TOWARD A THEORY OF TRUST DEVELOPMENT, VIOLATION, AND REPAIR ACROSS CULTURES

Trust Violations:
Mistakes, betrayals, and other unmet expectations can cause trust to erode, which can lead to resentment and withdrawal.

Grounded Theory Approach:
Data were gathered without formal hypotheses. This approach involved: qualitative data collection (interviews), coding data, identification of themes, connecting and interrelating data, and creating an explanatory theory.

Sample Demographics:
The 128 interviewees were members of the FIT Community, of which 55% were male and 70% were international. National Origins: US 25.2%, China 21.7%, India 25.2%, Middle East 23.5%, and Brazil 4.3%.

Findings & Implications:
Our research resulted in the novel framework of the trust lifecycle in work contexts seen above, capturing how individuals feel, think, and behave in multiple feedback loops when their trust is developed, broken, and repaired. Building or breaking trust involves meeting behavioral expectations and standards held by other individuals. When repairing trust, an individual can use different methods, such as apology, explanation, and going above and beyond in completing tasks. The salience and importance of these expectations, affective-cognitive reactions, and behavioral responses to them also differ across cultural groups. For example, completing tasks (performance), being reliable (predictability), and being unselfish (benevolence) were universal expectations in working together, while respect was emphasized only by Chinese participants, and keeping shared info private (confidentiality) only by Middle Eastern participants. Being confident in others to perform well after trust development was most mentioned by Indian participants.

So What Does it All Mean?
To achieve effectiveness in any situation, individuals must be trusted by those with whom they are working. In order to maintain or repair trust in culturally diverse settings, we provide these recommendations:

1. Spend some time getting to know one another. Trust develops more naturally and easily in a working relationship when individuals are more familiar with each other’s expectations, and cultural values.
2. Discuss expectations with collaborators up front. Make sure you know who is responsible for what and when.
3. Communicate promptly with your other collaborators if you have any problems with completing your work or attending a meeting.
4. In times of conflict, maintain a polite and respectful demeanor when expressing your own concerns.

“Trust is like blood pressure. It’s silent, vital to good health, and if abused, it can be deadly.”
— Frank Sonenberg

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