Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Building Trust

Supporting your co-design approach and delivery

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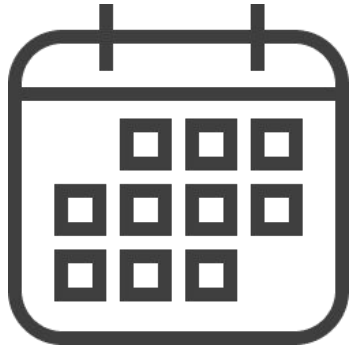
Why building trust matter in co-design

Co-design is about the long term

Create long-term relationships

- Users, experts, and stakeholders work in equal partnership for weeks, months (sometimes even years)
- It’s not a transactional relationship
- Users, experts, and stakeholders design things even without professional research, design, or policy support



Productive long-term relationships are not possible without trust

This document is largely based on

- TIGTECH (2020) ‘Trust and tech governance’.
- Patrick Lencioni (2002) ‘The five dysfunctions of a team’.

How do we build trust and create a supportive environment?

The following insights come from branches of psychology, neuroscience, behavioural and risk sciences, and sociology

Show good intent

People are more likely to trust an organisation, a process, or a decision, *even if it is not in their favour*, if they can see the intent is for the greater good.

- Good intent needs to be at all stages of the co-design process, all the way through implementation.
- Explicit action and communication about the good intent is central to trust.
- Intent shows commitment to public interest in action.

Kaufmann, T., Gutknecht, R., Lindner, R., Schirrmeister, E., Meißner, L. and Schmoch, U. 'Trust, trustworthiness and technology governance'.

Acknowledge mistakes and shortcomings

Mistakes will happen and people understand this. Operating honestly and being accountable is key for building trust.

- ‘It’s never the problem, it’s the cover up’. Trust can be lost more from the conscious or unconscious attempts to divert attention or rationalise it as something else than the problem itself.
- Explain uncertainty.
- Own up to mistakes and apologise when things go wrong (an apology on behalf an organisation goes a long way).
- Show users, experts, and stakeholders that you are impartial and are holding people to account.

Share power and ownership

Sharing power and ownership at every stage of the co-design process is much more effective than trying to convince people that you have done the right thing.

- Giving users, experts, and stakeholders genuine agency to influence decisions makes them more likely to trust those decisions, even if there is no personal gain for them.
- Jointly create a list of outcomes you want to achieve.
- Co-create a shared problem statement.
- Co-analyse research findings.
- Ask users to reflect on the key theme from user research interviews together with you.
- Ask users to share these reflections with experts and stakeholders.

Be open about how decisions are made

Create conditions for users, experts, and stakeholders to genuinely influence decisions about policy, products, and services and their delivery.

Openness and transparency about decisions and how they have been made help to demonstrate accountability and to earn trust.

- Be open about policy red lines and ministerial commitments.
- Be clear about what decisions can be made through co-design.
- Be open about lack of openness.
- Communicate decisions directly to users, not through stakeholders.
- Be more specific about actions. Tell people exactly what you've done so far with their contribution, what you've learned, and what you're doing next.

Fulfill expectations/aspirations

Trust is a hope about expectations being fulfilled.

A decision to trust signals a hope that an organisation or individual will fulfil expectations we have of them.

It's about context specific expectations– we don't lose trust in our doctor because he/she can't fix our loo.

- Ask what others hope to get from you, instead of making assumptions.
- Clearly communicate what you hope to get from others.
- Agree clear role definitions - assuming what the roles are often causes misunderstanding and may lead to lack of trust.
- Consistently deliver against expectations, responding to feedback.

"Assume…makes an Ass of U and Me"

Miss Rowe, Primary School Teacher, 1972

Demonstrate respect

People carry the feelings of anger and frustration generated by being disrespected for a long time.

- Perceived respect is a powerful driver of trust. People are more likely to accept the decisions taken, *even if they don't align with their desired outcomes*, if they feel their views have been respected.
- By 'showing your workings' in plain language and in a more open way you demonstrate your respect for users, stakeholders, and others. Talk to people so that they can understand - use everyday language.
- Demonstrate fairness of decisions. Perceived unfairness is one of the most powerful drivers of distrust. Even as tiny children we calibrate fairness and unfairness with great precision – 'it's not fair' we wail and feel the injustice.
- Treat everyone as an equal.

Acknowledge conflict & find common ground

All productive long-term relationships require healthy conflict. This is true in romantic relationships, parenthood, friendship, and work.

- Explore and acknowledge different views.
- Acknowledge that conflict is productive, and that many teams have a tendency to avoid it.
- Ensure that it's not the same person extracting buried disagreements and shedding the light of day on them. Acknowledging and addressing conflict is a team effort (e.g. assign different individuals to take on this responsibility during meetings and co-design activities).
- Acknowledge disagreement or conflict in real time and remind people how important addressing conflict is.
- Find out what the root of any conflict or misunderstanding is and address that (e.g. miscommunication, unclear expectations etc).

"Don't try to persuade, understand the source of resistance and address that"

Nobel Prize winning economist Daniel Kahneman

There is never a straight line between what we intend and how our intent is interpreted by others.

Taking actions to deliberately build trust is key.

Appendix

Appendix

Elements that shape who people trust

Cognitive biases and beliefs

- Our brains play tricks on us to simplify complex decisions, like those relating to trust. We call those shortcuts '**cognitive biases and heuristics**', as popularised by the behavioural economist Daniel Kahneman.
- The list of known influential heuristics is long; how and when our brains use them is context dependent.
- **Beliefs** do not require facts. If you don't believe in climate change, scientific facts don't matter. We actively seek out resources that support our beliefs and ignore the ones which don't.

"If you believe you can, or believe you can't, you are always right"

Henry Ford

Benson, B. (2016) 'Cognitive Bias Codex'.

The need for belonging

- Our need for belonging is thousands of years old and comes from the evolutionary need for survival. Our ancestors relied on others for physical safety and, although, we don’t have to worry about being eaten by tigers anymore, our brains haven’t evolved to take this modern reality into consideration.
- We intuitively feel closer and trust people who we consider ‘in our group’ more than those who we see as ‘outsiders’.

Previous events

Emotional events which happened in the past may be far more influential in our inclination to trust than current happenings.

- Our experiences or feeling safe, or not, in our early years play a role throughout our lives.
- Whether we have been trusted in the past matters – being regularly trusted builds confidence and an inclination to reciprocate.
- Whether our trust decisions have been well-placed seems likely to have an effect. If we had our trust betrayed, we may be less trusting generally, especially in a similar situation.

van der Kolk, B. A. (2014) ‘The Body Keeps the Score’.

Physical considerations

Some physical traits that influence our willingness to trust are hardwired into our bodies, and thus difficult to influence.

- The role of genetics in the context of trust is much debated.
- Hormones and body chemistry potentially play a role – levels of oxytocin might make us more trusting even when our trust has been misplaced.
- Higher levels of stress hormones might make us less likely to trust others in specific situations.

Kosfeld, M., Heinrichs, M., Zak, P., Fischbacher, U., Fehr, E. (2005) ‘Oxytocin increases trust in humans’.

Context

Trust exists in great part to help us navigate our environments successfully. Our decisions to trust are highly context dependent - ‘Is this ‘safe?’

- Our inclination to trust is often specific to quite a narrow context and aligned to our expectations of an individual or an organisation. For example, we might trust a regulator to ensure the rules are proportionate, but may not trust them to arbitrate on ethics.
- Edelman’s ‘Trust Barometer’ shows fluctuations in who is most trusted in society, but as trust in institutions becomes more fragile, ‘someone like me’ is growing in importance as a trusted source.
- Trust decisions are influenced by cultures and social norms. What’s happening now on the national or global scale also plays a part e.g. government’s response to the pandemic as well as post-Brexit arrangements shape our decisions to trust or not to trust in other contexts.

Patrick Lencioni's model

Building teams and collaborative partnerships

- **Build trust:** when team members are genuinely transparent and vulnerable with one another, they are able to build trust
- **Engage in conflict around ideas:** when there is trust, team members are able to engage in unfiltered, constructive debates of conflicting views.
- **Commit to decisions:** when team members are able to debate and openly share conflicting views, they are more likely to commit to decisions.
- **Hold each other accountable:** when everyone is committed to clearly articulated actions, expectations, and goals, they are more likely to hold each other accountable.
- **Focus on achieving results:** when there is trust, healthy conflict, commitment and accountability, people are more likely to deliver results.

Patrick Lencioni (2002) 'The five dysfunctions of a team'.