

The 3 C's of trust: Connection, Character and Competence

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Executive Summary

The article addresses trust-building challenges in professional relationships, citing data showing 61% of people worry business leaders deliberately mislead. The author proposes a '3 C's of Trust' framework comprising Connection (emotional bonds through stories, questions, listening), Character (visible values in communication), and Competence (perceived expertise and credibility). The framework suggests all three elements must work together for lasting relationships, as relying on only one or two creates vulnerabilities. The author presents a 'What-Feel-Who Method' for establishing connection through conscious questioning that uncovers what matters to others, how they feel about it, and who it impacts. The approach emphasizes showing care through follow-up questions that demonstrate genuine interest rather than surface-level interaction.

Key Insights

1. Trust requires simultaneous demonstration of connection, character, and competence rather than relying on any single element
2. Conscious questioning that reveals personal priorities, emotions, and key relationships creates meaningful professional connections
3. Follow-up conversations that reference previously shared personal information demonstrate authentic care and build psychological safety

Practical Takeaways

- Use the What-Feel-Who questioning sequence to uncover what colleagues care about, their emotional state, and key relationships
- Replace generic greetings with specific follow-up questions that reference previous conversations and show genuine interest

Frameworks Mentioned

What-Feel-Who Method — A questioning technique that uncovers what is important to someone, how they feel about it, and who it impacts

Critical Analysis

Strengths include practical applicability and clear methodology. The author draws on the Edelman Trust Barometer for context. Limitations include lack of empirical testing of the 3 C's framework, reliance primarily on personal experience rather than research, and potential oversimplification of trust dynamics. The approach may not account for cultural differences in relationship-building or power dynamics that affect trust formation.

Organizational Practice

Manager conducting initial and follow-up 1:1 meetings with new team members using structured questioning techniques to build personal connections

Strategic Implications

Organizations may benefit from training leaders in structured relationship-building techniques, though the approach requires consistent application and cultural alignment to be effective across diverse teams

Validation Status: passed

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