



Center for Technology in Government

New Models of Collaboration *A Guide for Managers*

The role of trust in new models of collaboration

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Introduction

All of the cases in the New Models of Collaboration study involved the development and exercise of trust. Trust has been the subject of a great deal of research and there are many possible ways to define it. For purposes of understanding the role and importance of trust in these projects, we offer a simple dictionary-like definition:

To trust is to have faith in the honesty, integrity, reliability, and competence of another.

To be sure, cooperation among individuals or organizations can occur without the involvement of trust. This is often the case in first-time or one-time encounters when we have no experience to support expectations about trust.

Trust (or mistrust) develops out of the joint experience of working together. By observing how different individuals or organizations deal with risk and vulnerability, we learn to expect certain behaviors. Trust, therefore embodies an expectation that those we work with will not take advantage of one another or exploit situations that benefit one at the expense of others. When trust is low, we usually build formal protections into these relationships. When trust is high, we are more likely to develop informal but well-understood ways of working together. Often the social context demands a formal framework for collaboration. The accountability requirements of publicly funded programs frequently demand these formal frameworks, even when the project is internally operating with a high level of trust.

In the New Models project, there are at least two trust relationships to be considered:

- Public trust, or the degree to which citizens and other groups in society believe the project or service program can be trusted to treat them fairly. For example, in several cases the government partners engaged in long-term exclusive relationships with a single private sector company. In these projects, other companies and government officials were concerned about the propriety and accountability of these arrangements. Both traditional and innovative mechanisms were needed to engender public trust in these relationships
- Professional trust, or the degree to which the people and organizations charged with developing and delivering a service believe they can rely on the motives and predict the performance of the other participants. In many cases, the project teams were composed of people from a collection of public agencies or a variety of public and private organizations. They came from different work settings and often had different expectations about the project operation. These groups needed to find ways to work effectively together to accomplish their goals and to solve problems that were sometimes quite serious. Trust was often an important factor in their relationships.

Social scientists have developed many different ways to understand the complexity of trust. One group of researchers has offered a useful description of three main types of trust:

- Calculus-based trust rests on information-based rational decisions about the organization or person to be trusted. For example, you might decide to trust your doctor based first on his or her professional credentials and public reputation. Your trust may be challenged or

reinforced as you acquire more information through personal interactions regarding your medical care.

- Identity-based trust is based on familiarity and repeated interactions among the participants. Identity-based trust also emerges from joint membership in a profession, a team, a work group, or a social group. Members of a sports team often develop deep trust in one another based on long term association and frequent interactions. Players come to know their teammates well and expect them to respond to different game situations in predictable, accepted ways.
- Institution-based trust rests on social structures and norms, such as laws and contracts, that define and limit acceptable behavior. When two companies enter into a partnership, they draw up formal contracts that specify rights and obligations, and these contracts conform to a body of accepted contract law. Even if the partners are not entirely sure about all the details of one another's operations, they know they can rely on the contract and its legal underpinnings to help the relationship work.

Resolution of public trust issues tends to emphasize institutional measures, although not they are not used exclusively. Professional trust may rest on any or all three types of trust. The tables below identify selected case examples for different kinds of trust-related experiences.

Issues and Solutions Regarding Public Trust			
Issue/Opportunity	Calculus-based trust solution	Identity-based trust solution	Institution-based trust solution
<i>Access Indiana</i> – “self-funding” model, in which the private partner’s revenue comes from user fees, raised issues of public accountability and service priorities			Creation of a governing body representing nine state agencies and representatives of the public, business, and professional associations to set policies, approve fees, and provide oversight.
<i>Bremen Online</i> – need for public trust in reliability and acceptability of electronic signatures for conducting business with the government			Adopted a basic e-signature statute followed by several years of amendments and adaptations to existing laws authorizing e-signatures for specific services
<i>E-file</i> – public demand for absolute accountability and security in tax information			A very strong and specific legal foundation authorized e-file. An oversight board monitors the program, a private sector advisory committee and a public-private oversight group with five standing committees advise on program structure and implementation.
<i>Hotjob</i> – the governing organization was viewed as bureaucratic, only about half of previous clients were satisfied with its performance	Adopted a totally new public identity to match its completely revised approach to providing job training and employment services		
<i>Ontario Business Connect</i> – positive public attitude toward business involvement in public services			Developed easy-to-apply standard tools and agreements to create and sustain partnerships such as letters of intent, MOUs, and licenses.
<i>Partners in Change</i> – extreme economic distress and dissatisfaction with government performance, but great anxiety over the potential loss of government jobs	Launched a high risk innovation supported by the personal and political credibility of the Province’s top elected official	Project managers continuously involved union leadership in decisions about job impacts, never surprised them or allowed rumors or public announcements to threaten their trust.	

Establishing and maintaining public trust in new service models has much in common with more traditional public policy initiatives. Our cases show that no matter how innovative the program may be, the public is reassured by a legal framework for government activities, usually in the form of laws or formal contracts. The public also expects open opportunity and broadly representative involvement in decision making processes, leading to frequent use of advisory committees and specialized councils where a variety of opinions and concerns can be expressed directly to policy makers and program operators.

Addressing public expectations is also an element of trust building. If government agencies or elected leaders want the public to perceive them as entrepreneurial and innovative, they need to signal clearly and frequently to the public that old ways of working are being discarded and new ones put in their place. And then they need to back up that claim by communicating clearly about real activities that show these changes in action.

Trust is not always a problem. In Ontario Business Connect, the generally positive public attitude toward public-private collaboration provided an unusual opportunity -- a trusting social environment for the project. This attitude enabled the project team to develop an institutional framework of official, but also creative and easy to use, tools to cement relationships and establish responsibilities.

Issues and Solutions Regarding Professional Trust			
Issue/Opportunity	Calculus-based trust solution	Identity-based trust solution	Institution-based trust solution
Ambassadeur – encountered difficult relationships between the field officers and the central agency. Desire for central control competed with desire for customized local solutions.	Recognized that the local information officers had needed knowledge of their communities, but the program directors had a better understanding of the larger needs and goals.		Created a steering committee to sit between the two levels of operation to provide overall coordination and communication among the various players.
Cadastre Quebec – experienced serious delays and numerous software problems that jeopardized the entire project		The government and private sector work teams came from similar professional and educational backgrounds so they understood the issues in the same way. They shared the same workspace and this proximity improved communication and collaboration.	
FirstGov – Presidential commitment and extremely high expectations were both advantageous and risky	The President personally initiated FirstGov, giving a strong signal to the agencies and the public that it would succeed.	The small project team was made up of highly motivated, experienced professionals whose personal commitment to the goal and each other pushed them to extraordinary lengths to implement on time.	The support of the federal CIO Council gave the project internal legitimacy as well as staff and other resources. Placement of the project in the General Services Administration committed its leaders to project success.
NYS GIS Collaboration Program – some state agencies were unwilling to share their GIS data without assurance that the dominant players would contribute		Three state agencies, the acknowledged GIS leaders, made the first serious investments in data sharing. Two were willing contributors, the other changed its internal leadership and policies to support statewide sharing.	The program was adopted by a unit of the Governor's office demonstrating top level support and an institutional home for the previously informal effort.

All of the cases in our study were experiments to some degree. Professional trust is the glue that holds these kinds of projects together. Inevitably, when things go wrong or the unexpected happens, professional commitment to the vision and goals of the project is needed to find acceptable solutions and keep the work going. In the stressful environment of tight timetables, shrinking budgets, and untested ideas, mutual respect and honest communication are essential. When the project staff truly work as a team, they make a commitment to each other as well as to their objectives.

Professional trust is supported by good quality information and by open recognition of key facts, trends, and histories. It is also enhanced by having a solid institutional context and the support of established leaders or organizations. The resources and credibility of these institutional players lend strength and provides some “shelter” to the professional network as it works out solutions to problems and invents new ways of working.

Trust matters

In every project, trust emerged as important element. Sometimes initial trust needed to be established. In other cases, unexamined initial trust was tested and needed to be rebuilt, often in the context of joint problem solving. Once earned, trust is still fragile. It needs to be nurtured through continuous attention and demonstrated in ongoing interactions. Two aspects of trust – public trust and professional trust – are likely to be present in all innovative projects. Project sponsors, leaders, and staff need to develop sensitivity and responses that build both.

Online Resources for Trust

Trust in the Public Sector, Center for Public Policy & Management, University of St. Andrews

<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/%7Ecppm/home.htm>

Trust in the Public Sector is a research seminar group at **The Center for Public Policy and Management (CPPM)** of the University of Saint Andrews (UK). This group focuses on interdisciplinary research on the theme of inter- and intra- organisational trust in the public sector.

ITrust

<http://www.itrust.uoc.gr>

iTrust is an Information Society Technologies (IST) cross-disciplinary working group created in August, 2002. ITrust Web site provides a forum for trust management research in the fields of IT, law, social sciences and philosophy.