Building Trust in Business
Best Practices in Trust, Leadership and Collaboration
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Building Trust in Business Research Report and Toolkit
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Foreword

Interaction Associates (IA) celebrates 40 years as a leading innovator of methods that help clients to develop strong leaders, foster collaboration, and achieve important business goals.

As part of our 40th Anniversary celebration, IA commissioned IDG Research Services in an extensive research project, Building Trust in Business, to discover what works for high performing companies in building trust, developing strong leaders, and achieving strategic results by becoming more collaborative.

This report has two parts: An extensive analysis of the Building Trust research findings; and the Building Trust Toolkit that provides important tools for leaders looking to move towards greater success now.
Introduction

Why Explore Trust?
Trust is vitally important today, and it has quickly emerged as a primary focus just about everywhere.

From the halls of power in the Obama administration to the front lines of business in nearly every industry, leaders are challenged to establish or increase trust to accomplish important business goals.

What does it take to build trust? Its foundation is strong, proactive leadership—and the methods leaders employ to fuel trust are more important than ever. They’ve become the critical make-or-break factors in a company’s success at achieving essential business goals in today’s hyper-competitive business environment.

What behaviors and management practices deepen trust to create lasting impact, greater confidence, and sustained success? Collaboration is emerging more and more as a critical skill, and yet collaboration itself is often misunderstood—or mischaracterized as a soft practice that would be “nice to have” in an organization.

But leaders at a rapidly growing number of companies are embracing collaboration strategically to help them drive the organization forward, to serve customers in new and innovative ways, and to achieve lasting value.
Section I

Researching Trust, Leadership and Collaboration
Research Findings Snapshot

*Building Trust in Business* focuses on research results and best practices identified from more than 200 leaders and 150 companies across the business spectrum who were surveyed in the Spring of 2009. This report focuses on vital characteristics shared by high performing companies that excel at manifesting trust, strong leadership, and collaboration. Additionally, it examines the relationship among those characteristics and how they impact company performance.

High performing companies in this research are defined as companies that reported high levels of trust, effective leadership, and collaboration. Here’s a brief snapshot of insights across all three:

**High-Trust Companies**
Their #1 business goal is **Customer Loyalty/Retention** (vs. cost reduction). They seem to be forward thinking even in this time of belt-tightening and short-term, survival focus. High-trust companies practice what they preach, excel in areas of talent and innovation. They embrace flexible organization structures and are very effective with the people and process aspects of collaboration.

**Effective-Leadership Companies**
Like high-trust organizations, this group’s top business goal is **Customer Loyalty/Retention**. They exhibit organizational behavior that is consistent with company values/ethics, are consistent in strategy execution, and foster loyalty among employees and customers. They shine at attracting and developing talent and creating a climate to foster innovation and entrepreneurship.

**Highly-Collaborative Companies**
This group’s top business goals are **Top-Line Revenue Growth** and **Customer Loyalty/Retention**. These companies have greater success in innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship, business agility, and the attraction, deployment and development of talent. These companies also tend to demonstrate effective leadership and significant levels of trust.
Research Findings Snapshot

The study also found that high-performing companies have common characteristics and behaviors considered vital to achieving important business goals in three key areas: productivity and innovation, customer and employee retention, and operational efficiency.

A snapshot of behaviors linked to success in each business goal area includes:

**Productivity and Innovation**
People are encouraged to take risks; leaders make sound decisions; and meetings are time-efficient and achieve desired outcomes.

**Employee Retention**
Management is consistent, predictable and transparent; leaders enlist many points of view in decisions; and collaborative skills are widespread.

**Operational Efficiency**
People feel safe in their communications; leaders provide clear direction and context, and share responsibility/accountability.

Let’s explore in detail the focus and findings of *Building Trust in Business*.
Building Trust in Business focuses on the characteristics common to top performing companies—companies that excel at achieving trust, strong leadership, and collaboration.

The research primarily focuses on two key issues:
1. How do trust in management, effective leadership, and collaboration impact an organization’s ability to meet key business goals?
2. What are the behaviors and practices of companies considered high performers in each of these three areas?

Results and best practices were analyzed from an extended survey conducted by IDG Research Services.

Research demographic snapshot:
• Research survey was completed by 211 business leaders from 150 different companies
• Represented industries include health care, bio/pharma, energy/utilities, financial services, technology/software/networking, and industrial/manufacturing
• Average company size is 11.2K employees and $14B in revenues.
• Respondents ranged from CEOs to mid-level leaders
• Nearly 60 percent of respondents are manager or director-level
• Forty-two percent of respondents work in the Human Resources function, with Management, Operations, and Marketing/Sales professionals making up about another 38 percent
Researching Trust, Leadership and Collaboration

Demographic Breakdown

Which of the following best describes your title within your organization?

Manager 30%
Director 30%
CMO 2%
EVP/SVP 2%
CEO, President 4%
Analyst 6%
VP 12%
Other 16%

Which of the following best describes your functional area within your organization?

Human Resources Executive 42%
Management 17%
Operations 11%
Marketing/Sales 9%
Technology 3%
R&D 3%
Manufacturing 1%
Finance 1%
Other 13%

Approximately how many people are employed in your entire organization or enterprise? Please include all plants, divisions, branches, parents and subsidiaries worldwide.

Less than 100 11%
100-499 5%
500-999 4%
1,000-2,499 9%
2,500-4,999 11%
5,000-7,499 5%
7,500-9,999 3%
10,000-19,999 17%
20,000 or more 43%

Interaction Associates
Researching Trust, Leadership and Collaboration

Understanding Business Goals
Research participants were presented with a list of 15 business goals across the full range of operations, product/service development, and customer service functions. They were asked to rate their organizations' success in achieving each of the 15 goals. Then, they prioritized each goal in terms of its importance to their organizations' success.

A factor analysis of the list of business goals aligned these objectives into three categories:

Productivity and Innovation
- Business Agility
- Innovation, Creativity, Entrepreneurship
- Improve Productivity
- Rapid-cycle, Time-to-market

Employee and Customer Retention
- Retention of Key Employees
- Attract, Develop, Deploy Talent
- Behavior Consistent with Company Values
- Customer Loyalty and Retention

Operational Efficiency
- Cost Reduction / Becoming More Efficient

The business goals that did not load on a factor were not included in the final survey analysis.
Researching Trust, Leadership and Collaboration

How Companies Rate
In addition to prioritizing and rating their success at achieving business goals, participants also scored their organizations along the dimensions of trust, leadership and collaboration.

Respondents were presented with a series of statements and asked to grade how accurately the statements could be applied to their organizations, using a five-point scale.

Below is a sampling of the statements used to assess company performance in practices and behaviors that support the three dimensions:

Trust
• People within the organization have a sense of shared commitment and responsibility
• People feel safe communicating their ideas and opinions with colleagues/peers
• People are acknowledged and rewarded for their work

Leadership
• Leaders effectively communicate the mission, vision, and strategy of the organization
• They make sound decisions even when the situation is ambiguous or complex
• They provide focused, balanced, and timely feedback to individuals and teams

Collaboration
• People are aware of and appropriately involved in decisions that affect them
• Individuals willingly share information and resources with each other
• People, by and large, have the interpersonal and group skills needed to collaborate

An analysis evaluated which statements correlated to high rates of success in each of the three business goal clusters.
Section II

Best Practices: What Drives High Performance?
Best Practices: What Drives High Performance?

Not surprisingly, effective companies in the areas of trust, leadership, and collaboration are also more successful at achieving important business goals.

*Building Trust in Business* provides a window into the relationship between key business goals and specific behaviors. An understanding of the correlation between behaviors and goals will help leaders achieve more success through taking specific targeted action.

Companies that wish to duplicate the success of our high-performers will be interested in the distinct practices that correlate with high performance in each of the three business goal clusters: productivity and innovation, customer and employee retention, and operational efficiency.
Best Practices Related to Productivity and Innovation

*Building Trust in Business* found that organizations exhibit greater innovation, creativity, and productivity when employees are open, consistent, and receptive to each other, and are encouraged to take risks and think “out-of-the-box” despite sometimes unclear situations.
Best Practices: What Drives High Performance?

As seen in Fig. 1, the following specific behaviors drive business goals clustered under Productivity and Innovation:

**Behaviors related to Trust**
- People and teams can take risks (allowed to fail and learn from mistakes)
- My peers are consistent and predictable in their efforts and actions

**Behaviors related to Leadership**
- Leaders demonstrate an ability to learn from their mistakes and change behavior
- Leaders make sound decisions even when the situation is ambiguous or complex
- Leaders support people who think outside the norm, experiment, and take risks

**Behaviors that foster Collaboration**
- Meetings achieve outcomes and are time-efficient
- People are open and receptive to suggestions of others

As the economy contracts, the tendency is often to “hunker down” and do what feels safe. But allowing people to take risks is a critical aspect of trust that will enable organizations to keep a competitive edge. Leaders who support risk and experimentation are crucial here.

Interestingly, time-efficient meetings correlate to higher levels of productivity and innovation. To improve your meeting capabilities, try some of the techniques outlined in the Trust Toolkit, on pages 57 and 61.
Best Practices: What Drives High Performance?

Best Practices for Retaining Employees and Customers

Employee and Customer Retention are stronger when leaders are clear and consistent in establishing realistic goals and metrics, according to Building Trust in Business survey respondents.

The survey findings indicate that employees need to be involved in the decisions that affect them and to understand how their goals link to those of others. Also, employee retention is increased when their personal contributions are acknowledged.

Business Goals
- Operational Efficiency
- Productivity and Innovation
- Employee and Customer Retention

[Figure 2]

Trust
- Fair treatment
- Consistent leadership
- Shared responsibility

Leadership
- Leaders live the values
- Leaders are committed to development
- Leaders are optimistic, within reason
- Leaders get input from many people
- Leaders acknowledge contributions

Collaboration
- Broad-based decision-making
- Skills to collaborate
- Context for goals

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Best Practices: What Drives High Performance?

As seen in Fig. 2, the following specific behaviors drive business goals clustered under Employee and Customer Retention:

**Behaviors related to Trust**
- Everyone is treated fairly regardless of position or rank
- Leadership is consistent, predictable and transparent
- People have a sense of shared commitment and responsibility

**Behaviors related to Leadership**
- Leaders reflect the organization’s values
- Leaders demonstrate a commitment to the development of employees
- Leaders reflect realistic optimism and confidence in the future
- Leaders draw on many points of view in setting direction and implementation
- Leaders acknowledge individual and team performance and contributions

**Behaviors that foster Collaboration**
- People are aware of and involved in decisions that affect them
- People have the interpersonal and group skills needed to collaborate
- Employees understand how their objectives are linked to others

The highest-performing respondents to the *Building Trust in Business* survey have a focus on Employee and Customer Retention. Transparency, drawing on multiple points of view, and involving people in the decisions that affect them—these are critical best practices. For a method to operationalize these in your organization, learn about using an “involvement map” on page 42 of the Trust Toolkit.
Best Practices: What Drives High Performance?

Best Practices for Operational Efficiency
Clear and consistent communication is critical for leaders, especially when targeting goals related to operational efficiency, including reducing and containing costs. Why is that so critical here? People must feel a shared responsibility and hold each other accountable when meeting operational efficiency goals.
As seen in Fig. 3, the following specific behaviors drive business goals related to Operational Efficiency:

**Behaviors related to Trust**
- Leadership is consistent, predictable and transparent
- People feel safe communicating their ideas/opinions with colleagues/peers

**Behaviors related to Leadership**
- Leaders provide clear direction and context for necessary action
- Leaders model and reflect the organization’s values

**Behaviors that foster Collaboration**
- People within my team, department or workgroup share responsibility for our success and hold each other accountable for following through.

The *Building Trust* toolkit provides important tools and tactics for more success in each of the three business goal clusters. See them now.

A trying economy calls for high levels of operational efficiency. A workplace where leaders provide clear direction and context, people feel safe expressing themselves, and everyone shares responsibility for success provides the best support for Operational Efficiency.

Our Trust toolkit can provide you with helpful ways to build the kind of trusting environment where people feel safe sharing their ideas and opinions. First, check out the Trust Assessment Tool on page 34. Then, learn five steps to help the leader give feedback to employees in a consistent, predictable and safe manner on page 52.
Section III

Understanding High Performing Companies
Understanding High Performing Companies

Definition and Characteristics
High performing companies in the Building Trust in Business survey are companies that report high levels of performance in all three categories: trust, effective leadership, and collaboration.

They also have in common important characteristics that are viewed as critical to their success at achieving important business goals, including:
• They are not “top down” organizations
• They have a strong sense of shared purpose
• Employees work together to support that purpose
• Tolerance and cooperation are highly valued
• Leaders often coach vs. just manage employees
• Many people participate in making decisions

In addition to these characteristics revealed in the research, we looked at the seven publicly traded companies in both the top 10 percent and bottom 10 percent of the surveyed companies. In an analysis using Yahoo! Finance, data drawn from portfolios of these publicly traded companies showed sharp differences in the earnings and P/E ratios over the past year. On average, high performing companies had earnings and P/E ratios superior to those in the bottom 10 percent.

**Earnings**
Low performers - $0.21   High performers +$2.72

**Price/Earnings Ratio**
Low performers 14.67   High performers 18.85

That amounts to a 28.5 percent premium for our seven high-performing companies.

What about Financial Performance?
Because the survey was conducted in Spring 2009 - amid one of the worst worldwide recessions on record - financial performance was self-reported as not effective among the majority of survey participants.

Outside of the scope of the Building Trust survey, Interaction Associates examined one year’s financial performance for the publicly-traded companies that fell into the best and worst-performing deciles of the survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earnings</th>
<th>P/E Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Performers</td>
<td>$0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Performers</td>
<td>$2.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That amounts to a 28.5 percent premium for our seven high-performing companies.
Understanding High Performing Companies

Breaking It Down

*Building Trust in Business* looked at companies that performed well in each of the performance areas of trust, leadership, and collaboration, and isolated their distinguishing characteristics.

High Performing Companies: High Trust

**The top three business goals of high-trust companies are:**
1) customer loyalty/retention
2) cost reduction
3) top line revenue growth

**Other companies reported these priorities:**
1) cost reduction
2) improvements to productivity/efficiency
3) customer loyalty/retention

High trust organizations are significantly more likely to be “highly effective” at achieving 14 of the 15 business goals named in the study.
Understanding High Performing Companies

There are several significant differences between high-trust organizations and other organizations. High-trust organizations scored “extremely or very effective” in the following important performance areas, as compared with other organizations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High-trust organizations are:</th>
<th>High-Trust Orgs</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better able to attract deploy and develop talent</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better at achieving innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More likely to exhibit organizational behavior that is consistent with company values/ethics</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better able to retain key employees</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better at developing customer loyalty/retention</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More likely to be effective at people and process aspects of collaboration than other organizations.</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, high levels of trust correlate with high levels of effective leadership and collaboration inside organizations.

High trust organizations are much more likely to describe their organizations as “highly collaborative” (87 percent vs. 24 percent others) and as organizations with “effective leadership” (91 percent vs. 35 percent).

In addition, 93 percent of respondents from high trust organizations trust others based on “their contribution to our shared commitment and responsibility” vs. 52 percent of other organizations.
High Performing Companies: Effective Leadership

The top three business goals of companies that have effective leadership are:

1. customer loyalty/retention
2. cost reduction
3. business agility

Other companies reported these top three priorities:

1. cost reduction
2. improvements to productivity/efficiency
3. customer loyalty/retention

High performing organizations with effective leadership are significantly more likely to be highly effective at achieving all business outcomes, with the exception of top line revenue growth and profit growth. In addition, these companies are more likely than others to be confident in their organizations’ ability to manage through the current economic crisis (88 percent “extremely or very confident” vs. 60 percent others).
Understanding High Performing Companies

Organizations with effective leadership are most often “extremely or very effective” at:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Effective Leadership</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction, deployment, and development of talent</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent execution of strategy</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention of key employees</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibiting organizational behavior that is consistent with company values/ethics, and customer loyalty/retention</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying effective people or interpersonal skills to collaboration</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organizations exhibiting effective leadership are much more likely to describe their organizations as “highly collaborative” (88 percent vs. 25 percent others) and as ones in which “employees have a high-level of trust in management and the organization” (79 percent vs. 26 percent others).
Understanding High Performing Companies

High Performing Companies: Strong Collaboration

Highly-collaborative organizations have prioritized top-line revenue growth and customer loyalty/retention as top business goals, versus other organizations, which are focused primarily on cost reduction.

Highly collaborative companies are significantly more likely to be “highly effective” at achieving 12 of the 15 business outcomes.

The *Building Trust* survey uncovered a number of noteworthy differences between highly collaborative companies and others, which are detailed on the next page.
Understanding High Performing Companies

Highly collaborative organizations demonstrate better performance in these areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Strong Collaboration</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction, deployment, development of talent</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business agility</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibiting organizational behavior that is consistent with company values/ethics</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retaining key employees</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction, deployment, development of talent</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer loyalty/retention</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering in employees a high level of trust in management and the organization</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibiting effective leadership</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The areas where highly collaborative organizations particularly outperform other organizations are “innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship” (76 percent highly collaborative organizations vs. 24 percent all others), “attraction, deployment, development of talent” (74 percent vs. 28 percent others); and “business agility” (59 percent vs. 20 percent).

In addition, 91 percent of those who reported their organizations were highly collaborative said they also exhibited effective leadership. This compares with just 38 percent of other companies.
Section IV

Key Additional Findings
Key Additional Findings

Building Trust in Business yielded additional highly topical findings that fall outside of the business goals model, but offer important insights into timely issues—including:

1. Confidence in the Current Economy
2. Business Priorities Now
3. What Is Trust Today?
4. What Is Collaboration Today?
5. Collaboration: When it Fails and Why

1. Confidence in the Current Economy

How confident are companies that they will manage the current economic downturn? What contributes to higher confidence among those that claim it?

Sixty-six percent of survey respondents said they are “extremely or very confident” in their company’s ability to manage through the current economic crisis.
2. Business Priorities Now
Respondents chose their critical priorities in the current economy from among a list of 15 business goals. Top performing companies cited different priorities than average or low-performing companies, as noted on pp. 20, 22, and 24.

Most Important Goals - All Respondents
1) Cost reduction/becoming more efficient (46 percent) is the most important business priority over the next 12 months, according to all survey respondents. However, only 40 percent of respondents rate themselves at “extremely or very effective” in this area; 44 percent feel they have been “somewhat effective” in achieving this outcome.

2) Customer loyalty and retention is the second most important business goal to respondents over the next 12 months, with 31 percent rating this as “extremely or very important.” This is the area in which the most success has been experienced overall, with 57 percent indicating their organizations have been “extremely/very effective” in achieving this outcome.

3) Respondents’ third most important business outcome was making improvements to productivity and efficiency. Only 29 percent of respondents rate themselves “extremely or very effective” in this area; 49 percent feel they have been “somewhat effective” in achieving this outcome.

Least Important Goals

The three business goals/priorities that are of the least importance to organizations over the next year include
• Rapid cycle time: product to market (37 percent),
• Conducting business in an environmentally sound manner (27 percent) and
• Attraction, deployment and development of talent (26 percent).

A mere 27 percent of respondents listed top line/revenue growth as an important priority. This may reflect that organizations are coming to terms with the harsh realities of the 2009 economic climate.
Key Additional Findings

3. What Is Trust Today?
Seven out of ten respondents (71 percent) trust others based on the consistency, predictability, and quality of their work and actions, and believe trust is based on evidence of past accomplishment and demonstrated capability (according to respondents who indicate this statement describes their organizations “extremely or very well”).

When thinking about the level of trust within their organizations, respondents most often indicate that:
• People within the organization have a sense of shared commitment and responsibility. (56 percent rate as describing “extremely or very well”)
• People feel safe communicating their ideas and opinions with colleagues/peers. (56 percent)
• Individuals are not assigned “impossible” tasks that are outside the scope of their knowledge/training. (53 percent)

Sixty-two percent trust others based on their contribution to a shared commitment and responsibility and feel that trust is based on confidence that others will work diligently to accomplish shared goals. However, as noted on p. 21, 93 percent of high-trust organizations base their trust level on others’ “contribution to our shared commitment and responsibility.”

Cautions about Trust
Interestingly, there were some red flags when respondents were asked to report cultural characteristics that affect trust within their organizations.

For example,
• Only half of respondents reported “My organization’s culture promotes and rewards honesty.”
• Only 51 percent reported “My peers are consistent and predictable in their efforts and actions.”
Key Additional Findings

4. What is Collaboration Today?
Two-thirds of respondents (67 percent) indicate that collaboration can be defined “extremely or very well” as, “the ability to build positive working relationships that enable people to work together to accomplish their goals.”

Over half of respondents (57 percent) chose this statement—“People within my team, department or workgroup share responsibility for our success and hold each other accountable for following through”—as describing the collaborative environment within their organizations “extremely or very well.”

60 percent of respondents indicate the most important aspect of successful collaboration is people or interpersonal skills (people having the skills to work together effectively).

This is also the area in which respondents feel their organizations have been the most effective, with 45 percent assigning ratings of “extremely or very effective” in this aspect of collaboration. Forty-four percent said they were “somewhat effective,” and about 11 percent reported they were “somewhat ineffective or ineffective” at people skills.

30 percent of respondents feel processes (a disciplined and replicable way in which people come to conclusions, agreements, and take action) are the most important aspect of collaboration.

10 percent of respondents feel technology (having access to tools for collaborating across boundaries) is the aspect most central to their organization’s collaboration success.
Key Additional Findings

What aspect of collaboration is most important to the success of your organization?

Please rate your organization's effectiveness in each of the following aspects of collaboration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Extremely or Very Effective</th>
<th>Extremely Effective</th>
<th>Very Effective</th>
<th>Somewhat Effective</th>
<th>Not Very Effective</th>
<th>Not At All Effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People Skills</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Skills</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Additional Findings

5. Collaboration: When It Fails and Why

The top three contributing factors (“always or often” contributing) to failed collaboration at respondents’ organizations were:

- Inefficient communication existing between team and work group members: 40%
- Objectives or goals changing in the middle of the project: 39%
- Uneven contribution from team members: 36%

These findings present unique opportunities for organizations that wish to excel at collaboration. For example, paying attention to team communication—even “over-communicating”—and sticking to stated team objectives will likely improve collaboration.
Conclusion

The *Building Trust in Business* survey results provide business leaders with important insights into the patterns and behaviors that improve the likelihood of success.

But how do you go from here to there?

The *Building Trust Toolkit* that follows builds on the research findings to help leaders equip their workforce with the process and people skills necessary to become top performers.

**Let’s get started.**
Building Trust Toolkit

Interaction Associates is the 40-year innovator of powerful and practical tools that help companies build trust, develop leaders, and deepen collaboration across the organization. The tools included here can help you build on our research findings and aim for fast and measurable results right away.
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Tools for Building Trust

36  1. Trust Framework Assessment
42  2. Mapping Stakeholder Involvement

Tools for Building Leadership

48  1. The Coaching Moment
52  2. Five Steps to Giving Feedback

Tools for Collaboration

54  1. The Interaction Method
61  2. The Core Meeting Process
The Trust Framework

The Trust Framework

The Building Trust in Business survey clarifies what people mean when they claim to have high levels of trust in their colleagues and managers. Seven out of ten respondents (71 percent) trust others based on the consistency and predictability of their actions and on the quality of their work. Sixty-two percent trust others based on commitment to shared goals. Additional research by Robert F. Hurley, professor of management at Fordham University, points to the impact of “situational factors” which relate to the conditions present at a particular point in time; for example, the relative importance of the decisions being made, or the impact of the economy on job security.

The Trust Framework takes advantage of both studies by comparing an individual’s world-view to the impact of situational factors. The Trust Framework allows individuals and teams to assess the degree to which they feel a general sense of safety (my world-view about trusting others) and the relative certainty of their current situation. A leader can use the assessment results to determine an appropriate strategy for increasing levels of trust.
The Trust Framework Assessment

How to use the Framework

Ask individuals or groups that you lead to complete the Trust Framework Assessment below. The assessment will yield a “safety” score and a “certainty” score. Plot both scores on the Trust Framework. The score will fall within one of the quadrants each representing a trust building strategy that a leader might emphasize: Transparency, Rapport, Empathy, or Appreciation.

Before looking at an example, let’s define our terms:

**Transparency** helps others understand what’s driving someone’s behavior and what processes and approaches will be used when drawing conclusions and making decisions. People feel more in control when hidden processes become visible.

**Empathy** is about demonstrating a genuine understanding and concern about what someone else is thinking and feeling. Empathy helps people feel understood; they’ll be more open so that a leader can deal directly with concerns.

**Appreciation** shows recognition and gratitude for someone’s contributions. When a leader increases the amount of attention paid to others’ contributions and shows sincere appreciation, even those with a pessimistic outlook will derive personal satisfaction and meaning from their work.

**Rapport** is about strengthening relationships. Rapport undermines the obstacles to trust created by status, enhancing trust even when safety and certainty are high.
In the example in Figure 6, a team’s scores have been plotted. Other than a clear outlier, the majority of the team feels a fairly high degree of safety and a fairly low level of certainty about the current situation. In this case, one individual may have more information about the current situation than the rest of the team. The *Building Trust in Business* research notes that leadership that is “consistent, predictable and transparent” correlates with high levels of Employee and Customer Retention (p. 15). Given the outcome of the assessment, the leader of this team would do well to increase transparency.
The Trust Framework Assessment

Circle the number that represents the degree to which you believe the statement accurately describes you (from 1 = very inaccurate to 5 = a completely accurate description)

**I would describe myself as a person who...**

- willingly takes risks
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

- expresses optimism, often describing the benefits the future will bring
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

- has formal or informal power / has influence over others
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

- always expresses faith that things will work out
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

- willingly shares personal thoughts and feelings
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

- rarely expresses concern over “what the boss will think”
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

**Safety Score (average of the ratings above)**

1  2  3  4  5

Circle the number that represents the degree to which you believe the statement accurately describes your current situation (from 1 = very inaccurate to 5 = a completely accurate description)

**Regarding our current situation...**

- the stakes are low – the worst that could happen isn’t that bad
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

- the situation is familiar
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

- the people involved share similar views and opinions about things
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

- the people involved have aligned interests and goals
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

- the people involved tend to look out for one another
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

- leadership’s actions and decisions are fairly predictable
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

- people are well informed about what’s going on
  
  - 1  2  3  4  5

**Certainty Score (average of the ratings above)**

1  2  3  4  5

*Plot the “Safety Score” and the “Certainty Score” on the framework*
From the previous page, plot the Safety and Certainty scores.

See next page for a discussion of specific trust-building strategies.
Here are some specific things a leader might do for each of the trust building strategies:

**To Increase Transparency (high safety, low certainty):**
- Express the rationale for your actions and decisions
- Externalize your thought process, “I’m trying to figure out... and right now I’m thinking that...”
- Hold frequent meetings to communicate both what’s known and what’s not known

**To Increase Appreciation (low safety, high certainty):**
- Focus on what’s working
- Say “thank you”
- Learn what matters to the people you work with
- Give appropriate rewards and recognition

**To Increase Empathy (low safety, low certainty)**
- Listen actively and without judgment
- Share your own feelings about facing uncertain situations
- Check your understanding, “Are you saying that...”

**To Increase Rapport (high safety, high certainty):**
- Learn about the personal histories and interests of the people you work with
- Share personal information about yourself and your vision of success
- Make time for relationship building activities not specifically related to getting work done

Naturally, all the above tips would be helpful in any set of circumstances for building productive working relationships. Thinking through how individual styles and changing situations impact people’s willingness to trust will help you set priorities for change management and communication.

---

**Here’s a Tip**

Make a flipchart size Trust Framework and hang it on a wall at your next team meeting. Hand out copies of the assessment to your team and give them time to calculate their scores. Have each team member put a dot on the coordinate corresponding to their score for safety and certainty. Lead a discussion with the team of what accounts for any clusters and any discrepancies in the location of the dots. Build working agreements with the team about commitments that address any concerns surfaced during a discussion of the framework.
The Involvement Map (i-map)

The *Building Trust* research data shows what good leaders seem to understand through experience: the importance of involving people in the decisions that affect them. Top-performing companies all shared a common trait: “Many people participate in making decisions” in my organization. (p. 19)

The Involvement Map (i-map for short) is a document that can be used to strategically plan and communicate any large-scale initiative inside an organization, with a high degree of transparency. It is helpful both to the leader who is planning the change, and to all those who will be affected by the initiative.

Many project managers are familiar with project management tools that help solve task-oriented problems: for example, the Gantt chart. At Interaction Associates, we find it helps to map out the initiative involvement strategy in phases so that people can be engaged at the right times, with the right amount of information.

Because an i-map delineates key stakeholders, as well as important decision points and go-no go crossroads, stakeholders can see exactly how they will be involved, and when.

However, seeing and understanding are often not sufficient when people find that a promise of involvement doesn’t actually materialize in reality, or seems to be merely an exercise to placate.

This is nearly inevitable—unless leaders take a good, hard look at the timeline, the places where people’s input might be needed, and the actual number of stakeholders. Time always gets tight because change is complicated, usually more so than we expect. Best intentions are compromised and broader input is abandoned. Well-meaning leaders settle for what they have rather than letting the timeline slip.
i-map Planning – Keeping It Real

Who are the individuals or groups that need to be involved in planning or decision making at any point in the process? Think about the people who must implement the change, individuals and groups who will be affected, people who have led similar efforts, and customers or other external stakeholders who may contribute helpful points of view.

How can you uncover their insights, issues, and potential contributions? “Sending an email” is often not the answer. Consider facilitated meetings and one-on-one conversations with your most important stakeholders. This not only helps you get information but helps build commitment and increases transparency and trust. Consider: What is a “win” for them?

For example, in the beginning of a process design, we recommend the leader ask key groups and individuals open-ended questions about the problems with the current process, their ideas for improvement, and good ways to communicate.

What follows is an i-map planning worksheet to help develop a realistic stakeholder involvement strategy and an example i-map to demonstrate what the end product looks like.
# Mapping Stakeholder Involvement

## i-map Planning Worksheet

### Clear and Agreed Upon Goals

**What will success look like?**

**How will you know?**

### A Collaborative Approach

**What are the key decisions?**

**Who are the stakeholders: individuals or groups that are responsible for final decisions, affected by the decision, or have the power to block the decision?**

**At what point should various stakeholders be involved?**

### Clear Roles and Responsibilities

**Who is the project owner? Sponsor?**

**Who is responsible for design? For facilitating? For leading?**

**How will key decisions be made? If consensus, what are the fallbacks?**

---

Note:
This planning worksheet helps you think through your stakeholder involvement strategy.
### Specific Activities and Milestones

| What are the key activities? (Consider type of process involvement mechanisms or structures that would be most suitable for each step. For example: task forces, large meetings, formal/informal checkbacks) |
| What are the timeframes? |
| What kind of short-term results might we anticipate? |

### Resources Available and Efficiently Deployed

| What resources are needed to support this effort: money, support services, personnel? |
| What are the best points in time for including content experts, management, and employees who will be impacted by the end results? |
| What kind of short-term results might we anticipate? |
### i-map Planning Worksheet

#### Well-Planned and Implemented Communication Process

| How will decisions, milestones and accomplishments be communicated? |
| How will success be communicated? |

#### An Explicit Monitoring and Evaluation Process

| How will progress be monitored? |
| How will success be measured? |

On the following page is a completed i-map showing how stakeholders will be involved in shaping an organization’s vision. Note how many people are involved, and where and when they touch the process. Symbols representing key stakeholders are depicted along the bottom of the i-map, and the map itself depicts specifics of their involvement.
## Mapping Stakeholder Involvement

### Trust Tool 2

### Sample Vision/Goal Collaborative Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
<th>Future State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Team</td>
<td>Vision &amp; Strategic Plan</td>
<td>Vision &amp; Strategic Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Team</td>
<td>Plan &amp; Execute Strategy</td>
<td>Plan &amp; Execute Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Partners</td>
<td>Support &amp; Implementation</td>
<td>Support &amp; Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Awareness &amp; Engagement</td>
<td>Awareness &amp; Engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Legend

- **A**: Announcements
- **B**: Briefings
- **I**: Interviews
- **M**: Meetings
- **O**: Outcomes
- **P**: Presentations
- **R**: Reviews
- **S**: Sessions
- **T**: Training
- **U**: Updates
- **V**: Visions

### Key Points

1. **Executive Team**
   - Overview of ACB's role in the team
   - Key stakeholders involved in the process
   - Key outcomes and decisions

2. **Core Team**
   - Plan & Execute Strategy
   - Support & Implementation
   - Awareness & Engagement

3. **Collaborative Partners**
   - Support & Implementation
   - Awareness & Engagement

4. **Community**
   - Awareness & Engagement

### Notes

- **ACB**: Advisory Committee Board
- **AC**: Advisory Committee
- **BC**: Business Committee
- **CD**: Community Development
- **IT**: Information Technology

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**Interaction Associates**

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“Hey, got a moment?”

One of the key traits of high-performing companies responding to the *Building Trust* survey is that in these organizations, “leaders coach,” vs. just manage their work forces (p. 17). But what kind of coaching is effective? Survey after survey of employee engagement describes a baffling gap between employees’ perceptions of how often they receive coaching from their manager (not much) and the managers’ perceptions of how much time they spend coaching (a lot). Maybe we should change the question on our surveys to ask, “How often do conversations between you and your manager start with ‘got a moment’?” Each of those unplanned interactions presents a coachable moment. A coachable moment provides an opportunity for development.

While it may seem simpler and more efficient to provide a quick solution or deliver a blunt message, in the end nothing fundamentally improves. Of course, this is not a recommendation to create coaching moments when there’s nothing to be gained: “Where’s the restroom?” should not illicit a response worthy of Socrates: “Where do you suppose the architect would put a restroom in a building like this one?” The key is to have a simple approach that will help you efficiently make the most of the “got a moment” moment.
Managing the Coaching Moment

Whether the employee comes to the manager with a problem or the manager goes to the employee with feedback, the conversation is rarely as simple as the “got a moment?” opening would suggest. The model above describes a four step approach to moving through the interaction in a way that feels efficient, builds rapport and leads to a decisive next step.
1. Connect
The choice to engage in a coaching conversation should be a conscious one. We’re simply too busy and we have too many distractions to assume that when we have an unplanned interaction, we’re giving that interaction our full attention. To connect means each person makes a conscious choice to give their full attention to the conversation. To connect also means that I value the person with whom I’m speaking. I care about them and I’m in this conversation to serve them.

2. Contract
Each person in a coaching conversation should understand the goal of the conversation. A client described a leader in her organization that starts impromptu conversations with the question, “Are you here for therapy or advice?” While you may not want to limit the choices, the coach should take the initiative to clarify what the coachee wants (in cases where the coachee comes to the coach) or to clarify what the conversation will be about (in cases where the coach goes to the coachee).

Generally, people haven’t thought through exactly what they want out of the conversation before they seek out the person with whom they plan to converse. Still, it’s a good habit to start and you can always revisit the stated purpose of the conversation as you go along – the arrows in the model are meant to suggest that in practice you don’t really finish a step completely before moving on to the next step. You will find yourself, re-connecting as new distractions come up and re-contracting as new data emerges that uncovers the real issue.

3. Content
Notice that we’re two steps into the process before we get to the content of the issue. At the content step, coach and coachee exchange perspectives based on the goal agreed to in the contracting step. At this point, the coach risks undermining all the great work done in setting the stage for the conversation by doing all the talking. If it’s a feedback conversation, the coach needs to hear the coachee’s perspective of the situation. If it’s a problem-solving conversation, the coach needs to explore the issue to understand the coachee’s worldview if the coachee is to learn anything useful.

Here’s a Tip
If you can’t honestly devote your full attention and service to the conversation, then your answer to “Got a moment?” should be, “No.” Schedule a time or re-prioritize before jumping into the meat of the coaching conversation.
The Coaching Moment

4. Commit
It’s not a coaching conversation if the coachee doesn’t agree to an action at the end of it, even if the action amounts to continuing a successful behavior. The word commit focuses attention on the level of agreement required for a successful coaching conversation. All three previous steps contribute to the depth of the commitment a coachee will demonstrate to any action agreed to at the end of the coaching conversation.

Specific Things to do or Say at Each Step

**Connect**
- Close the laptop; put away the blackberry
- Come around from your side of the desk and sit next to the coachee—or move to a neutral location
- Ask, “what’s going on?” as a way of acknowledging current potential distractions
- Commit to a specific amount of time, “I’ve got 15 minutes before my next meeting”

**Contract**
- “What do you want to get out of this conversation?”
- “When we’ve finished up, what would a successful outcome look like for you?”
- Paraphrase to confirm understanding of the request, “So, you’d like some ideas about what to say to your team?”

**Content**
- Ask open-ended questions and reflect back any provocative or loaded statements; “You’ve never trusted David?”
- If it’s a problem-solving conversation, build agreement on the problem before seeking agreement on the solution.
- If it’s a feedback conversation, connect behaviors to impact and then check the coachee’s perception; “When you stopped the presentation until David sat down, you focused everyone’s attention on the fact that David came in late. As a result, he probably felt embarrassed and became hyper-critical of your conclusions in order to save face. How do you see it?”

**Commit**
- “What do you plan to do?”
- “When do you plan to do it?”
- “What might get in your way?”
- “What support do you need from me?”
- “On a scale of 1 – 10, how likely are you to follow through on this commitment?”

Leadership Tool 1

Here’s a Tip
Coach the person you’re talking to, not the person you’re talking about. Coachees often come to a coach to talk about a problem with a third person. It’s tempting to talk about how to change the “third person’s” behavior. In the end, you can never be sure whether you’re getting all the data and you can’t elicit a commitment from someone who’s not in conversation with you. Return to the contracting step and build agreement on a goal related to the behavior of the person you’re talking to.
Build Trust With Feedback: Five Steps

How does feedback show up in the Building Trust survey results? In order to reach high levels of Operational Efficiency, leaders must provide clear direction and context for necessary action (p. 17). Feedback is a critical part of that. Feedback is a hallmark of open communication that can be shared up or down the organization. Intuitively, it would seem that safe and constructive feedback from a leader tends to build trust, while harsh or thoughtless feedback will likely destroy it. While most leaders would agree with this assessment, many fail to make regular feedback a part of their organization’s culture. These leaders miss an easy way to build trust, make performance improvements, improve morale, and develop employees.

Why do leaders avoid giving feedback? There are many reasons. Among them: fear of an emotional reaction from the employee, fear of retaliation, a desire to “make nice,” and even a perceived lack of time. Probably the lack of a strategy for having the conversation is high on the list. The problem is: the issue that is driving a need for feedback will not go away on its own. On the contrary, it will tend to get worse, until the leader cannot ignore it anymore. This can lead to what we call “drive-by” feedback: a quick hit about why you are driving me crazy, followed by a quick escape. On the receiving side, employees dread feedback of this kind. Even employees who want to improve fear having to defend themselves or being forced in the feedback conversation to agree to something they do not really believe.

The solution lies in leadership modeling of feedback, and the use of some simple but powerful guidelines for giving -- or better yet, exchanging -- feedback. It is an organizational truism that the higher one goes in an organization, the less feedback one gets. So start by asking for feedback from others, and then be very careful not to get defensive. Then try to act in a visible way on the feedback. This will show the organization you are willing to “go first” and lead the way before you ask others to make a change. If feedback is the “breakfast of champions”, you will need to eat the first bowl yourself.

To be successful, feedback must be focused on three key dimensions: results, process and relationship. The feedback must increase results, use a clear process, and lead to enhanced, rather than diminished, relationships. To get the hang of giving strategic, trust-enhancing feedback, try this five-step process:
Five Steps to Feedback

1. Choose when to give the feedback. If you are too angry or upset yourself, you will not be able to give the feedback in a respectful way. Wait until you cool down. Also, find a time and place which allows the employee to hear the feedback (especially negative) in private and a time when they can handle it emotionally, but do not wait so long that they can no longer act on the input. Positive feedback should be given quickly, when the employee is still “sweating from the effort”.

2. Describe the behavior in as objective language as possible and be specific. Words like “bad attitude” will not be understood and will seem judgmental. “You came in twenty minutes late two days last week.” Specific and objective descriptions reduce defensive reactions because they are facts, not opinions.

3. State the impact of the behavior on you, the team, the goal, the client, etc. “When you are late, Jane and Mark have to pick up your calls and they fall behind on their own accounts.” Stating the impact allows the receiver of the feedback to better understand why he or she should change, or at least consider the input.

4. Make a suggestion or request. You may ask the employee to change a behavior that is not working, to continue or do more of an effective behavior, or to simply understand your point of view. “You are not well organized” is a criticism, not feedback. “Please be on time,” or, “I expect you to be on time every day this week,” is feedback. Have a concrete action in mind so the employee has a clear path to improvement.

5. Lastly, check for understanding and be open to alternative views. There may be relevant facts you are unaware of and asking for a response avoids just dumping on the employee, destroying trust, and damaging the relationship.

You’ll note that many descriptions of feedback focus on the negative behavior that needs to change. Remember that reinforcing positive behaviors can be very effective in building trust. Try to focus at least as much on positive reinforcement as on feedback to change undesirable behaviors. Just watch the results!
The Interaction Method

The research results make a strong case for the impact of collaboration on business results. They show that, although technology may play a minor role in collaboration, the interplay of interpersonal skills and process discipline are where most of the focus belongs.

If we could take an x-ray of collaboration, what would we see?

The Interaction Method is a facilitated approach to building understanding, generating agreements, and helping people take concerted action. The interplay of elements forms the basis for effective collaboration.

Elements of The Interaction Method

Figure 7 on the next page details the four elements of The Interaction Method, as follows:

- **Shared Responsibility**
  - The *principle*... that everyone can play an active and positive role in producing meaningful results.

- **Collaborative Attitude**
  - The *mindset*... that guides individuals to act in a cooperative and impactful manner.

- **Strategic Thinking**
  - The *mental process*... of selecting an appropriate course of action to achieve desired results.

- **Facilitative Behaviors**
  - The *practical tools, techniques, and actions*... that help people build understanding and agreement.
The Interaction Method

Collaborative Attitude

Shared Responsibility for Success

Strategic Thinking

Facilitative Behaviors

The Interaction Method

[Figure 7]
The Interaction Method is both descriptive and prescriptive. It both identifies the conditions required for effective collaboration and provides a diagnostic framework for recognizing when and how collaboration has broken down.

**Tools and Techniques for Each Element**

There are dozens of approaches for addressing each element of The Interaction Method. But the big idea here is that successful collaboration requires a healthy balance of all four elements working in concert. Here’s an example for each element as a place to start.

**The Interaction Method: Shared Responsibility**

Rate yourself on each statement. Then think of one or two ways you might improve. You’ll find that when group members balance the workload so that everyone can participate effectively, you’ll establish shared ownership for creating a successful outcome, and boost operational efficiency (see p. 17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I help plan how to get the work done.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I support my teammates when they need help.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do the tasks I’ve agreed to, or ask for help if I need it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I actively participate in working out differences on the team.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I continue bringing my support and ideas to the team even when things aren’t going the way I want them to.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I regularly recognize my teammate’s contributions and accomplishments.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I give my teammates feedback in a respectful way about what they do that doesn’t work, either for me or for the team.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make requests about what I need from the team in a straightforward way.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to understand what my teammates really mean, even if I disagree with them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I acknowledge the things that are working about the team as well as the things that aren’t.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Interaction Method

The Interaction Method: Collaborative Attitude

Business meetings are great places to look for examples of “collaborative attitude” in action. Often, meeting attendees will gladly contribute, if they know what’s needed. In addition to sharing responsibility for the work of the meeting (discussed above), the group’s efforts will be more focused if everyone knows why they are together (the purpose) and what the meeting is expected to produce (the desired outcomes).

To help people fine-tune their collective collaborative attitudes to get the most out of a meeting, every meeting should have an explicit purpose and desired outcomes. Here are guidelines for each:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose Statement</th>
<th>Why is the meeting being held?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The meeting purpose might be sharing information, solving problems, planning action, or resolving differences, among others. The key is to be explicit so that meeting participants know what type of involvement is expected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desired Outcomes</th>
<th>What are the desired end results or products of the meeting?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desired Outcomes are usually:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Brief, written statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Specific and measurable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Written from the perspective of the participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nouns, not verbs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Examples**

By the end of this meeting, we will have:

- An agreement on the key problems with current invoicing systems and a list of recommended solutions.
- A decision and action plan on how to reduce spending by 10 percent.
- A better understanding of the revised work schedule so that we ensure full coverage on the shift this week.
- An agreed-upon list of production goals for the week.
Identifying the purpose and desired outcomes up front helps the group to both stay on track and recognize digressions, diversions, or dead ends. What’s more, these tools help meetings become more time-efficient—a key to productivity and innovation (see p. 12).

**The Interaction Method: Strategic Thinking**

The essence of strategic thinking is making choices. Strategy involves decisions about what will and won’t be done. In a meeting or interaction, strategic thinking comes into play by recognizing when the group has a choice about how to proceed. All too often, we fall victim to a mentality that says “just do something!” This results in organizational behavior we all bemoan that could be described as “ready, fire, fire, fire, fire!” with no explicit or agreed-upon “aim!” In contrast, strategic thinkers follow three steps that allow them to “ready, aim, and then fire.”

First, we ask **“Where are we?”** This involves recognizing the current situation—we’ve gotten an unexpected result, our meeting has meandered off-track, or some aspect of our environment has shifted. The key to doing this collaboratively is to be explicit and transparent about what’s going on with the other people involved and to build a shared understanding of the situation. This is the “ready” part.
Second, we ask “Where do we want to go?” Here’s the “aim” part. What are we trying to accomplish? What is our desired future state? Again, this is a collaborative discussion to build alignment around the goals we’re trying to achieve.

Third, we ask “How do we get there?” Having established our starting point and our goal, we’re now ready to decide on the right path to get us there. We’re ready to “fire.”

When we aspire to collaborate with our partners and teammates, recognizing choice points and working together to plan the path forward allow the group to work more efficiently and to share responsibility for the approach.

The Interaction Method: Facilitative Behaviors
We call agreements “the currency of collaboration.” When people become frustrated in their attempts to collaborate, the problem can often be traced to weak or incomplete agreement building. The simple three-step approach outlined below helps to ensure that agreements are strong. Conversely, if an agreement turns out to be weak or faulty, a failure in one of these three steps is usually the reason.

1) Agreements start with a proposal. This could be as simple as a suggestion or recommendation, or it could be as involved as brainstorming a list of alternatives. Most people get through this step pretty well. Problems arise when people make a suggestion which is met with silence and the group proceeds as if an agreement has been reached. Silence does not equal agreement!
2) The necessary second step in building an agreement is to ensure that all parties share a common understanding of the proposal. This often involves a dialogue and inquiry into what specifically is and is not being recommended. For example, if a supervisor asked an employee to be more flexible in their work schedule, the employee might “agree” and think they’d be working occasional weekends, but the supervisor might be thinking of shifting the employee to the night shift! Clarity is important.

3) Finally, after all parties have built a shared understanding of the proposal, it’s necessary to actually confirm that the parties agree. Agreement confirmation can take either of two forms, both of which can be illustrated by thinking of a wedding. You can poll the involved parties to ensure they explicitly agree to the proposal (they have to say “I do”), or you can ask whether anyone has an objection to proceeding along the terms of the proposal (the parties should “speak now or hold your peace”).

What about big, complex agreements, where there is lots of conflict? We would respond: “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” While it’s tough to build a big agreement all at once, a series of small agreements often leads to the big “yes.”

By attending to each of the four elements of The Interaction Method—Shared Responsibility, Collaborative Attitude, Strategic Thinking, and Facilitative Behaviors—groups can collaborate more effectively and create stronger, lasting agreements.
At Interaction Associates, we have long believed that meetings are a high leverage point to initiate positive change. And now the Building Trust research has shown that time-efficient meetings that achieve desired outcomes are directly correlated with high levels of innovation and productivity. (p. 13)

The Core Meeting Process
The cornerstone of leading effective meetings that achieve their goals and don’t waste people’s time is to understand and skillfully apply the Core Meeting Process. The Core Meeting Process highlights the major phases of a meeting. By making conscious choices about how you’ll plan, conduct, and follow through on your meeting, you’ll increase the likelihood of success for you and other participants.

Here’s a Tip
When you are setting up your next meeting, consider these facts: Managers will spend over one-half (more for senior managers) of their working life attending, conducting, preparing for and following up on meetings. Over 25 million meetings take place every day in the United States alone.

Almost one-third of all meetings are considered unnecessary by the people who attend them.

Ask yourself: is this meeting really necessary?
The Core Meeting Process

Set up meetings for success by:
- Knowing when to hold a meeting and when not to.
- Deciding on who to involve and how to involve them.
- Writing clear desired outcome statements.
- Designing effective agendas.

Conduct productive meetings by:
- Getting everyone involved.
- Facilitating a discussion to keep it on track.
- Building understanding and agreement.
- Reaching a decision

Ensure follow-through by:
- Evaluating the effectiveness of your meetings.
- Organizing the information; producing useful minutes.
- Planning for the implementation of decisions.

Meetings are a microcosm of an organization’s culture. Use the cornerstone of effective meeting management, the Core Meeting Process, to improve the way you run meetings. By changing the meeting culture—making it more open, honest, collaborative, creative and results-oriented—you will produce a positive ripple effect throughout the organization.
End Note

*Building Trust* returns many rewards.

Interaction Associates can gauge levels of trust, collaboration, and leadership inside your organization. To take the survey and receive a benchmark report, please contact Jeff Nugent at jnugent@interactionassociates.com

About Interaction Associates
Interaction Associates (IA) has 40 years’ experience in helping companies find breakthrough solutions to business challenges. Fortune 500 companies, government agencies and nonprofit organizations throughout the world have used IA’s integrated management consulting and learning and development services. Interaction Associates helps these enterprises set strategic direction, inspire commitment, and build leadership capabilities, leveraging the power of collaborative action for long-term, sustainable results. Learn more at interactionassociates.com