

Building Up Trust

Trust is one of our most precious resources.

Read what Ulf D. Posé says about how to build it up – sequel 5:

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.

If you want to build up trust, you have to behave adequately. An activity is adequate if the disadvantages resulting from it never win over the advantages of said activity. That means that adequacy always makes it necessary to weigh the advantages and the disadvantages of an activity against each other, which basically makes adequacy a question of proportionality.

Especially if you are in a position of strength against the opposite party and have to make a decision that involves him, you have to be aware of proportionality. Our legal system dealt with the principle of proportionality at great length: an action is only adequate if it is suitable, necessary, and proportionate. Adequacy is characterized by the factors:

- Suitability: if the desired effect can actually be achieved by the measure you took.
- Necessity: if no milder or less detrimental means can serve the same purpose.
- Proportionality: detrimental effect and desired achievement must be well-balanced.

Basically, the requirement of adequacy wants to make sure that an activity has the desired effect while keeping the detrimental consequences at an acceptable minimum.

The disadvantages caused by an activity, therefore, must not be more than the disadvantages prevented by the same activity.

That means adequacy has a price. It means you have to forego immediate advantages if they would mean a disadvantage for other people or our environment.

What counts is not how many people want trust, but how many people are prepared to pay that price for adequacy.

That is exactly where evaluation of values begins. First, it determines which ethical dimension you want to protect. Take, for example, biophilia, which is the “promotion of life” or “love of life”. The evaluation of values has to weigh activities with respect to ethics in order to decide if they can be called adequate.

Basically, we have to ask four questions:

1. What if an activity is useful for all parties concerned with respect to promoting life? Then the activity is ethically imperative.
2. What if the activity is detrimental to all parties concerned? Then the activity is ethically forbidden.
3. What if the activity renders more advantages than disadvantages? Then the activity is ethically acceptable if the harmed person agrees.
4. What if the damage is graver than the advantage? Then the activity is ethically reprehensible.

Just as you act reprehensibly if you put pressure on someone to make him accept a grave disadvantage in order to gain something yourself. But who is to identify disadvantage and advantage? Who is independent enough not to be blinded by his

own advantage and consequently to convince others that the disadvantage to them is negligible?

Who is to decide, who is to weigh and control? First and foremost: you yourself! The social scientist Michaela Pfadenhauer developed „Codes of Ethics“ as a mode for controlling and monitoring. This ethical code is particularly valid for people who hold positions involving a high degree of self-control, self reflection and autonomy.

We can identify six characteristics for self responsibility and self-control with respect to adequacy:

1. There is an ethical code, usually in written form.
2. All parties concerned identify with the ethical rules laid down in the code, and they behave accordingly.
3. There are pre-defined criteria and indicators encouraging everybody to adhere to the formal code. This commitment to ethical rules is intended to make the ethical standard publicly transparent and to ensure that violations against it are monitored.
4. The individual rules laid down in the code address persons and their individual behaviour. What matters is the behaviour and not the – possibly good – intention.
5. All parties concerned have ethical competence. This will only be possible if the code is controlled by an independent commission.
6. As a last characteristic, Pfadenhauser proposed that “it should be communicated that professional behaviour is linked with social values such as the common good, solidarity, autonomy and trust, etc.”. This communication helps to make sure that professional behaviour is subject to control and sanctioning.

If these six characteristics are met, adequacy through self-control is possible. However, this does not mean that self-control is necessarily the only form of control for adequacy. There is another dimension to adequacy: justice.

We will discuss it in the next sequel.