

# Trust-me:

A concept and metric to embed in leaders rendering them more effective

by

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## Introduction

Trust is the foundation of any successful relationship, whether it be personal or professional. Building trust requires effort and time, but the benefits of a trustworthy relationship are immeasurable. Trust can lead to increased communication, better collaboration, and a stronger sense of community. In this article, we will explore the strategies and techniques available to leaders that can be used to establish trust in their relationships.

Trust is an essential concept in many of the articles, books, and research focus of the coauthors of this article. Dolan (2011, and 2020), for example, refers to TRUST as the **“Super-Value”** or the **“Value of Values”** or the **“Mother of all Values”**<sup>1</sup>. Garti and Tzafrir, in a recent book (2022) suggested trust to be a powerful concept for synchronizing work family relationship<sup>2</sup>. As researchers, consultants, and change agents, we observed that a leader that wishes to be effective in his/her role, needs to embed the triple anchors in his/her toolbox: 1) A clear definition of what trust means (and what is not trust), 2) a clear methodology to assess trust, and 3) evidence-based tool (or tools) to assess the genuine level of trust that he/she experiences. We therefore thought that time has come to explore these three components, which we have been researching and studying since 2000. This is needed because managers, leaders, and employees across organizations frequently use the term trust, even though it is not very well understood, neither is it clear as to how to build it and what measures/tools are available to enhance it.

Enhancing trust in organizations is a complex and challenging process that requires a well-planned methodology and effective tools to achieve success. Trust is the foundation of any healthy and productive relationship. Without trust, employees can feel disengaged and unmotivated, resulting in a decline in productivity, quit the organization and overall poor organizational performance.

However, enhancing trust within an organization is not an easy task. It requires a significant investment of time and effort, along with the right “know-how”. Leaders must not only be committed to creating a culture of trust and be willing to make difficult decisions to achieve this goal, but also have a firm understanding of how to do so and what works against building trust. Additionally, trust takes time to build, and it can be easily lost if not nurtured and maintained.

Simply stated, the objective of this paper is threefold: (1) to shed light on what trust means in organizational contexts (2) to describe a 360 methodology to assess the leaders’ trust (ranging from self-trust, subordinate trust in the leader, colleagues trust in the leader and

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<sup>1</sup> Dolan S.L. (2011) Coaching by Values. iUniverse; Dolan S.L. (2020) The Secrets of Coaching and Leading by Values. Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> Garti, A., & Tzafrir, S. (2022). Work–Family Triangle Synchronization: Employee, manager, and spouse. De Gruyter.

superior trusts in the leader), and (3) to describe the latest applications of the TRUST-ME scale that that can be used as a gamification tool and (online assessment).

Leaders' trust strives to create a safe and supportive environment where all stakeholders attempt to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. To achieve that, we need to embed the three principles describe above.

### **So, what exactly is TRUST?**

Trust is about having confidence in someone or something. It's about believing that they will do what they say they will do, it is the ability to reduce uncertainty as a result of a shared positive history, and that they have your best interests at heart<sup>3</sup>. However, trust can mean different things to different people. For some, it may be about reliability and consistency. For others, it may be about honesty and transparency. And for others still, it may be about a sense of connection and understanding. One thing that is clear, though, is that trust is vital in any relationship, whether it's personal or professional. Without trust, it's difficult to build strong, lasting connections with others. It's hard to feel secure and confident in your interactions with them.

Some analyze trust as a concept with two components: *trustfulness* and *trustworthiness*. This approach combines the attitude of one actor with the characteristics of another actor. A host of scholars stress the importance of being trustful. In the idealistic tradition, faith and social education nurturing positive expectations are the keys to trust and cooperation. However, trustworthiness can play a major role in this attitude. Overoptimistic or deceitful promises will fool and disappoint the trustful actor, making him/her distrustful, while experience of trustworthy partners will enhance further cooperation. Hence, the degree of trustworthiness is the central factor for whether trust increases or decreases<sup>4</sup>.

Mind you, trustfulness refers to the willingness to trust others, to believe in their intentions and actions without questioning them. It is a positive trait that allows individuals to build strong relationships and foster collaboration. Trustfulness is often associated with openness and vulnerability, as it requires individuals to let their guard down and rely on others. On the other hand, trustworthiness refers to the ability to be trusted, to act in a reliable and honest way that inspires confidence in others. It is a character trait that is built over time through consistent behavior and actions. Trustworthiness is often associated with integrity and responsibility, as it requires individuals to be accountable for their actions and to follow through on their commitments. It also involves compassion and benevolence, as one needs to believe that others will act with kindness and with their best interest in mind.

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<sup>3</sup> See: Tzafrir, S. S., & Dolan, S. L. (2004). Trust me: A scale for measuring manager-employee trust. *Management Research: Journal of the Iberoamerican Academy of Management*, 2(2), 115-132.

<sup>4</sup> See: Tullberg J., (2008) Trust—The importance of trustfulness versus trustworthiness, *The Journal of Socio-Economic*, Vol 37(5): 2059-2071

While trustfulness and trustworthiness are both important, they are not interchangeable. Trustfulness can be a positive quality, but it can also be risky if it is not accompanied by discernment and caution. Blindly trusting others, unconditional trust, can lead to disappointment and even harm if the other person proves to be untrustworthy. On the other hand, trustworthiness is a foundational quality that underpins all healthy relationships. Without trustworthiness, trust cannot be built or maintained. Trustworthiness requires individuals to be honest, reliable, and consistent in their behavior, even when it is difficult or inconvenient.

All in all, research shows that leaders who display trust, create a positive culture which makes a huge difference in terms of the commitment and productivity of members of the organization (See Exhibit 1)

Exhibit 1:  
some tangible consequences connected to leaders who generate trust

|                  |              |            |             |
|------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Experience       | Enhance      | Report     | Report      |
| Over <b>40%</b>  | Productivity | <b>74%</b> | <b>106%</b> |
| Less waste       | by about     | less       | more        |
| and enhance      | <b>50%</b>   | Stress     | energetic   |
| Resource Savings |              |            | at work     |

Source: : <https://esp.6seconds.org/2017/08/24/la-neurociencia-de-la-sala-al-directorio/>

**The spiritual dimension of Trust**

Is there such a thing as spiritual trust? The answer is yes. Among the types of trust, it focuses on faith and religious doctrine. People with this type of trust believe in all the spiritual energy that surrounds human beings. Obviously, it's a very subjective trust that depends on the context and culture.

The phrase "In God We Trust" is a well-known and significant motto in the United States. It is printed on its currency, displayed in government buildings, and has been a part of the US

national identity for over 150 years. Despite its origins in wartime and Cold War politics, the motto has endured as a symbol of American values and identity. Regardless of one's personal beliefs, the phrase "In God We Trust" remains an important part of the US national heritage. It represents its history, values, and commitment to a higher power. And it serves as a reminder that, even in times of hardship and division, one can find strength and unity in one's faith. Moreover, the phrase is a testament to the importance of faith and spirituality in American life. It acknowledges that religion and spirituality are not just personal beliefs, but also a fundamental part of the nation's heritage and culture. It is a call to embrace one's faith and to seek guidance from a higher power in times of need.

### **The biological and neuroscience base of Trust**

We are born to trust – to engage with others and rely on them for survival. This innate human condition served critical evolutionary purposes in early hunter-gather societies that depended on collaboration and concern with non-familial members.

The neuroscience base of trust is a fascinating topic that explores the intricacies of the human brain and its ability to build and maintain trust. The neuroscience of trust is based on the understanding of the brain's reward system, which is responsible for regulating our emotions and behaviors. Studies have shown that when we trust someone, our brains release oxytocin, a hormone that is associated with social bonding and attachment. This chemical reaction creates a sense of warmth, closeness, and intimacy, which reinforces the bond of trust between individuals.

Furthermore, the prefrontal cortex, a region of the brain responsible for decision-making and social behavior, is also involved in the process of building trust. This area of the brain is responsible for evaluating social cues and determining whether someone is trustworthy. When we encounter someone who displays trustworthy behavior, the prefrontal cortex sends signals to the reward system, which reinforces the bond of trust.

However, the neuroscience base of trust is not limited to the reward system and prefrontal cortex. Other regions of the brain, such as the amygdala, play a crucial role in the process of building and maintaining trust. The amygdala is responsible for processing emotions, particularly fear and anxiety, which can have a significant impact on our ability to trust others. When we encounter a potential threat, the amygdala sends signals to the prefrontal cortex, which evaluates the situation and determines whether it is safe to trust the other person.

In conclusion, the neuroscience base of trust is a complex and multifaceted topic that involves a combination of cognitive, emotional, and social processes. It highlights the importance of social bonding and attachment in human relationships and provides insight

into the mechanisms that underlie trust. By understanding the neuroscience of trust, we can develop a greater appreciation for the power of trust in our lives and work towards building stronger, more meaningful relationships with others.<sup>5</sup>

### **The costs and consequences of mistrust in an organization's leader**

Today, mistrust has become a pervasive issue that has far-reaching consequences. In organizations, mistrust can create an environment of fear, doubt, and uncertainty. The costs of mistrust are significant, as it can lead to a breakdown in communication, a lack of collaboration, and ultimately, a loss of productivity.

In the workplace, mistrust can be equally damaging. It can create a toxic environment where employees are suspicious of one another, and where collaboration is difficult to achieve. Mistrust can lead to a lack of innovation and creativity, as employees are hesitant to share their ideas and opinions for fear of being judged or criticized. And it is difficult to recover from mistrust, as research shows that it takes approximately 6 trust-building actions to compensate for one act that breached trust<sup>6</sup>.

Mistrust in the workplace can have serious consequences for both employees and the organization. Firstly, mistrust can lead to a toxic work environment. When employees don't trust their leader, it creates a culture of suspicion and paranoia. This leads employees to feel isolated and unsupported, which can have a negative impact on their mental health and well-being. A toxic leader can also lead to high turnover rates, as employees may feel compelled to escape the negative atmosphere.

Secondly, mistrust in the leadership of an organization can decrease productivity. When employees don't trust each other, it leads to lack of collaboration and communication. Important information being withheld or not shared, which can lead to mistakes and delays. When employees don't feel comfortable working with their leaders, they may also be less likely to ask for help, which can further decrease productivity.

Thirdly, when employees don't trust their leader, they may feel unsupported and undervalued. This leads to a lack of motivation and enthusiasm for their work, which ultimately impacts their performance. When employees are unhappy in their jobs, it can

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<sup>5</sup> In January-February 2017, Harvard Business Review has published an amazing article by Paul J. Zak who covers with great details the neuroscience of trust. Highly recommended.

<sup>6</sup> Baumeister, R., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenaur, C., & Vohs, K. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. Review of General Psychology 323–370.

also lead to increased absenteeism and presenteeism, which can further impact the organization's bottom line.

### The paradox of employing “inward- trust” but “outward - zero trust”

So far, we have argued that trust is a valuable commodity. It is especially important to nourish it within the people that work in the same team or organization. We call “*in inward trust*”. But, With the rise of cyber-attacks and political turmoil, it's becoming increasingly difficult to rely on others. That's where the concept of "Zero Trust" comes in. This approach to security is gaining popularity in both international politics and the digital security sector. The idea behind Zero Trust is simple: trust no one. This means that every user, device, and application must be verified and authenticated before being granted access to a network or system. It also means that access is granted on a need-to-know basis, rather than blanket permission.

While the concept of Zero Trust may seem extreme, it's becoming increasingly necessary in today's world. Cyber-attacks and political turmoil are on the rise, and trust is becoming harder to come by. Zero Trust provides a solution to these problems by ensuring that every user, device, and application is verified and authenticated before being granted access. It's a small price to pay for the security of sensitive information and the protection of our democracy.

### Leadership and Trust : The usefulness of the TRUST-ME scale and tools

When it comes to measuring trust, it is important to consider the various factors that contribute to its formation. To measure trust, various concepts and scales have been developed. These include the Trust Scale, the Trust in Organizations Scale, and the Interpersonal Trust Scale, among others. These scales are designed to assess different aspects of trust, such as trust in specific individuals, trust in organizations, and trust in oneself.

Many of the conflicts in organizations arise because leaders do not have the capacity to generate and/or sustain trust. How can a leader have followers if they don't trust him/her? Unfortunately, research suggests that in more and more companies (families included if we use it as a metaphor for an organization), it seems that people have lost trust in their leaders and their peers. We note this lack of trust in businesses, government agencies, education, and even in our churches (you only must listen to the scandals that are published on the corrupt behavior of some priests). This general distrust in our leaders points to a cultural



breakdown. The problem is not a lack of leaders but a lack of a climate of trust where leadership is possible, without which it is impossible.

Unless followers feel confident in fairness and reliability in their leaders, they will not continue following them. Trust can significantly alter individual and organizational effectiveness. It is trust, more than power and hierarchy, that really makes an organization work effectively.

So, if we know that trust is a prerequisite for any attempt by the leader to change the organizational culture, and to sustain the reliability, motivation, and behavior of the followers, why don't we help leaders to improve trust? In our opinion, people use the word trust too often in making a generic reference and therefore until we have a clear metric to measure it, we will continue to operate without a compass. The consequence will be simple: the more a leader uses the word trust (without precision), the more the followers and companions will lose interest in listening to him/her and it will naturally lead to disappointment in our leaders.

For this reason, at the beginning of the 2000s, we began to study trust in work settings, in a rigorous and systematic way. In 2004, we published for the first time an article where we identified the three key dimensions of the concept of trust (acronym RCH), as we refined the tools to measure it. The three dimensions that emerged from the numerous scientific studies were:

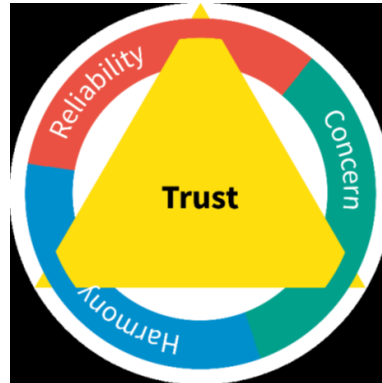
**R**eliability, **C**oncern, and **H**armony (See Exhibit 2).

Let's elaborate a bit on each of these dimensions:

- **Reliability** is a leader's competence that shows that he is true to his words, makes him/her do what they say, and does it consistently. This dimension is connected to the efficiency of performance.
- **Concern** is equated with the interest that the leader really displays in interacting with his/her subordinates. The leader is involved affectively and emotionally in the relationship and shares common and complementary goals. It also shows that the leader is concerned and manifests genuine interest in problems that his/her followers and companions might have and shares values such as empathy or sympathy.
- **Harmony** occurs when there is an ethical-social bond between the leader and his follower. That means that there are elements such as integrity, respect, and other ethical-social facets.



**Exhibit 2: Tzafrir and Dolan RCH model of Trust<sup>7</sup>**



**Trust assessment: A Demonstration of tools that are based on (a) gamification (b) digital online**

Entrusting my leader assessment and calculating the trust scores in each dimension is provided in Exhibit 3.

<sup>7</sup> This model was published for the first time in 2004, but was studied in other contexts many times by Tzafrir and Dolan and many other collaborators. It was tested in many cultures and sectors. Recently Research gate has advised the authors that over 9000 researchers have downloaded and/or used this model in their own research; it seems that of all alternative models of trust, this one has become the most popular and most cited. To read more: Tzafrir S., Dolan S.L. (2004) Trust me: A scale for measuring manager-employee trust, *Management Research: Journal of the Iberoamerican Academy of Management*, Vol. 2(2):115–132, <https://doi.org/10.1108/15365430480000505>; Dolan S.L., Tzafrir S., Baruch Y. (2005) Testing the causal relationships between procedural justice, trust, and organizational citizenship behavior, *Revue de gestion de ressources humaines*, Vol. 57:79–89; Mach M., Dolan S.L., Tzafrir S. (2010) The differential effect of team members' trust on team performance: The mediation role of team cohesion, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 83(3):771–794 (<http://doi.org/10.1348/096317909X473903>); Chaluz H., Tzafrir S., Dolan S.L. (2015) Actionable trust in service organizations: A multi-dimensional perspective, *Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 31(1):31–39; Capell B., Tzafrir S., Enosh G., Dolan S.L. (2018) Explaining sexual minorities' disclosure: The role of trust embedded in organizational practices, *Organization Studies*, Vol. 39(7):947–973 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0170840617708000>.

**Exhibit 3: Entrusting You:**  
**A Scale for measuring the level of trust I have in my Leader/Manager/Boss**

Here are 21 statements that demonstrate dimensions of trust that you have in your manager/leader/boss (select a focal person). The scale is based on the works of Tzafrir and Dolan, 2004).<sup>8</sup>

Indicate the degree to which you agree with each statement by using the following scale.

**1**                      **2**                      **3**                      **4**                      **5**  
*Disagree strongly*   *Disagree*   *neither agree nor disagree*   *Agree*   *strongly Agree*

*Think about yourself and the person in your organization that you wish to assess. This can be a direct manager, a colleague at work, a leader or the so-called Boss. For each statement, write the number that best describes how much you agree or disagree with each statement.*

| Item # | Statement  | Score (1-5) | Card Label                      |
|--------|--|-------------|---------------------------------|
| 1      | My needs and desires are very important to both of us  |             | Shares needs & desires          |
| 2      | I can count on my manager/leader to help me if I experience difficulties   |             | Lends a hand at difficulties    |
| 3      | My manager/leader is sensitive and quite open-minded when he /she has to deal with me  |             | Open up                         |
| 4      | People around me succeed because my manager/leader do not let conflicts to arise (he/she don't let people step on each other)          |             | Resolves conflicts              |
| 5      | My manager/leader keeps the promises he/she makes  |             | Keeps promises                  |
| 6      | My manager/leader looks out for me to ensure that I get what I deserve   |             | Ensures equity                  |
| 7      | My manager/leader has lots of knowledge about situations that we are in together and knows what needs to be done.                      |             | Have knowledge and competence   |
| 8      | My manager/leader is known to be successful in the things he/she attempts to accomplish  |             | Success track                   |
| 9      | If I make a mistake, my manager/leader will "forgive and forget" in order to not upset me  |             | Forgives unintentional mistakes |
| 10     | My manager/leader actions and behaviors are supportive and harmonious  |             | Harmonious action               |
| 11     | My manager/leader actions are consistent with their words (he/she "walk the talk")   |             | Walks the talk                  |
| 12     | My manager/leader is known to generate comfort and thus I I feel unthreatened in sharing personal or intimate information with him/her |             | Generates comfort               |

<sup>8</sup> Tzafrir and Dolan 2004. Op. Cit.

|    |   |  |                                 |
|----|---|--|---------------------------------|
| 13 | There is a lot of warmth and caring in the relationships between my manager/leader and myself                                   |  | Warmth & Caring relationships   |
| 14 | My manager/leader will makes personal sacrifices for me in order to maintain the relationships                                  |  | Engage in personal Sacrifices   |
| 15 | My manager/leader expresses his/her true feelings about important issues that concerns us                                       |  | Manifest true feelings          |
| 16 | My manager/leader brings the best his /her humanistic traits in order to sustain our good relationships                         |  | Brings the best human character |
| 17 | My manager/leader shows genuine concern to my needs and qualities   |  | Show concern                    |
| 18 | All in all, my manager/leader is a reliable person  |  | Exhibits reliability            |
| 19 | My manager/leader focuses on the message, (not on his messenger status), to ensure that he/she is aligned with his/her promises |  | Consistent actions              |
| 20 | My manager/leader is often collaborative and cooperative with me  |  | Collaborates                    |
| 21 | My manager/leader makes an extra effort to maintain harmonious relationships between us   |  | Maintains harmony               |

### Interpreting the results

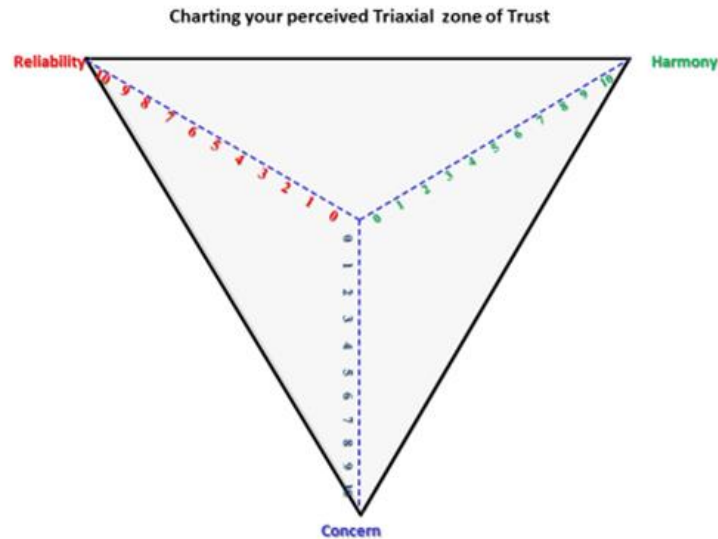
Calculate your total score by adding the following items.

| Entrust dimension | Items                  | Total Score |
|-------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Reliability       | 2, 5, 7,8,11,18,19     |             |
| Harmony           | 4,10,12, 14, 16, 20,21 |             |
| Concern           | 1, 3, 6,9, 13,15,17    |             |
|                   |                        |             |

- Please retake the scores obtained before and place them respectively for each dimension in column 2.
- Take your score and divide it by 7 and then multiply each by 2, and place each of them in Column 3 respectively. This will generate a final score on a scale range from 1-10 to be used in the Template.

| 1               | 2                     | 3  |
|-----------------|-----------------------|--|
| Trust Dimension | Score obtained before | Final calculated score on a scale of 1-10 to be placed on the template |
| Reliability     |                       |  |
| Harmony         |                       |  |
| concern         |                       |  |

- Now, mark your final score on each of the corresponding dimensions in the triaxial ENTRUST template. Once marked, connect the dots with a straight line. Please shade the area. This is your perceived TRUST zone with the person that you are assessing.



### The Trust Kit<sup>9</sup>



The Trust Kit was developed to perform the same exercise as in Exhibit 3, but in a fun and interactive fashion. Research shows that this gamification approach tends to yield more effective results than simple explanations of principles by tapping into psychological and motivational aspects of human behavior. The Trust Kit contains 21 cards (in alignment with the 21 questions), each of which corresponds with a dimension of the RCH model, with distinct color background. Seven cards are **Red** (representing **Reliability**), 7 Cards are **Green** (representing **Concern**), and 7 cards are **Blue** (representing **Harmony**).

Players select cards in accordance with the person being assessed (boss, manager, leader) and place it on the mate (Exhibit 4).

<sup>9</sup> More information on the Trust Kit is available at: [www.learningaboutvalues.com](http://www.learningaboutvalues.com)

Exhibit 4: The mate of Trust based on the RCH model

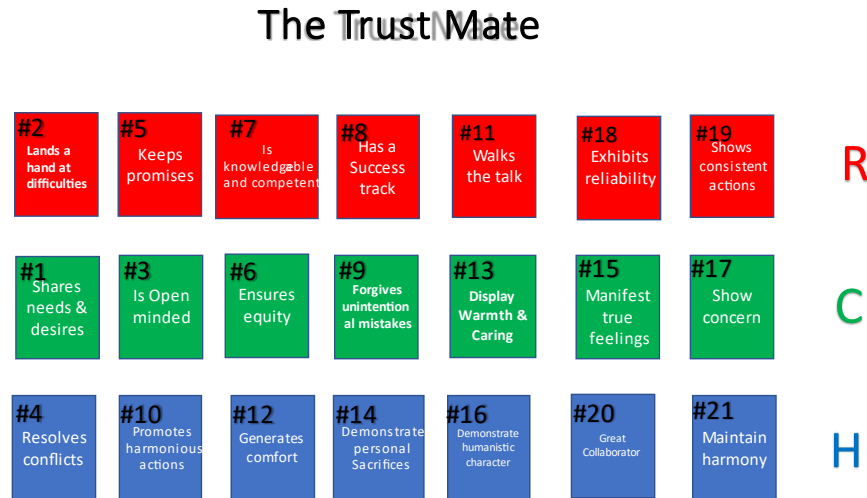


Exhibit 5a:  
An example of a leader assessing the level of Trust he/she generates with a subordinate.

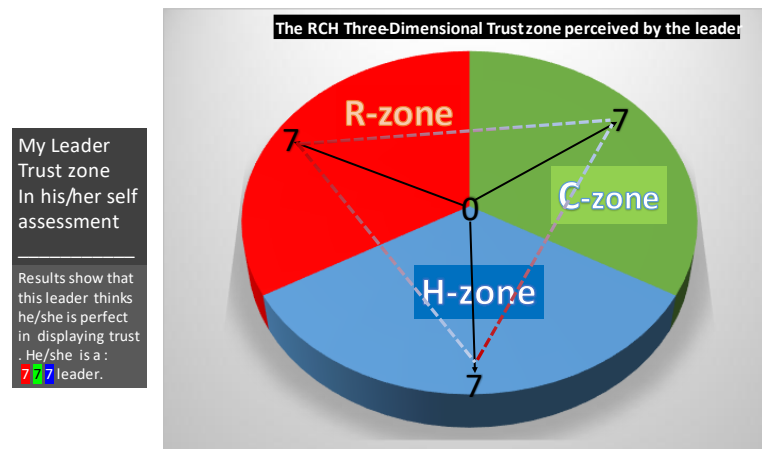
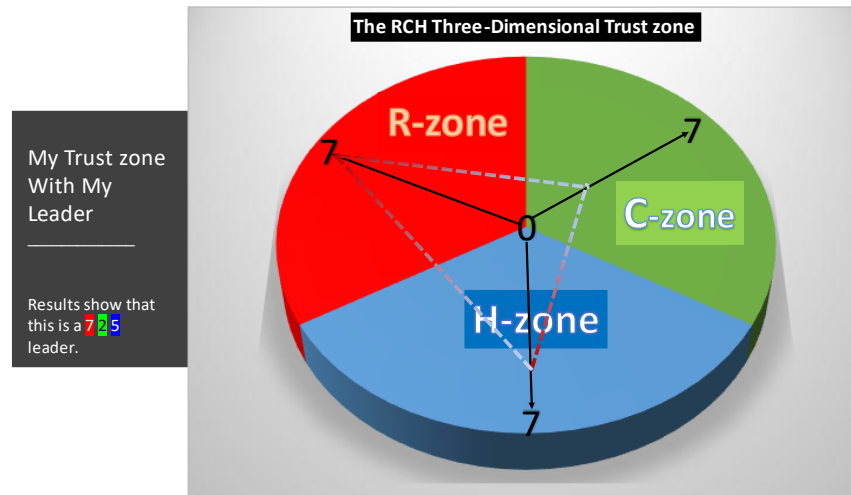


Exhibit 5b:  
An example of a leader being assessed by his/her subordinate.



When you compare the two assessments, and can also see the gap visually, you get an idea of what needs to be worked on to improve the level of trust between a leader and a subordinate. You can add more assessment in the 3600 patterns, to identify more gaps (with a team, with peers, etc.,) thereby improving the diagnosis. Obviously, this will be a cumbersome process, and this is the reason for the development of the digital tool that is described in the next section.

#### A digital online tool to assess trust in the organization

The Digital Trust Assessment has been developed as part of a program and philosophy called "Leadership by Values®." This program provides stakeholders with the ability to evaluate their leaders in three areas: 1) assess their core values and measure how well they fit with the organization's culture, 2) assess their competencies and leadership skills for future success (9 skills total), and 3) assess their overall state of trust. The program, which incorporates some features of Artificial Intelligence, assesses each of these leadership skills in a 360-degree degree, and uses information on:

- Leader's self-assessment of the level of trust they generate. (RCH model)
- Subordinates (one or many) aggregate assessment of the leader's level of trust (RCH Model).

- Aggregate assessment of leaders' "peers" (RCH Model), and
- Aggregate assessment of the leader's superior(s) (RCH Model)

At the end of this process, an elaborate automatic (AI-based) report is generated which indicates (a) the diagnosis, (b) the gaps, and (c) the areas for improvement to enhance this important phenomenon of building mutual trust.

## Conclusion

In this article, we explored the concept of trust in all its complexities. We wish to reiterate that trust is one of the most widely used constructs around the world, but it is poorly understood, defined, and measured.

We were trained to think that if any concept is missing these qualities (definition, methodology on how to use it, and metrics) it is useless. An attempt was therefore made to define trust, to look at its dimensions, and to show clearly how it can be applied. We have decided to adopt the RCH three-dimensional Trust model, because it was based on empirical research and seems to be used by thousands of researchers around the world.

In the article, we have introduced the essence of the RCH model and explored its potential use wherever leadership is called for: at home, at work and in the community. And finally, we introduced three tools for measuring trust, and they can all be used in different contexts, and, if necessary, in 360°. This allows you to measure your leader's trust either manually, or via the use of a gamification tool or digitally. Gaps between the leader and other stakeholders can be easily detected, displayed, and discussed resulting in the preparations of strategic solutions to enhance trust, which in the end, is a win-win outcome.