

Building Up Trust

Trust is one of our most precious resources.

Read what Ulf D. Posé says about how to build it up – sequel 4:

If you want trust, you need the competence to judge.

Every economical crisis is also a confidence crisis. If expectations have not been met and dreams have not come true, this generates insecurity and lets trust dwindle. If trust has crumbled, it is extremely hard to restore. Because there are some requirements for trust to grow. It is based on reciprocity. On the other hand, that also means: every one of us can contribute to its growth – by behaving trustworthy and trusting others. Our series wants to show what matters.

Linguistic and behavioural competence were the first two requirements we found to be necessary for trust to build up. But another necessary requirement is: competence of judgement. It is not just a question of expertise or special knowledge; competence of judgement also has something to do with applying your knowledge adequately. In order to do this, you need a certain degree of maturity and experience in life.

Years ago, the great Austrian philosopher Paul Feyerabend said about competence of judgement: “A democracy is an assembly of mature humans, rather than a gathering of sheep led by a small group of know-it-alls. Maturity does not fall from the skies. It has to be earned. You can learn it by taking responsibility for and being active in all important events and decisions in a political system. Maturity is more important than expertise, because it determines the application and range of said knowledge. Naturally, a scientist assumes that nothing can beat science. Yet citizens of a democracy cannot lean back and accept this kind of pious belief. Even if it means that the success rate of basic decisions is lowered, laymen must not refrain from participating in the process of finding them.”

Competence of judgement means both to have quality knowledge and evaluate this knowledge in a competent manner: quality of knowledge means you can determine the value of this knowledge. So what we need is not to know overmuch, but know to particularly well. In order to do that, we need professional competence.

Competence of judgement will not be satisfied with expertise. Instead, competence of judgement also means that you can apply your knowledge. Unfortunately, more than a few people are satisfied with just gathering information. Yet, there is more between heaven and earth than just information: experience and life. Apart from information and experience, the latter, in particular, is a necessary requirement for competence of judgement.

There are four kinds of knowledge to distinguish between:

- Informational or professional knowledge: How big is the earth? How much is the value of the Euro? What criteria must be met if you want to delegate a task? All these questions are about information.
- Knowledge from experience: If I hold my finger into a flame, I will suffer a burn.
- Habitual knowledge: I know how to butter my bread and how to drive a car.
- Knowledge gained in life: This is where the competence of judgement happens. That means it does not necessarily have something to do with habits, experience or information. Rather, it has a lot to do with wisdom about life itself. Competence of judgement does not necessarily have something to do with how old you are.

Perhaps we can illustrate this by comparing it to the difference between education and intelligence. Someone is intelligent if they can (firstly) find patterns, (secondly) distinguish between what is important and what is not, and (thirdly) concentrate on something.

There are quite a few people who know a lot and have enjoyed an excellent education – yet they do not rank high in terms of intelligence: they cannot find patterns in their knowledge and are not capable of distinguishing between the necessary and the dispensable. They also tend to get stuck. Thus, these people come up with stupid judgements, regardless of their excellent information standard.

So in order to build trust, you have to evaluate your competence of judgement, rather than just rely on the quality of your knowledge. That means you have to identify certain minimum criteria for judging analyses, solutions and decisions. Apart from that, you should look for a motivation to make you critical towards your own proposed analyses and solutions.

A good way to do this is to reflect your own ideas together with others. You can only do that if you are aware of your own position, have considered the consequences of your actions, and have verified the norms and values of your actions. Competence of judgement is a quality question. If you have competence of judgement, you can make better decisions. The quantity of your knowledge is only marginally important. What matters is the quality.

It is determined by the following factors:

1. Competence of judgement is characterized by the attempt to minimize errors and delusions. People who have no competence of judgement are dogmatic.
2. Whatever looks to make sense and to be useful and acceptable may still be unnecessary, useless and unacceptable. Someone who cannot accept that the opposite of what he believes might be true is not competent to judge.
3. A person with competence of judgement will question what is allegedly self-evident. Someone who sits on his throne surrounded by the cage of his truths and thinks they are always correct and acceptable is not competent to judge. A person who is competent to judge, on the other hand, knows that what he sees as self-evident is only obligatory for him. Nobody has the right to transfer his own obligations to other people and make them mandatory for them, as well.
4. A person who is competent to judge can differentiate. At the same time he can identify what is the important thing about complex issues. If you are not competent to judge, you lose track in complex issues.
5. If you have competence of judgement, you think in alternatives. For every possible activity, you also see that it can be done differently. Someone who is incompetent of judgement thinks adversely, rather than alternatively. To him, it is important to contradict other people's ideas. There are quite a few enterprises where the meetings and conferences are characterized by adverse thinking: employees are supposed to contradict each other – not find out what might be conducive to finding a solution to a problem.
6. Someone who is competent to judge tries to reflect on the values, expectations, interests and needs of other people. The person who is incompetent to judge transfers his values, experiences and needs to others; he forces his own ideas on others.

So now we have described all three competences that promote trust: linguistic, behavioural and judgemental. Together, they prevent us from making decisions based only on feeling: they are a platform for trust based on knowledge, rather than opinions. They are a necessary and helpful foundation according to which to orientate your behaviour adequately. Thus, if a person has competence of judgement, he will not fall victim to blind bustle and empty actions. Instead, he will act goal-oriented: the competence he gained will enable him to give good advice or come to a decision that makes sense, and then to initiate the necessary steps.

In short: if you have it, you spread trust, because you can accompany people through unclear terrain. Speaking with the words of Luhmann, you do not hesitate to give someone an "advance payment". However, what is also necessary is adequacy. We will discuss this in the next sequel.