

Preface

During my thirty-five years in higher education, as a student, teacher, researcher, and administrator, I worked in several universities and colleges and observed and experienced a wide range of trust and distrust. Usually the focus was on the leader, who as the literature in leadership tells us, sets the stage for trust or distrust. It struck me that effective leaders can usually not change the culture of a deeply entrenched distrusting organization, but ineffective leaders often flourish in such cultures. On the other hand, when trustful leaders and trustful organizations meet, the resulting healthy synergy creates high morale, exceptional pride and productivity, which are reflected in the organization's low turnover, low absentee rate, and loyalty at all levels.

Organizations are not permanently trustful or distrustful; they have life cycles and are influenced by external events that alter the degree of trust or distrust over time. When trust exists at most levels of an organization, its healthiness is evident to all. By the same token, when distrust is practiced by organizational leaders, and reinforced by the organization's culture, the organization's unhealthiness is apparent. Too often, when problems arise organizations replace leaders rather than examine and rectify the organizational culture.

Most leaders would say that they work to instill trust in their organizations and that they see their actions as trustful. When leaders fail, they often blame the organization. When organizations fail, they change leaders.

I thought what I was observing and experiencing was unique to academic organizations until I began to talk with people at different levels in profit and non-profit and public and private organizations. The ingredients of trust and distrust, healthiness and unhealthiness seemed to be universal in organizations. The people I talked with were preoccupied with, and made comparisons between, different leadership styles and personalities in their attempt to explain the current state of trust and health in organizations. Few people took a global and historical view of their organization in order to put leaders and their actions in context.

This led me to undertake this project. I wanted to see if I could determine some common characteristics of trust and better understand how leaders and cultures become distrustful. Ideally, we all want to work in organizations that are trustful, that help us to develop personally and professionally, that we can be proud to work for, especially since we spend the majority of our time each day at work. By interviewing current CEO's, and former CEO's in a variety of organizations I hoped to learn how trust works and how it can be used, as well as abused. This book is an the result of that effort.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the editing skills of Paula Levine, long-time assistant and friend. Many of the ideas and perspectives in this book grew out of shared experiences with many colleagues from different organizations over the past decade including Alan P. Chesney, Charles J. Fey, William B. Sanders, Ray Lewis, Jr., Billy U. Philips, Gary Zajac, Loren D. Prescott, Jr., Charles Fensch, Anthony Herbst, Garland O'Quinn, Beverley Cuthbertson-Johnson, and Roberto Villarreal. Special thanks to Eliot Werner, my editor at Kluwer/Plenum for his advice and encouragement. I could not have completed this study without the CEO's and former CEO's who so generously gave of their time to talk to me about their organizations. I gave them my promise of anonymity so I have retained the essence of their contributions while altering some facts to respect their confidentiality and protect their identity.