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# Team Trust Survey



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## ***Welcome to the Team Trust Survey***

Developing trust can be thought of as “the work before the work,” meaning the mutual effort needed to build effective communications and relationships. Without it, other tasks get done less efficiently and effectively.

The survey is a useful tool to help people explore together their differing expectations and experiences of one another. It can offer a framework to help people think about the kind of team they want and what they need to do together to create it.

Trust can be a sensitive and emotional topic. It is often built slowly and can be eroded rapidly, so it makes sense to use a framework, such as the one provided by this survey, to help make discussion safer and more productive.

As you use the survey, you are likely to find it a rich resource for understanding group dynamics. Please read the following information carefully. Video tutorials and other resources on the [teamtrustsurvey.com](http://teamtrustsurvey.com) website offer additional information on how to use, share, and learn from the survey results.

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## ***Good Uses for the Survey***

- helping a group of people be intentional about how best they can grow and develop as a team
- serving as a framework to share observations and differing perceptions of a team's culture
- developing higher levels of openness and feedback
- developing a common vision for the success of the team and actions that will support that objective.
- as a group starts up, talking about past member experiences and their desires for the new team
- evaluating progress in communications and relationships over time.

## ***Poor Uses for the Survey***

- a “gotcha” to prove to other people that a team is either functional or dysfunctional
- a teambuilding exercise that members have not had an opportunity to review or have been pressured to participate in
- a way to highlight the problem behaviors of an individual or otherwise call someone out in a public or exposed way
- a way to prove to the leader of a group that his or her behaviors are interfering with team success.

*To begin with, you may find it useful to take the survey yourself, acquainting yourself with how the survey is constructed and the nature of results; then reflect on how you might best introduce this tool to other members of the team. Advice on how to do this effectively is available in the video tutorials. Additional commentary and information regarding the survey are available on the FAQ and Theory pages of the website. Please also feel free to email the survey's creator, Dan Oestreich, through the contact page on the [teamtrustsurvey.com](http://teamtrustsurvey.com) website.*

## ***Instructions: Manual Version***

*Focus on a specific team of people. This may be a group that you lead, participate in, or are trying to help in some way. There are six questions – take your time with them and reflect carefully.*

- *For each question, read through all five statements (A, B, C, D, and E), noting the differences between them. Write in the number “5” next to the statement that most accurately mirrors the team’s behavior.*
- *Then, for the same question, rate one of the remaining statements – the one that is next most like your team -- a “4.” Similarly, rate the other statements, “3,” “2” and “1” for each question, with “1” meaning the statement is least like the team in question.*
- *When rating the five alternative statements, use each whole number only once. That is, for each question, there will be one statement rated “5,” one rated “4,” one rated “3,” “2,” and “1.”*
- *Once done with your ratings of all six questions, proceed to the score sheet that immediately follows, completing it manually. The video tutorial, “Taking and Scoring the Survey” may be of help to you.*

*Please keep in mind...*

- *Rate according to how team members actually behave, NOT how they should behave or would like to believe they behave.*
- *Because it is socially desirable (and perhaps necessary) in some organizations to say that one is part of an effective team, there is a natural bias toward rating favorably. To get the most value from the survey, however, do your best to stand back from the group, rating as objectively and honestly as possible.*

## Question 1

- \_\_\_\_\_A. People are generally expected to get along. If there are personal conflicts or performance problems they are supposed to be handled between the members involved but often still end up with the leader.
- \_\_\_\_\_B. People are able to fully work through their differences or their concerns about others' performance problems in one-on-one meetings without the leader needing to be involved.
- \_\_\_\_\_C. People give each other direct, personal and constructive performance and interpersonal feedback in team meetings with everyone participating in a frank dialogue about the issues.
- \_\_\_\_\_D. People seem to be in an open war with one another, justifying their hostile and insulting feedback to one another.
- \_\_\_\_\_E. People are critical and blaming of each other in the background – their feedback to one another leaks into team meetings through put-downs or subtle jabs.

## Question 2

- \_\_\_\_\_A. Members take the risk to ask for sensitive feedback in a team setting (e.g., about a mistake they've caused in a project or in a relationship with another team member) and apologize publicly.
- \_\_\_\_\_B. Group members walk out of meetings or simply refuse to meet because conflicts have become destructive and "too personal."
- \_\_\_\_\_C. People maintain positive professional decorum and stay task-focused. Personal growth and team relationships are often considered too "touchy-feely" to spend much time on.
- \_\_\_\_\_D. Team members are closed and careful in team meetings. The group is divided into alliances and cliques.
- \_\_\_\_\_E. In group meetings, people openly share their personal development challenges and patterns (e.g., lack of confidence, insensitivity) in a vulnerable way, receiving emotional support and guidance from other team members.

Question 3	Question 4
<p>_____A. The group “leads itself” with members taking full, shared responsibility for one another’s performance and trust levels. The leader is a strategic guide who mentors but does not need to actively guide the team.</p> <p>_____B. Decisions take too long, go unsupported, or are undermined by members after group meetings. Team members feel the group is inadequately led.</p> <p>_____C. The leader is the central decision-maker, coaching the group to stay on track and efficiently accomplish its goals and projects.</p> <p>_____D. The leader is a good facilitator, helping people through their conflicts and joint decisions as the group learns and develops.</p> <p>_____E. One or more people (including the leader) are viewed as the core problems of the group. Decisions are mired in self-serving arguments.</p>	<p>_____A. In problem-solving sessions, members compete with one another to be right and to protect their interests and resources. People are concerned about others’ hidden agendas.</p> <p>_____B. Members coordinate their actions to most effectively reach the goals they have defined together. Although they prefer their separate roles and resources, they regularly look for win/win improvements that will serve the team and its customers.</p> <p>_____C. People are unable to compromise. The group is stuck because <i>talking</i> itself has become a lose/lose proposition.</p> <p>_____D. Members use their conflicts constructively to break out of roles and mental sets. They actively pool their resources (time, money, people, ideas) to generate exciting solutions no one could have come up with alone.</p> <p>_____E. Clear roles and accountabilities and a spirit of cooperation solve most team challenges. Members respect the need to do their part and avoid stepping on one another’s toes.</p>

## Question 5

- \_\_\_\_\_ A. Anyone on the team can bring up a painful or sensitive issue in a team meeting. All join in constructively to address the problem. This can include major mistakes, ethical issues, betrayals or other serious conflicts within the group.
- \_\_\_\_\_ B. If difficult issues surface in a meeting, they are usually met with an uncomfortable silence; then are handled quickly or diplomatically to avoid too much awkwardness.
- \_\_\_\_\_ C. Once someone has had the courage to place a sensitive issue of any kind on the table, others join in to help resolve it. The leader may be the main person to bring up such issues, but not always.
- \_\_\_\_\_ D. Open, unresolved mistrust and blaming have overtaken the group's ability to discuss issues productively, even everyday ones that aren't very sensitive or interpersonally demanding.
- \_\_\_\_\_ E. The team environment is less than safe. People talk about "undiscussables" in the background but hesitate to bring them up in meetings because of possible repercussions or because it won't do any good.

## Question 6

- \_\_\_\_\_ A. Members feel ignored, abused, or intimidated; the environment is focused on public punishment for mistakes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ B. The team is a true community, affirming and appreciating each person and helping that individual make the best use his or her special talents as a unique life path. Members develop deep, lasting connections as friends and colleagues.
- \_\_\_\_\_ C. Members tend to focus more on what each other does *not* have or does *not* do than on their positive attributes. People may use job titles, pay differences or other perks to compensate for lack of recognition.
- \_\_\_\_\_ D. People make a special point of welcoming, recognizing and responding to others' abilities and special talents, no matter how long a person has been a member of the group.
- \_\_\_\_\_ E. Members generally offer respect and recognition to each other, especially those who are considered highly competent by virtue of their expertise and experience.

## Scoring

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Transfer your ratings to the *columns* for all questions, matching your number scores to the letters. For example, if your rating of Question 1.C was “5,” put the number 5 in that box below. Once you’ve filled in all of your ratings, total each row, left to right. Ensure that the Row Total Column, in gray, adds up to 90 points. If it does not, the survey has not been completed correctly.

Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Row Total
C:	E:	A:	D:	A:	B:	_____ = +2
B:	A:	D:	B:	C:	D:	_____ = +1
A:	C:	C:	E:	B:	E:	_____ = 0
E:	D:	B:	A:	E:	C:	_____ = -1
D:	B:	E:	C:	D:	A:	_____ = -2

**Does adding up the Row Total numbers equal 90? \_\_\_\_\_**

Now transfer your five Row Total scores in the gray column to the gray score boxes on the left side of the following five pages. **Circle the score box on the page with the *highest* score.** This represents your team’s typical trust level. See the information that follows in this document and the video tutorials for further help taking and interpreting the survey.

The Team Trust Survey is based on five levels of team trust. Statements on the following pages describe each of these levels.

**+2 = Ideal**

**+1 = High Functioning**

**0 = Traditional Practice**

**-1 = Low Functioning**

**-2 = Disintegrating**

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## Team Trust Levels

### Level +2

Score _____
----------------

**Ideal: The Ideal trust level is a self-led powerhouse where people are genuinely *for* one another and everyone's performance potentials are deeply tapped in service to the team's mission.**

People give each other direct, personal and constructive performance and interpersonal feedback in team meetings with everyone participating in a frank dialogue about the issues.

Anyone on the team can bring up a painful or sensitive issue and all join in constructively to address the problem. This can include major mistakes, ethical issues, betrayals or other serious conflicts within the group.

As part of the discussion, people openly share their personal development challenges and patterns (e.g., lack of confidence, insensitivity) in a vulnerable way, receiving emotional support and guidance from other team members.

Members use their conflicts constructively to break out of roles and mental sets. They actively pool their resources (time, money, people, ideas) to generate exciting solutions no one could have come up with alone.

These capacities enable the to group "lead itself" with members taking full, shared responsibility for one another's performance and trust levels. The leader serves as a strategic guide who mentors but does not need to actively guide the team.

Members sense they are part of a true community, affirming and appreciating each person and helping that individual make the best use his or her special talents as a unique life path. They develop deep, lasting connections as friends and colleagues.

**Level +1**

Score
_____

**High Functioning: The High Functioning trust level empowers a group through greater openness, feedback, and the intentional choice to use the team as a vehicle for personal and professional growth.**

People are able to fully work through their differences or their concerns about others' performance problems in one-on-one meetings without the leader needing to be involved.

And they are also willing to take the risk to ask for sensitive feedback in a team setting (e.g., about a mistake they've caused in a project or in a relationship with another team member) and apologize publicly.

Once someone has had the courage to place a sensitive issue of any kind on the table, others join in to help resolve it. The leader may be the main person to bring up such issues, but not always.

Members coordinate their actions to most effectively reach the goals they have defined together. Although they may still prefer their separate roles and resources, they regularly look for win/win improvements that will serve the team and its customers.

These capabilities are fostered by a leader who is also a good facilitator, helping people through their conflicts and joint decisions as the group learns and develops.

People make a special point of welcoming, recognizing and responding to others' abilities and special talents, no matter how long a person has been a member of the group.

**Level 0**

Score
_____

**Traditional Practice: Teams at the Traditional Practice trust level focus on the tasks and getting them done through clear expectations, cooperation, and good communications.**

People are generally expected to get along. If there are personal conflicts or performance problems they are supposed to be handled between the members involved but often still end up with the leader.

In general, team members work to maintain positive professional decorum and stay task-focused. Personal growth and team relationships are often considered too “touchy-feely” to spend much time on.

If difficult issues surface in a meeting, they are usually met with an uncomfortable silence; then are handled quickly or diplomatically to avoid too much awkwardness.

Clear roles and accountabilities and a spirit of cooperation seem to solve most team challenges. Members respect the need to do their part and avoid stepping on one another’s toes.

Supporting the team is a responsible leader whose role it is to serve as central decision-maker, who coaches the group to stay on track and efficiently accomplish its goals and projects.

Members generally offer respect and recognition to each other, especially those who are considered highly competent by virtue of their expertise and experience.

## Level -1

Score  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Low Functioning: Low Functioning teams experience a level of interpersonal and organizational mistrust that erodes relationships and has a negative impact on the work. People feel stressed, frustrated, and sometimes victimized.**

Team members are critical and blaming of each other in the background – their feedback to one another leaks into team meetings through put-downs or subtle jabs.

Consequently, people tend to be closed and careful in team meetings, with the group divided into alliances and cliques.

In problem-solving sessions, members compete with one another to be right and to protect their interests and resources. They are concerned about others' hidden agendas.

The team environment is less than safe. People talk about “undiscussables” in the background but hesitate to bring them up in meetings because of possible repercussions or because they feel it won't do any good.

As a result of these dynamics, decisions take too long, go unsupported, or are undermined by members after group meetings. Team members feel the group is inadequately led.

People tend to focus more on what each other does *not* have or does *not* do than on their positive attributes. They may use job titles, pay differences or other perks to compensate for lack of recognition.

**Level -2**

**Disintegrating: The team is literally in a spiral of Disintegration, a painful process where blame, anger, self-doubt and other emotions dominate the team environment.**

Score
_____

People seem to be in an open war with one another, justifying their hostile and insulting feedback to one another.

Group members walk out of meetings or simply refuse to meet because conflicts have become destructive and “too personal.”

Open, unresolved mistrust and blaming have overtaken the group’s ability to discuss issues productively, even everyday ones that aren’t very sensitive or interpersonally demanding.

People are unable to compromise. The group is stuck because *talking* itself has become a lose/lose proposition.

One or more people (including the leader) are viewed as the core problems of the group. Decisions are mired in self-serving arguments.

Members feel ignored, abused, or intimidated; the environment is focused on public punishment for mistakes.

## Interpreting the Results

First, take a look at the distribution of your numbers. What level did you give the most points (circling the box)? This would be the level where you believe your team most often operates. Next, take a look at the distribution of overall scores. Are they high in more than one level (say, 0 and +1)? That means the team operates at some times at one level or at some times another.

Look at the following scale and consider the number of points you have assigned to the highest point boxes.

27-30: Strong Match	21-26: Good Match	15-20: So-so Match	9-14: Marginal Match	5-8: Not a Match
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This tells you whether one or more of the levels is a very strong match – meaning the team operates *consistently* at this level across the dimensions represented by all six questions. If the points are spread out over several levels (so that none of them is a “strong match”) it means that team behaviors are less consistent. If this is the case, look back carefully over your score sheet. Did you rate the team higher for one or more of the questions and lower for others? In addition to the overall rating, this might give you an idea of how the team could improve its trust levels over time – by addressing the specific dimensions measured by the six questions. Later in this material, each of these questions is described with a suggestion for improvement. Please see the section titled, “What Each Question is About.”

The five-level framework used by this survey is generally based on the image of a “bell curve.” Within any given organization a majority of teams would be expected at Level 0, fewer are -1 and +1, and an even smaller proportion are -2 and +2. However, for a variety of reasons, some referenced below, teams do initially tend to rate themselves higher than objective observations of day-to-day behavior would warrant.

Please see the video tutorial (“Interpreting Survey Results”) for more information about analyzing survey ratings.

## Using the Survey with a Group

The survey is discussion tool, not a scientific analysis. Its primary purpose is to spark a deeper conversation about the culture of a team. Team members can individually score the survey based on their personal perceptions, then share results, examining discrepancies and similarities in their scores. It is best if such ratings are *not* done anonymously, but as groundwork for an open, frank and mutually supportive dialogue. The goal of the discussion can be stated as ***“creating a shared perspective on the team’s current trust level and on how we would like to see the team grow and develop in the future.”***

In this conversation, watch for the following:

- a team that cannot come to agreement about the ratings may be acting out lower trust levels as it argues over the higher ones that some members want to believe in (-1 level)
- a team that too quickly comes to agreement may need to check itself to see if this agreement covers up sensitive issues that members, in an unspoken way, have decided not to address. (0, -1, or -2 level)

The goal of the team discussion is always is to foster an honest and reflective conversation. Such an exchange is always about the desire to create a shared, *accurate* perspective on the team’s behavior, a higher level of interpersonal openness within the group, and a plan for how the group can intentionally grow and develop together.

It is a fact of life that such conversations can be an innately threatening activity for some teams and for some individuals, especially when the ratings are 0, -1 and especially -2. Keep in mind that members may fill out the survey with a falsely positive rating. Some reasons for this include the need to:

- deny or cover up sensitive problems or conflicts within the group in which they are involved
- protect themselves from personal frustration or from retaliation by team members or the team leader
- seek to avoid emotional, relationship-oriented subjects of any kind at work (too ‘touchy-feely’)
- score the survey from a cynical perspective (“This won’t do any good anyway, so why should I stand out?”)
- pretend to oneself the group operates at a higher level than it actually does in order to protect self-image
- give more weight to the intentions of people than how they actually behave.

Finally, it is not uncommon for individuals to challenge the framework itself, especially the description for the +2 level, arguing that teams should not be as open as what is described. For example, someone might say: “Not every team member needs to be involved in every performance issue.” This of course is not the intent of +2, and can be a distraction from more genuine discussion of where relationships and performance by the group actually stand. If dynamics like these surface, the best course of action is to let group

members work together to define their own +2 and then examine score discrepancies and similarities among members, question by question, letting members talk about their experiences in the team and citing real examples to support their ratings.

Be aware that some of the issues that surface from these discussions could have been previously undiscussable and could be sensitive and emotional, so this conversation among team members may need well-developed ground rules and require skilled facilitation.

Please see the video tutorial (“Engaging the Team”) for more information.

## General Intervention Strategies:

Each team situation has unique elements, so the following advice is only a general guide. If your team is -2, -1, or 0, focus your efforts on helping the team move toward the most positive aspects *two* levels up.

### **Level -2 Primary trust-building task: Create stability.**

Action needs to be immediate and fully committed. The group probably cannot be saved without significant changes in personnel, roles, or leadership methods, basically reinventing the group along the lines of “Traditional Practice,” the historic hierarchic model of clear structures and responsibilities and close supervision. As a starting point, restructuring may appear as the most compelling option (e.g., breaking up the group, appointment of a deputy, etc.) as sometimes even small amounts of reorganization can lead to a turnaround. In any event, members and the team leader may need much supportive individual coaching, mediation, or facilitation to vent negative emotions, discern real needs, and develop solutions to individual and group problems. Some people may be asked to leave or leave on their own out of frustration with the group. The leader ideally needs to play a strong, forthright, and calming role. The solutions are less likely to be achieved through group consensus than through participation by all members and visible, rational decision-making by the leader. Pairs or trios in conflict may need significant attention to reach agreements on how best they can work together. The group will need clear ground rules for day-to-day courtesy and cooperative behavior as well as frequent checks on progress. The goal is to get people refocused on tasks, responsibilities, and customers as soon as feasible, while swiftly resolving the large emotions, conflicts, obvious performance or relationship problems that clamor to be addressed. Facilitating these changes may require the assistance of an outside facilitator and consultant, as well as the counsel of internal HR and legal resource functions.



**Level -1 Primary trust-building task: Restore respectful relationships.**

The ship can be righted but this will require time, persistence, and patience. Dealing with “undiscussables” and creating and reinforcing new group norms for respectful behavior will be paramount. The leader and team members probably all need feedback about their contribution to the problems, and often the best way for this to happen is through third-party facilitation and coaching, fostering an environment where people increasingly work through their differences on their own. Underlying system problems (e.g., unclear roles, expectations, decision protocols or organizational structures) will likely need to be separated out from the interpersonal mistrusts woven around these problems – and both will need to be constructively addressed. For example, a promotion process that is associated with past organizational “baggage” and unfair pay could be co-redesigned with members to become more open, consistent, and rational. Skills training in basic communications, such as assertiveness and listening or similar topics may also be helpful, with the aim of helping members move from a “victim” stance to higher levels of responsibility for personal and team dynamics. Training or individual coaching should aim to show how members can ask one another for personal feedback safely. The leader will mostly likely need to clarify his/her role and personal contribution to the problems. He or she will also need to explicitly solicit personal feedback from the group and act on it in visible, constructive ways -- essentially serving as a model of how to move toward Level +1. Finally, the group may need regular, facilitated problem-solving sessions to deal with tensions and background issues that continue to come up.

**Level 0 Primary trust-building task: Build group awareness and inspiration.**

The group can begin to set a goal for conscious and intentional team development. This is best when group members see that the potentials for the team will not be fully released simply because roles are clear and everyone does their separate jobs well. This work is likely to face some resistance because it breaks out of traditional mindsets about hierarchy and individual performance responsibility. The dialogue may need to answer such questions as “How best do we address these ‘big, hairy, audacious goals’ together?” “What do we do with all the rapid changes?” or “How can we best share what seems to be an impossible workload?” These questions may help the group begin to create a shared vision for performance of the team and for the nature of relationships team members need to have with one another. A second step is then for individuals to identify and share their goals for their own development with their team mates and ask for assistance in meeting these goals. It may also be useful to create a team charter, spelling out the responsibilities of the team as over and above the responsibilities of individuals. What is the value added of the team? What decisions should the team make together? What outcomes are expected from the team beyond the performance of individuals in defined roles? What will that actually require in terms of relationships with one another?

This work can help the group and leader set a goal for the group to become more self-managing (+2). Members may need some time to understand and discuss the merits of this direction and their fears about it. The leader may also need to share some of the issues he/she is handling behind the scenes (such as disagreements, assumptions, and

perceptions of one another) that the members need to learn address directly among themselves, in this way becoming both more independent and more inter-dependent.

Finally, training on group processes can be introduced, such as frameworks for meeting planning and decision-making, useful as members learn to take more combined responsibility for the flow, content, and outcomes of their sessions together.

### **Level +1**

#### **Primary trust-building task: Develop confidence in self and others through practice.**

Intentional, planned practice, experience, and individual interpersonal risk-taking are primarily what separates +1 from +2. Regular sessions can now be built into a group's meeting schedule to help members give and receive feedback about their performance from their peers. Conversations should aim to be open and vulnerable, touching deeply on issues of self-knowledge and personal development. Higher level training in even more sophisticated skills, such as facilitation skills, conflict management and systems thinking, can be brought into the team, with members trying on new behaviors that guide and teach the group as a whole. A major movement from +1 to +2 is in the area of collaboration, where work and resources begin to be significantly co-managed and pooled, rather than separated into siloed areas of responsibility. The group can also be challenged to take on higher level group leadership tasks, such as getting feedback and other data from the team's external and internal customers, developing and deploying a strategic plan or vision, and auditing the culture of the teams reporting to the group. At the +1 level teams take over some of the visioning from the leader, suggesting, initiating and independently executing collaborative projects to upgrade work systems and group performance.

### **Level +2**

#### **Primary trust-building task: Take on the leadership challenge together.**

The group can be challenged to identify its own course of study and learning for the future, with the team expected to lead projects that redesign the work and improve major systems. The appraisal/pay system can be adjusted to mirror the sense of accountability team members have to one another and measurement of team, rather than individual outcomes. The major part of feedback to individual members can come from within the group itself (both systemically and informally) and directly from its "customers" external and internal, rather than being passed through the leader. The leader can freely move from being a regular facilitator toward becoming more of a group mentor, with day-to-day leadership within the group being handled according to the talents of members rather than their formally assigned areas of responsibility. Groups at this level are likely to spend a significant amount of time in purposeful innovation and in self-initiating strong inter-team collaborations to meet the strategic goals of the larger organization and its customers.

## What Each Question is About

In addition to considering the overall level, it may also be useful to consider the responses to specific questions. The questions are targeted to interrelated areas of trust within team relationships. Each description includes one suggestion for improvement. Teams that show a consistent strength and failing in one or two areas can brainstorm and prioritize their actions to build trust accordingly.

### Question 1: Feedback to Team Members

Exactly what feedback is offered in a group – and how it is offered – is usually an indicator of trust levels. In some groups individuals feel free to give and offer information to one another as peers, even information that is sensitive, such as feedback to another person about his or her performance of a task. In other groups, this is considered too sensitive, or to be the responsibility only of the group leader, supervisor, or manager.

In groups where trust is lacking, feedback may leak out in the form of an attack, subtle or overt, or may be experienced that way even when the intentions of the person giving feedback are positive. In very low trust groups, feedback becomes part of the conflict itself and is used as a weapon to punish others and protect oneself.

Feedback is a primary way for people to know where they stand with one another, so groups where feedback is a problem can leave people feeling unsure, defensive or excluded. By comparison, in groups where trust is high and feedback is commonplace among members, people feel connected, grounded, and engaged. Even if the feedback is critical, it is heard as a caring effort to help every person be successful and optimize individual and team achievements.

*One suggestion for improvement:* Help people to develop skills in actively *asking for and receiving feedback* non-defensively. The more team members learn these skills, the more effective they also tend to become in learning how to offer feedback in constructive ways

### Question 2: Personal Openness

A group is simply a small community. When people are open with one another, revealing themselves and some of their vulnerabilities, others can offer meaningful help. When trust is high, people are able to share honestly, for example, where they know they need to grow – whether that is in skills to do the job or in less tangible ways, such as in judgment, improved relationships, conflict management, or self-confidence. When trust is low, people keep this information private because to reveal it creates anxiety about how others could use that information against them.

People naturally vary in this dimension according to their temperament, but they also vary their behavior according to their context. A naturally private (introverted) person in a high-trust group may be much more open, for example, than an extraverted person in a low-trust group.

*One suggestion for improvement:* Help the group write ground rules for effective team behavior. Then ask each person to identify one of the ground rules to focus on for his or her personal development over the next week or month, also describing why he/she made this selection. Follow-up.

### **Question 3: Leadership and Decision-Making**

Leadership and group decisions are often closely tied to one another. Higher levels of trust enable the leader to delegate more to the team itself – with the team taking on these responsibilities and making decisions effectively through consensus. By comparison, low trust teams often have significant problems around decisions, such as failing to come to consensus, remaking decisions repeatedly, or failing to execute decisions made by the leader or team. Such groups are often characterized by criticism of specific decisions, who made them, and/or how they were made.

Decision-making is often a mirror of trust levels because decisions are never purely a matter of authority or clear roles -- although authority and role clarity are factors. Decisions also deeply reflect the credibility of the leader and team members, and faith in their judgment.

*One suggestion for improvement:* Use an “Appreciative Inquiry” approach by having the group assess what it is doing well with regard to decision-making and how to get even better. (Use a computer search of the term “Appreciative Inquiry” if you don’t know what this is.

### **Question 4: Collaboration**

High trust groups most easily collaborate. This is because true collaboration is based on understanding differences and converting real or potential conflicts into new, positive energy. It is much more than operating in a harmonious way. (In fact, there are times when apparent harmony is a sign that groups are not collaborating at all). High trust groups use their differences to develop innovative approaches and create sound solutions to shared problems. Team members in low trust groups, by comparison, get lost in competing for the best answer, adopting the easiest one, or trying to persuade or manipulate others into agreements. Where high trust prevails, people naturally want to understand others’ needs and want to find solutions that address the separate needs of all the players, not just one dominant player or a dominant faction of the team.

People develop their capacity to collaborate over time. They may begin with simply cooperating, but then learn to bring their goals together more effectively, ultimately working to pool their resources and break out of older, more role-bound mindsets. In doing so, members often develop a strong sense of partnership, shared power, and shared fate.

*One suggestion for improvement:* Facilitate a discussion on the difference between “cooperation” and “collaboration.” If possible, use a case study from real life to help the group see the difference. Then apply the learning to an upcoming decision the team needs to make.

### **Question 5: Dealing with Tough Issues**

Teams often have unstated, invisible boundaries about what is discussable in a group setting and what is not. The silent issues, called “undiscussables” usually represent the “secrets everyone knows.” An undiscussable is any issue that someone is hesitant to talk about with those who can do something about the problem. They frequently go unnoticed until the work or working relationships are directly affected. Anything -- from a manager’s unethical behavior to concerns about favoritism to perceptions someone is not pulling his or her weight in a team – may be undiscussable. This does not mean the issues are not talked about – they are – but in the cafeteria or parking lot, not directly with those involved. People usually worry that such issues, brought up, will result in negative repercussions, no change, or both.

High trust teams recognize undiscussables when they see them and deal with them upfront – avoiding background talk and “triangulation” (one person talking to another about a third person who isn’t present). Low trust teams spend a great deal of time discussing and re-discussing their undiscussables in the background.

*One suggestion for improvement:* Help the group make a list of its “undiscussables,” then, with the consent of the team, select one to work on, using a facilitator to guide the discussion.

### **Question 6: Appreciation and Affirmation**

Trust – or the lack of it – is reflected in how people affirm or undermine one another. In high trust teams, this is often a matter of spontaneous positive recognition and respect. It tells people, in one way or another, “I believe in you.” When this type of recognition is unavailable, or when the focus is on peoples’ problems and deficits, trust can go down quickly as members wonder what others think and how they are being perceived. Frequently, the problem is ambiguity. Because a person is not recognized, it is more than easy to project a negative belief or a worry into the vacuum. In low trust situations, recognition becomes the means for highlighting the negative attributes and failures of one another or simply snubbing or ignoring others.

Affirmation, or the lack of it, goes deep, to a sense of personal identity and the personal value of specific relationships. When people explicitly show that they see, recognize, admire, and respect one another, enduring bonds of trust and collegiality can be born.

*One suggestion for improvement:* Ask people to take turns listening, one at a time, while other group members identify the listener's strengths and gifts and discuss how best those could be used to support the work of the team.

## Where do low-trust groups come from?

Trust levels are part of the complexity of human interactions. Individual relationships, teams, and organizations all have their own cultures based on shared assumptions about reality. From small events, perceptions, and interpretations of behavior, mistrust can spiral. As groups begin to move downward toward -1 and -2, people bring more and more self-protective and hostile behaviors to interactions, basing this conduct on increasingly negative, often unverified beliefs about others' motives. There are many factors that seem to push groups toward self-fulfilling -1 and -2 spirals, including the previous experiences of individual team members, performance pressures, conflicts, integrity issues, broken promises, or other "betrayals," poorly handled or avoided performance problems, abrasive or ambiguous behavior of leaders and peers, unresolved complaints, and many other factors. Here are a few examples:

- Ambiguous behavior in a relationship between a female manager and male assistant manager of a work unit led to questions in employees' minds about the propriety of the relationship. Frustrated by the manager's apparent insensitivity to the assistant manager's intimidating and patronizing behavior toward them, team members took their concerns to the HR department. The head of HR and a consultant then attempted to counsel the manager. However, the manager had become deeply and permanently incensed by the employees' concerns, denied all impropriety, and appeared to take a hostile stand, eventually pushing people out of the work unit before eventually resigning herself. (-2)
- Members of a City Council often leaked their values conflicts and assumptions about one another's self interests during public meetings. Increasingly these comments became unfair and were not grounded in the facts but generally amounted to petty sniping and alliance building with the effect of undermining one another's credibility. Fortunately, the group agreed to reduce these behaviors and develop a shared vision. This work and the development of ground rules for conduct helped improve the group's internal communications and overall functioning. (-1)
- A superficially "self-managing" middle-management team had great difficulty making decisions regarding the priority and completion of key projects. Behind the scenes comments by some members reflected a strong sense of frustration and criticism of other members. Background questions about one another's competence, agendas, and motivations were not being addressed either by the formal leader or by individuals. Instead, the group played out its differences by arguing "rationally" -- and interminably -- about the projects. The leader tended to skip group meetings, rationalizing that this was a "learning process" for the team. Things began to change when members became publicly critical of the leader's "abandonment" of the group and people began to see and acknowledge how their own, rather than their colleagues' behaviors, contributed to the group's overall stuckness. (-1)

## What facilitates trust?

Trust levels begin to improve as people become more aware of their personal behaviors and more responsible for them. Commitment to a positive “relational field” of trust emerges when individuals develop a shared sense of accomplishment for interpersonal changes they can see one another striving for. Triggers to improvement often lie deep within the potentials of people for authenticity, self-knowledge, and personal meaning. This means that high trust levels cannot be forced. They are always a matter of choice, invitation, and inspiration. Individuals lead toward higher trust levels by modeling their self-awareness with vulnerability and disclosure, and by actively and unselfishly helping others gain appreciation and understanding. This in turn leads to further reductions of self-protective and defensive behavior, allowing openness and respectful exchanges to flourish, even with sensitive topics. Some examples:

- A leadership team for a probation department found themselves in a deep argument over the wording of their mission statement. Trust in the group was so low that there were grave questions on the table about its ability to even meet to discuss the matter. Some members preferred a mission focused on “rehabilitation;” others on “punishment for wrong-doing.” In the heat of the argument one of the members shared his private experiences from some years previous when he had attempted suicide and found himself going through the department as a probationer. “If this place had been about punishment, I’d be dead now,” he said. This dramatic disclosure triggered others to share their own moving stories of why they had come to work for the department. As they did this, the team reached a new level of understanding and the mission statement was resolved. A desire for collaboration around newly defined department directions suddenly began to emerge. (-2 moving toward 0)
- The executive team for a hospital reached the breaking point over a minor policy decision, resulting in a number of angry outbursts and members in tears. Not sure exactly what to do, the group examined how the angry disagreements had come about. This revealed a number of incorrect assumptions about one another’s intentions and faulty norms for dialogue that emphasized confusing, “depersonalized” messages that were ambiguous in both meaning and tone. The group re-wrote its formal norms for communication, members offered apologies to one another and spontaneously asked for feedback. A group practice of checking one another’s intentions quickly developed. (-1 moving toward +1)
- A management team for a phone company faced new and rapid changes in technologies and resource demands after years of a stable, “institutional” type environment. Under the guidance of the team’s leader, a visionary vice president, the team learned to resolve two-person conflicts within the group openly and with the assistance of other team members who were not directly involved but who were affected by the conflicts. The vice president himself modeled deep disclosure of his motives, successes, and failings, so that all could participate in co-management of the organization, moving the team from a siloed past toward a trust-based, skilled and adaptive future. (0 moving toward +2)



## The Team Trust Survey Website ([teamtrustsurvey.com](http://teamtrustsurvey.com))

Please see the website for additional resources and support in using the survey. You will find:

### Video Tutorials

These three tutorials cover main points in use of the survey, and can be helpful to share with a group as you get started:

- **Taking and Rating the Survey** – a walk-through of the instructions, especially useful if you are scoring the survey manually
- **Interpreting Survey Results** – framework of the survey and how to interpret scores
- **Engaging the Team** – how to introduce the survey and trust-building work to a team

### Team Trust Survey Workbook

Detailed instructions for how to start and follow-through on a team development effort.

### Theory of Team Development

A page that provides context for the work of developing trust levels and why that is important.

### FAQs

A page of common and sample questions that can arise from use of the survey.

### Survey History

An explanation of the survey's origins, evolution and goals.

### Reaching Out to Build Trust

A carefully developed web-based tutorial using brain-based tools to design, conduct, and evaluate a one-on-one trust-building conversation.

### Registered Use and Registration Form

Pages for internal and external consultants and other professionals who would like to use the survey as part of their toolkit and for commercial purposes. These pages include a current list of registered users -- with contact information for external consultants available to support teams.

### Contact Information for the survey's creator, Dan Oestreich

A web-based contact form you can use to answer questions about the survey and its use. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

**Oestreich Associates**  
**[dan@teamtrustsurvey.com](mailto:dan@teamtrustsurvey.com)**

