at the time, the organisation I was working for wanted to block these applications from working on work computers, though the rationale behind that wasn't the applications, it was a question of trust. The theory from some of the managers was that if you have Facebook at work, you're going to spend all of your time playing on it, playing Farmville or something like that. If you have LinkedIn at work, you're going to spend all your time looking for new jobs rather than getting on it. And I think the challenge there from a trust perspective is about delineating between something that's a tool and a channel and actual behaviour. And if you're not doing the work, then that's a managerial issue. It's not a tool issue, it's not a channel issue like that. So from the strengthening perspective, working from home. From the weakening perspective, I'd say lack of personal contact with people. So we're talking now over a Teams call. I can see you, you can see me, but we have pictures that are a little bit fuzzy, not as sharp as they could be. I've never met you in person, we've never met in person. And so I can't tell and see and feel a lot of the nonverbal cues that we use to understand whether we can trust someone or not. I mean, Elle, I think I can trust you. But generally, if you're trying to build a relationship with someone, you need to be in front of them, because we receive so much information consciously and subconsciously, by the way in which people talk and their body language. So you can see on the screen at the moment, whilst I'm talking to you, I'm waving my arms everywhere, which usually means that the coffee is going to go over in a minute, but for this situation, it's just me trying to talk verbally and non verbally at the same time.

Elle Bradley-Cox

It's so interesting what you say. And very often it's unique to the individual as well. I remember speaking to somebody who had a severely disabled daughter, and she was saying, "I have my camera off all the time, because what you can't see is I'm changing her nappy and multitasking while we're talking and doing this", and she was like, "I have to laugh, because if I didn't laugh, I'd cry it just how much work I've got to do plus dealing with all of this". But she said "I laugh because I just think you're never going to know what's going on. And I'm here changing this nappy sorting her out, and, you know, managing to multitask on so many levels". And she said "it really works for me". Whereas then you've got other people who've been terribly lonely living on their own, and particularly when we were locked down and I just think an organisation someone like Nationwide that sort of got this Work From Anyway policy that really just has embraced and leaned into the fact that we're all different individuals. It's a really interesting one to watch. And I hear what you say. I've seen some of the financial services institutions very much calling for 'back to the office'. And I guess it's understanding why. And when you've got people who work all over the country or all over the world, understanding that need to commute when it's really important, is probably what's going to make it land with people, rather than just

feeling like, "Oh, I've got to get out of bed two hours early, hit the road, feel frustrated before I even start work". It's a really interesting dichotomy that we find ourselves in.

Rob Briggs

And I'd add to that as well, on the flip side, for people working from home, it's not necessarily a benefit, as you say. That commute as far as I understand, it has translated to additional working hours for for some people. On the other side of things, there are a lot of small businesses around business districts, certainly in the UK, London, other places, which are no longer viable anymore, because they haven't got the office footfall coming into work to support them.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Yeah, it's a real paradox to find ourselves in. And, you were talking about managers earlier and leaders. Have you ever met a leader who didn't think that organisational trust and truth was important?

Rob Briggs

Several of them. And it's not necessarily because they don't understand it or don't believe it, but their focus may well be on performance related targets that are tangible and easy to understand. So let's say for instance, a sales target, a financial target. If you've got something specifically that you need to aim for, that's easy to understand. Dealing with people is difficult because people are messy, and people do things that you don't necessarily expect them to do. And it can be easier and more simple to hang on to process and see processes the single source of truth. And one great example of this would be in employee surveys - not all employee surveys, I hasten to add. But if you're dealing with an organisation that has a lot of numbers involved with within it, if you were to conduct an employee survey that asked people to give rankings that can be turned into numbers or to percentages, there is an understandable bias towards saying, "right, okay, I've got seven out of 10 on this scale, that must mean that I'm a bad manager", or "there's a seven hours, 10 minutes, I'm a fantastic manager." And then there's a comparison that can go on. Equally, if you do the qualitative side of a survey to try and understand what's driving these particular numbers and understand that they're based on a snapshot in time when the survey took place, and depend on how the person was feeling towards the organisation at that point in time. And the more macro environment. I mean, I'd hate to be doing an employee engagement survey at Facebook, at the moment for all of these kinds of reasons. So I guess my point is that yes, there are plenty of people who may not see the relevance of softer skills, or trust and truth, if they are driven and rewarded according to more process related criteria. So if I'm going to get a bonus, based on scoring, seven out of 10 in my engagement survey, or hitting certain sales targets. If I have to do that, if I'm incentivized to do that in a certain way, then my behaviour will follow that way. If my boss is busy telling me "hit your targets, hit your targets, hit your targets", then that's what I'm doing, you know. He's in charge. She's in charge of, basically, my job and my income if I don't do what they say, Where am I going to go?

Elle Bradley-Cox

What would you say to them? If you had your moment?

Rob Briggs

What I would say is "Be kind, be consistent, and then, be an adult?" So I think occasionally people can get scared, particularly line managers. I still think that there is an issue with training line managers, certainly in UK

organisations, training to lead people there. I'm generalising, but often I see managers in organisations who've been promoted because of their excellent technical capabilities, then they're promoted into a position where they have to manage people and they have a team of 10. What do I do with that? And in areas where there's ambiguity, we tend to assume as we would normally go for, move towards areas of certainty, so rely on process again, which could then, if you're not understanding and addressing how people are treated, how you want people to be treated, a bit like how you might want to be treated. So you may find then that the levels of trust within that organisation start to break down if you're not paying attention to the people side of things,

Elle Bradley-Cox

I completely agree. And I've definitely been definitely been in a place where it was all about targets. And you just think, "where's the human touch here?" And actually, when you do focus back in on your humans and the people you have working for, you get far greater rewards than if you're kind of constantly slave driving.

Rob Briggs

Yeah, I think there's another good example, though similar kind of trust element, where - and this has come out from some of the recent reporting around Facebook, (not denigrating Facebook, to one jot), there was an example where a person was concerned about Facebook's approach to protecting teenagers through their platforms, and protecting more vulnerable people. And there was apparently a lack of understanding of what the impact of the configuration their social platforms was particularly on young girls. And it brought it home to me when somebody said, "well hang about, you're this person working in Facebook, how would you like it? If it was your daughter who was getting body shamed? If it was your kids who are being bullied? Online, they don't, you know, because of how ubiquitous social media is today and how we can get online so easily. When I was growing up, and I'm a little bit long in the tooth now, we didn't have this. I do think it's brought many, many benefits, but equally, a kid in the 70s, or the 80s, could switch off, they could go read a book or go play somewhere. Whereas today, we have an addictive almost "always on" culture. So the point really is about focusing, not necessarily just on the process side of things again, but but also what's the impact on people. If you think about that, from your own personal perspective, rather than organisational perspective, and then bring that back to to the workplace, you may find that degree of empathy helps the organisation and your team and your colleagues to work better together.

Elle Bradley-Cox

I love your point on empathy. I mean, if trust has been eroded in an organisation, is it possible to build it back? Is empathy, the key?

Rob Briggs

I think empathy is one of the keys. I'd say that it's more about integrity and consistency. Trust and reputation management have very similar parallels in that it takes long amounts of time of exposure to build a reputation, simply with trust, we base our levels of trust with other people on the amount of time that we spend with them, and our experience of their behaviour. So when they say, "I'll pick you up at five, I'll be there to pick you up at five", when they say "I'll deliver this piece by the end of the week", do they actually do that? And if they can't, can they come back to you? Or do they come back to you and say, "Look, I'm sorry, I know, I promised I did a script for you. It's taken me a bit longer than I estimated. Do you mind if we do this by Tuesday next week?" And that gives people the counterparty the opportunity to think through the request and do something, do

something about it. Whereas if you keep schtum, because you are not necessarily confident in how the other person is going to react, then that turns into a different matter. And that's where trust starts to break down. So, going back to your question, how can we rebuild trust if it's been eroded? A lot of the time I'd say it's treating people how you'd like to be treated yourself. Be consistent in your behaviour so that people have a good understanding they can project forward what they think you're going to do or how they think you're going to react and that they feel personally safe, that they're not going to get targeted. That the person or the organisation would tackle the problem, and not the person assuming that this is a business issue. So be consistent, is what I'd say.

Elle Bradley-Cox

I feel like this is life advice for every human, let alone every workplace. Just be consistent, show up for each other, be honest. It's fascinating. I want to talk about measurement. It is a perennial issue in internal comms. It comes up all the time on every single webinar that we do. IC colleagues are asking us about measurements. I mean, is trust measurable?

Rob Briggs

Edelman, the PR firm, put out a Trust Barometer every single year. So the short answer is yes. Is it measurable, directly or indirectly is perhaps a slightly different question. So trust is a bit like communications and the perennial communication measurement issue. Yes, you can measure it, but it tends to be indirect. You're measuring the impact and the outcomes of what it is that you're trying to do. If you're speaking from a qualitative perspective. So if you're trying to understand sentiment, like trust, if you have something that you can measure, it's not hard to measure sentiment, or to measure trust, as long as you have a tested questionnaire. Even if you wanted to do it on the back of a cigarette packet - nobody smokes anymore - If you wanted to do it in a very simple way, just asking stakeholders about a particular issue, whether it's trust related or not, and saying, "okay, on a scale of one to five, how good do you feel about this proposition?" Is it's 1, where it's, "I don't like your proposition at all". Is it 5 where it's "Yeah, I think this is good". And set that as a benchmark. And then when you've gone through the process that you're measuring, and maybe this is a trust process. Let's say you revisit that in a short period of time and say, "okay, we spoke a couple of weeks ago, this is what you said, then here are the actions we've taken to rebuild trust with you or your department or whatever. What score would you give to it now?" And they say, "oh, okay, well, it was a 1 but I'm feeling better because we've implemented X,Y and Z. My team are talking to me, I'm taking note of their birthdays, I'm giving them incentives. We go out for lunch once a week", all this kind of thing. "And I always remember to tackle the business issue, not yell at people for doing something that I think has been particularly egregious". So yes, the answer is it is measurable - communications is eminently measurable. And I would thoroughly recommend a book on measurements by a lady called Susan Walker, who you may have come across. Susan, I'd say, is the doyen of communication measurement in the UK, so very worth tapping into her skills and her experience in her books.

Elle Bradley-Cox

I feel like there will be a lot of internal communicators out there breathing a sigh of relief. Last question, really. We've seen disinformation run rife throughout the pandemic. And before, in politics. It feels like we're always fighting for transparency, I guess, wondering whether to trust what we read, which is inherently a problem for internal communicators. So, what can we do to champion truth in our organisation?

Rob Briggs

That's the hardest question, I think, because the answer is, "depends". And it depends, I think, on the person who's asking the question and what level of safety they feel in doing that, and what activities the organisation is undertaking, and whether they feel that those activities are aligned to their own personal values. So, organisations spend a lot of time and effort - certainly bigger organisations - promoting their values and telling everybody that their people are their best asset. Is that necessarily true? Sometimes it will be, sometimes not. So, if you want to focus on that, then I would say instead of telling people that you have trust values, you have integrity values, you have honesty values, etc, or telling your key stakeholders that, actually live those values and ensure that you have an understanding through engagement surveys, for instance, through talking to your staff about the degree of alignment between organisational values, and how the workers are actually behaving. And if the workers are not behaving in line with the organisational values, there's a gap. Where's that gap? It's possibly in the management layer where people have not necessarily been trained to the degree that they need to in order to motivate, engage and encourage their colleagues and their teams to work in line with both the organization's objectives and with the softer areas and elements of the values of the organisation.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Yeah, like that. I think I'd probably add to that, if any internal communicators are setting up some principles that they want to hold themselves to account to in their writing, definitely stick down trust as an important value and truth as something you aspire to as a team because it will pay dividends.

Rob Briggs

Can I kind of just build on that slightly, if you don't mind. Completely agree, and when I was being taught how to how to write for news, I was told to write in a way that was clear, concise, credible, and relevant. And the part that refers to trust there is going to be credible. I can give one example where I was working for a client and I was asked to produce a newsletter, internal newsletter, that basically said things that weren't true. And it was used as a tool to promote a very senior person in this organisation. And all their achievements and to assign all the credit to them. And again, it wasn't true. And in that circumstance, I was lucky. I was able to turn around and say, "look, guys, I don't know who you're going to get to do this, but I wouldn't advise you do this, number one. And number two, I can't help you." But I was fortunate to be in a position where I could do that. There's a lot of people who rely on their job to put food on the table, and they may not feel that they have the opportunity to speak truth to power. I'd say do it if you can, if you can't, secondly, suck in your breath and look for a new employer.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Yeah, completely agree. It's a really, really tricky position to be in. But you know, when you think of colleagues and what they're reading, they can smell puff writing a mile off, and they're going to call time on it. They really are.

Rob Briggs

Yeah, so you actually decrease engagement with your organisation. You can measure that as well, you can measure where organisations are feeling the pinch, in terms of credibility. And this is this is a discussion that I've had with quite a few CFOs In the past, how do you measure communications? How do you measure how people

are feeling within an organisation? And you can see it by how people vote with their feet. Because whatever you're doing in an organisation, it's going to get out to the external world. So if I'm going to the pub, and someone says to me, "Rob, where do you work?" And I say, Well, I work at "X, Y and Z" company. "Oh, yeah, I've heard about them. They're really great". That's good. That's kudos. "Yeah, my mom likes me working there." Or if somebody says to me, "Oh, God, I heard that they're atrocious." You know, the local recruiters are telling you, they're seeing 1,000 CVs from this organisation every single day, what's going to happen? So, there are ways where you can quantify goodwill, where you can quantify trust, where you can quantify engagement. As mentioned before, it can be slightly offset, but there's no reason not to try. Can give you just one really, really good example motivational example? The underwear company Spanx. Literally, yesterday, the CEO of Spanx said we've been really fortunate. I think, Sara Blakely, there we go. They had a huge investment by private equity company, Blackstone. And what Sarah did was she gave every single employee \$10,000 and two First Class plane tickets. I want to go work there.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Why? Why did she do that?

Rob Briggs

Because she got this huge investment. And it was to say 'thank you' for everybody who'd helped to build the company to the position that it got to. Another good example, particularly from a trust perspective is a guy called Dan Price. Dan's the CEO of a credit card services company in Seattle, and a few years back, Dan decided to cut his salary. I think he was on a million dollar salary, something like that, and he redistributed to the workforce. So, now everybody who works for Dan gets \$70,000 a year - everybody, there is no distinction. And he was criticized, particularly by right wing media in the US said "you're introducing socialism, this is communism, blah, blah, blah. It will fail. Dan's workforce has doubled, and his revenue has tripled. Something's working.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Oh Rob, I've really enjoyed talking to you. Final question. Thinking about the people making the biggest impact in the world of work, right now, who would you nominate as your 2021? World Changer?

Oh, that's really, really difficult. And I've thought about this a bit. I would actually, from a business point of view, go back to Dan, who I just mentioned. Because I'd say looking at different business models, it doesn't necessarily have to be the way that you have a hierarchical structure in your organisation. If you actually step back and think about how organisations talk to each other, how they work with each other, the lines of communication, don't go down straight from the don't cascade straight from the top. People talk to each other. Someone in sales might speak to someone in finance, might speak to someone in the HR. So I'd say that someone like Dan, who is building equity and equality into an organisation has proved that you don't have to follow the top-down organisational model in terms of hierarchy and in terms of funding.

Elle Bradley-Cox

Sign me up. Thank you so much for your time today on World Changers, Rob, really enjoyed your company and huge amounts of insight. I'm sure our listeners will get loads out of it. Thank you.

Rob Briggs

No, that's great. Thanks very much. Thanks for having me

Elle Bradley-Cox

Our huge thanks to our contributors. If this episode got you thinking about trust, do come and chat to us over on Twitter @scarlettabbott or drop us an email at Hello@scarlettabbott.co.uk. We'll see you next time for another dive into World Changers 2021.

Elle Bradley-Cox

World Changers is a podcast by employee engagement consultancy scarlettabbott, hosted by Elle Bradley-Cox. Find out more at scarlettabbott.co.uk