

**A Leadership Challenge:
A Case Study of Trust Among a Union Leadership Team During a Pandemic**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2022

Trust is one of the key components necessary for having a highly effective and successful organization and is a cornerstone of relationships. While many leaders know this, few dedicate the time to create opportunities to build and maintain high levels of trust among its leadership. This study illuminated trust dynamics of a labor union's leadership team.

Ten members of this leadership team were interviewed, observed, and the data was analyzed through narratives, content analysis, and field observations. Participants gave their experiences of five trust components (honesty, understanding, loyalty, keeping agreements, and openness) in facilitating or impeding trust among the local's leadership team (Broom, 2002). Moreover, the impact of COVID-19 on the leadership team's trust dynamics was also examined.

Study findings indicated that of the five trust components, keeping agreements had the greatest impact on trust. Accountability, even though it wasn't one of the original five trust components also emerged as having a large impact on trust. COVID-19 did not have a significant impact on trust among this team as they were able to perform when dealing with crises. Addressing organizational and managerial trust is a key factor in the success of accomplishing an organization's mission and results in organizational viability, an increase in productivity, and successful outcomes.

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Preface

There have been people from the very beginning. My parents, Bennie and Chrysteen (Winfrey) Richard, the world's greatest educators; Crandall and Bennie LeNard, the world's greatest brothers; my entire Richard community in Magnolia MS; all of my cousins on the Winfrey side; High School Park Home and Garden Association Community; New Hope Baptist Church in Jackson MS; Onetta Starling Whitley and Robert Smith. Then many others appeared including, Mr. Harold Haughton, Vanella Crawford, Dr. Alice Cahill, Dr. Velma Elaine McLin Mitchell, Dr. Victor Cheers, Abukamau Ali-Ibrahim, Dr. Tom Sizemore, Bill Butler, the Black men of the Re-evaluation Co-counseling community, and Paco Valencia (I can still feel your hand on my shoulder in that auditorium). Dr. Sonia Alvarez, Dr. Loretta Hobbs, Dr. Charlyn Green-Fareed, and Dr. Andrea Myers... you kept up with me after Fielding and I can't find the words to describe what that support has felt like. Dr. Carl Wamble and Dr. Renard Peeples, won't he do it? My "Imagine Us" family, y'all held it down and the best is yet to come. To my University of Pittsburgh cohort, we are connected for life. Dr. Benjamin D. Wilson, in you I have found yet another brother.

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wife. Not that long ago, no one could have convinced me that we would be figuring this thing called life out together. But God! You held this family close, while I chased this dream, and supported me in all ways along this journey. WE did it. Let's continue laughing, loving and playing, real hard, now and forever more.

Dedication

I dedicate this body of work to my paternal grandparents, Bennie and Perlina Richard. They knew the value of an education and were prohibited from receiving one living in Pike County Mississippi. Know that I always knew your brilliance, wisdom, courage, fearlessness, and circumstances. Your legacy spans across time....

1.0 Naming & Framing the Problem of Practice

1.1 Broader Problem Area

Trade organizations, originally known as trade societies, and labor unions date back to the 1700s in the United States (Dubofsky & McCartin, 2017). The founding objective of these two groups was and still is to protect the employment interests and rights of workers and enable them to bargain with employers from a position of strength. Over three centuries, the existence of both trade societies and labor unions has changed the lives of the working class through measures such as increased working wages, improved working conditions, the addition of paid vacation time, mandatory safety and health regulations, and opportunities for laborers to improve their economic, social, and political position in the U.S. through collective bargaining (Docherty & van der Velden, 2012). Historically, labor unions have championed the fight against workplace and social injustice through these endeavors and many additional efforts.

However, the last few decades have presented some critical challenges. Since the 1980s, U.S. labor unions have seen a decrease in membership, ongoing interference and defeat by employers, and a loss of direction and power regarding the relationship between unions and their members (Docherty & van der Velden, 2012). As a result of these challenges—particularly the latter—a depleted state of trust has emerged as a censorious issue between union leadership and union members. To best understand the dynamics of trust as a construct for leadership in labor union organizations, a review of the history and emergence of U.S. labor unions, current union trends, and contemporary leadership challenges is needed.

1.1.1 History of United States Labor Unions

The need to heed the call to protect U.S. laborers started in the latter portion of the eighteenth century with events like the introduction of trade unionism in the 1780s, and the first strike of Philadelphia printers in 1786 followed by a two-week strike by Philadelphia carpenters several years later in May 1791 (Doherty & van der Velden, 2012). These events—and many others like them—triggered the beginning of what extant literature refers to as the quest to “form a more perfect union” (Atkinson, 2004, p. 199; Skurzynski, 2008, p. 6). The growth and membership of trade societies and labor unions began to grow substantially during the Industrial Revolution at a time when the U.S. workforce workers became increasingly dependent on large factories, schools, and other early forms of corporations for employment. It was during the first half of the nineteenth century when new unions were rapidly gaining political power following the appointment of a presidential arbitration commission by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1902, the enactment of the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933 which gave unions the legal right to recruit employees and to be collective bargaining representatives, and the National Labor Relations Act (also known as the Wagner Act) in 1935 that protected the rights of labor unions to organize and engage some sectors of workers in collective bargaining. It is estimated that at the turn of the twentieth century, the number of labor unions had more than doubled from what it was just a decade prior and membership sat at just over two million (Form, 1995).

Reflective of labor unions’ popularity as a means for protecting workers’ rights and curtailing the potentially abusive power and behaviors of employers, there is no shortage of scholarship on the role, purpose, and necessity of unionization. On a similar note, literature has extensively confronted the role and importance of quality leadership as a systematic way of building and nurturing trust between organizational members. Covey and Merrill (2008) assert that

trust affects the trajectory and outcome of leadership relationships, be it positively or negatively. Still, however, it remains that trust as an asset for enabling performance is both “misunderstood and underutilized” (Covey & Merrill, 2008, p. 51). Further, despite it being an integral function of leadership relationships, existing literature has failed to sufficiently address the link between the two. However, it should not be overlooked that leadership quality and trust are both critical elements of context that need to be considered in understanding labor union membership.

1.1.2 Trust as a Construct for Organizational Leadership

Effective leadership requires a variety of skills like knowledge and experience, however, the ability to lead people, teams and projects requires trust. Within any organization there are various levels that employees occupy. Simply put, within an organization there are employees who perform tasks/functions, managers who guide processes, and leaders who set the organization’s vision and work to maximize organizational successes. One of the core values within the organization, regardless of the employee level, is trust (Covey & Merrill, 2008; Jiang & Probst, 2015). The absence of trust is typically cited as one of the primary factors that diminish organizational leadership and success and impact organizational outcomes (Covey, 2006; Jiang & Probst, 2015). Leaders of major organizations face a growing problem as four out of five employees expressed low confidence in organizational leadership because of trust issues (Hurley, 2006). Building trust is a long-term process (Tomaževič & Aristovnik, 2019) and must be maintained to foster employee engagement and commitment. Trust also influences a variety of attributes within an organization to include but are not limited to managerial and organizational effectiveness (Thomas et al., 2009), team performance (De Jong, Dirks & Gillespie, 2015), job satisfaction (Guinot, Chiva & Roca-Puig, 2014), the commitment-withdrawal relationship (Chow,

Cheung, & Ka Wa, 2014) organizational citizenship behavior (Nienaber et al., 2015), and employee involvement (Thomas et al., 2009).

1.1.3 Organizational System

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) is an international workers union that was founded in 1921. SEIU, an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor, began in Chicago as a building services union that primarily organized custodians. SEIU is comprised of several chapters called ‘Locals’ that serve union members across various regions of the United States. Local 105, the SEIU chapter where this study occurred, is located in Colorado and represents upwards of 8,000 laborers in healthcare, janitorial, security, and airport roles throughout the nation’s southwestern region.

In the middle of 2011, amid a backlog of business challenges and internal issues, Local 105 requested organization development support from SEIU’s internal consulting group. To better understand the breadth of the problems facing the organization, two BOLD (Building Organizations and Leadership Development) consultants conducted 19 empathy interviews with members of the executive board and representatives from the international union. Many interviewees expressed their strong belief in the capacity and credibility of the union and its reputation and offerings, as well as their desire to immediately and directly address issues that negatively impacted its members. The members and staff, however, had varied opinions about how and why the internal environment deteriorated over the years, with the bulk of the decline being within the previous six months. Local 105’s leaders were distressed about the organization’s current climate and were open to guidance and support to address organizational and leadership issues.

One thing to note was that widespread concern existed regarding the impact of tensions on membership. Additionally, the prediction that members were feeling and becoming disengaged and disheartened, and believed that the executive board and staff needed to improve its communication and engagement with members, first and foremost, was noted. It was obvious that the lack of trust between and among the different levels of Local 105's leadership (executive board, elected officials, and staff) was pervasive.

Several leadership changes and a lengthy transition period contributed to a lack of clarity in decision-making processes, ineffective communications, and confusion about the separate roles and responsibilities of the executive board, president, and staff. This observation was reinforced in many interviews with executive board members who reported confusion about the actual structures and processes that were in place to support the work of Local 105.

Specific observations and empathy interview findings concluded:

- Executive board members expressed hope and optimism that Local 105 could improve and indicated a mutual commitment to reach this objective;
- Tension within the executive board and Local 105's staff was having a negative impact on members;
- There was confusion about how decisions were being made;
- There was a lack of clarity and respect for the roles and responsibilities of the president and executive;
- Neither members nor leadership were happy with the status quo;
- The issues and dynamics of Local 105 had become personal, complex, and longstanding;
- Trust was consistently referred to as "non-existent"; and

- A shortage of experienced staffing, particularly within the healthcare division, was a challenge affecting all aspects of Local 105's work.

From December 2011 to January 2012, a concentrated focus on improving the relationship between the president and the executive board, the president and the secretary-treasurer, and relationships among the executive board took place. The BOLD center supported Local 105 by providing:

- Regular, individual coaching sessions with the president and the secretary-treasurer;
- Executive board trainings focused on trust building, roles and responsibilities, and leadership in December 2011 and January 2012;
- Meetings with healthcare members of the executive board to increase communication and decrease conflicts and deeply imbedded patterns of gossip; and
- Consistent meetings with Local 105 senior staff.

Despite the efforts to manifest Local 105's objective of improving internal affairs, Local 105 was placed in trusteeship in 2012. That is, the union removed Local 105's leadership and assumed command and control. During this time, the union temporarily assigned international leaders to diagnose the issues surrounding the trusteeship and instated the basic organizational structures needed to stabilize Local 105. In November 2013, new bylaws were presented to the membership for approval and were officially adopted in December of the same year. In March 2014, Local 105 appointed a new president that subsequently became its first elected president after emerging from trusteeship

1.1.4 Stakeholders

Local 105 serves both internal and external stakeholders in its drive for social and economic justice. Staff, the executive board, and stewards (local representatives) are all internal stakeholders of the organization. It is slightly more challenging to define the external stakeholders of Local 105 depending on which sector Local 105 represents. However, there are key external stakeholders across all sectors of Local 105.

- External stakeholders include:
- Employers in each sector (for specifics, see each industry, below);
- City, county, and state politicians who the union contributes to, often supports their election with volunteer canvassing, and holds accountable;
- Community organizations Local 105 supports financially or organizes with around joint priorities such as environmental justice, affordable housing and racial equity;
- Other unions, local and state building trades, the Denver Labor Federation, the SEIU State Council, and the state AFL-CIO federation;
- In general, the public is an external stakeholder to this union because they are cared for and protected by SEIU Local 105 members and the contracts that Local 105 negotiates. Moreover, Local 105 is involved in creating policies and laws that help all Colorado residents.

Secondary stakeholders:

- Healthcare
 - Employers: Health systems like Kaiser, Mental Health Center of Denver, and Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains. Property Services

employers like janitorial contractors cleaning commercial real estate across the Denver Metro region, Airport contractors providing janitorial, parking, and other services.

- People they serve: Patients who benefit from low staffing ratios
- Janitorial, Airport and Security:
 - Employers: Airports, Convention Center
 - People they serve: Making sure buildings are clean and safe affects everyone who works or passes through these buildings.

1.1.5 Statement of the Problem of Practice

In 2012, Local 105 exited trusteeship, and began the journey of earning a reputation as a powerful labor force in Colorado. Adding to its reputation has been a successful arrangement of marketing campaigns, record participation and funding for political programs, contract bargaining successes, and collaboration with several statewide non-union organizations. There has also been an increase in membership. Yet, despite these successes, Local 105 has also experienced varying levels of staff morale because of the changing dynamics in operations. More recently, since 2018, Local 105 experienced a 27 percent change in staff composition and, as a result, two key positions, chief of staff and political director, were vacant until recently. According to Strickland (2002), a thin line exists between stability and change that, when not properly managed, can affect organizational identity and constitute a fragile resistance from internal stakeholders. At the Local 105, during its successes in 2012, the union's leadership failed to facilitate practices that would maintain a collective stance against corporate pressure to achieve such progress, thereby leading to low employee morale plagued by distrust with leadership.

During consultation prior to COVID, the union president described a specific problem as fluctuating trust among Local 105's leadership team. It was determined that the onset of the pandemic challenged and ultimately dismantled any psychological safeguards that prior to the pandemic, allowed elements such as trust, respect, and collective learning and performance to naturally take place within the organization. Edmondson (2018) posits that the loss or mismanagement of such elements generally results in internal stakeholders being engaged and expressive or being disengaged and defensive—a disposition that could quickly and continually underpin issues with trust and agency.

The purpose of this case study is twofold: 1) to better understand how Local 105's leadership team thinks and feels about trust among the team; 2) to identify the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on members of the team. At minimum, this research will provide foundational knowledge regarding trust among the Local 105 leadership team that can help guide the design of organizational development interventions intended to increase and maintain high levels of trust in the future. The researcher anticipates the leadership teams' capacity to build and maintain high levels of trust among itself can facilitate increased trust among Local 105's staff and positively influence membership by supporting aligned and intentional actions of member leaders throughout the state.

2.0 Review of Supporting Knowledge Regarding Trust

The importance of trust in an organization cannot be overemphasized, especially when an organization is facing both an internal (i.e., low trust among leadership team) and external crisis (i.e., COVID-19). The following literature frames an understanding of organizational trust.

2.1 Defining Trust

Organizational trust is regarded as a currency, a form of social capital, that is exchanged between individuals, teams, and organizations. When individuals and teams enjoy high levels of trust they desire, and require, less oversight (Roca & Wilde, 2019; Bashyakar & Menon, 2010). According to Hakanen and Soudunsaari (2012), trust is also defined as having confidence in another's goodwill; commitment to work cooperatively in the presence of unknowns (i.e., how trusted people will act); arises through expectations of continued honest and trustworthy interactions; signifies follow through on commitments; and is impacted by past experiences and interactions.

One of the challenges of addressing issues of trust is first defining what trust is, both in general and within specific organizational contexts. Ferrin and Dirks (2001) state that trust is “a belief or confidence about another party's integrity (including reliability, predictability, and dependability) and/or benevolence (including goodwill, motives, intentions, and caring)” (p. 469). Edmondson (2018) describes trust as “a psychological state [that's] comprised [of] the

intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectation of the intentions or behaviors of the other” (p. 395).

McAllister (1995) describes trust as an interpersonal transaction where people take a risk which encourages innovation and is based on the “expectation that one will [engage in] what is expected rather than what is feared” (p. 2). The author further posits that trust in another depends more on “how they make decisions that affect [them] than on how the [decision maker] behaves (McAllister, 1995, p. 2). In other words, trust is about determining how confident one is with engaging in tasks “on the basis of another’s words, actions, and decisions” (McAllister, 1995, p. 2).

2.2 Operationalizing Trust

Trust is one of the key components necessary for having a highly effective and successful organization that represents shared strategic values. Trust is central to having high quality relationships between employees, their supervisors, and their organizations. When organizational trust between employees and supervisors exists and is based on successful communication and effective work relationships, a decrease in turnover intentions and an increase in organizational commitment and job satisfaction ensues (Sousa-Lima & Michael, 2013).

Organizations are dynamic human systems that utilize reciprocal relationships to get work done. This interdependence is both required for humans to effectively work together and illuminates the need for trust to maintain such interdependence (Thomas et al., 2009).

Most research on interpersonal interactions references the concept of trust as integral to human interaction, team development, and organizational behavior (Ažderska & Jerman-Blažič,

2013; Bauer, Keusch, & Kreuter, 2019; Ferrin, Bligh, & Kohles, 2007; Wise, 2016). Organizations that have highly functioning teams, performance, and employee satisfaction, typically have high levels of organizational trust. While the hackneyed phrase “people are our most important resource” is commonly repeated in organizations, these same organizations often fail to create a culture that fosters high quality relationships built on trust. This can result in a loss of productivity, employee satisfaction, and employee loyalty. (Thomas et al., 2009).

2.3 Cognitive Based Trust and Affect Based Trust

The process of trusting another is both a cognitive and affect-based phenomenon. McAllister (1995) states that “trust is cognition-based because we choose who we will trust, what type of trust (e.g., professional or personal) to extend, and the circumstances in which that trust is extended (e.g., novice or expert)” (p. 3). One’s assessment of another’s trustworthiness is based on historical interpersonal interactions and experiences related to reliability, dependability, competence, and responsibility. The conscious choice to trust another person is not only based on a cognitive assessment but also includes an affective assessment, which, when combined, determines the type and level of trust that will be provided.

According to McAllister (1995) the affective considerations that support trust in relationships is based on the premise that relationships are built on emotional bonds between individuals and that people make emotional investments in trust relationships. This emotional investment is based on “genuine care and concern for the welfare of partners; belief in the intrinsic value of the relationship; and belief that there is reciprocity in the trust relationship(s)” (1995, p. 26). Sousa-Lima and Michael (2013) takes McAllister’s (1995) idea of “affect based trust” and

defines it as the “emotional attachment [formed] from the mutual care and concern developed by individuals in social exchange relationships” (p. 26). This connotes that affect based trust is a reciprocal relationship based on trust and mutual obligation that provides the employee with the perception that the organization values their contributions and opinions as well as a sense that the organization cares about their well-being and success.

2.4 Factors that Impact Managerial Trust

According to McAllister (1995), managers' use of cognitive based trust with their peers depends on the success of past interactions, social similarity, and the organization's context consideration. Success of past interactions results from previous interpersonal interactions with peers in role-related job duties and the peers' past track record. Managers tend to look for culturally normed patterns of reciprocity and fairness as well as an indication that their peers are dependable and follow through on commitments. Perceptions of peer performance, competence, and dependability has a direct impact on personal productivity and shapes a manager's perception of a peer's trustworthiness (McAllister, 1995, pp. 27-28).

Social similarity was also cited as a key factory in trust development. According to McAllister (1995), “groups of individuals with similar characteristics, like race, ethnicity, gender, may have an advantage over more diverse groups in maintaining trust in working relationships” (p. 28). Such characteristics have the ability to negatively influence the beliefs and attitudes of managers when their peers do not share similar characteristics. They tend to perceive the out-group member(s) as dishonest, untrustworthy, uncooperative, and unqualified and undependable than

those who display similar characteristics. This perception leads the manager to make a value judgement of the employee as being untrustworthy, incompetent, and unpromotable.

McAllister (1995) also explored the concept of *organizational citizenship behavior* (OCB) as a component of affect-based trust. He described OCB as “behavior that provides help and assistance outside of an individual’s work role, is not directly rewarded, is self-motivating, and altruistic in nature” (McAllister, 1995, p. 31). This person is perceived as a “team player” which is considered highly valued in effective, task-oriented teams. A question remains—is the level of acceptance, attributed to OCB, enough to establish trustworthiness, or does the level of trustworthiness also depend on the amount of social similarity and/or past work and interpersonal interactions? It is assumed that the latter is more than likely the case in most cases.

Broom, (2002) posits that high quality relationships support high levels of influence among team members. In other words, team member will allow themselves to be influence by others if they trust them. He states that “relationships become worthy of trust, “after” being tempered by adversity” (p. 92), and names five primary components of trust. These components are honesty, understanding, loyalty, keeping agreements, and openness. And, are defined as: *Honesty*-We don’t knowingly lie to each other and share the truth as we see it; *Understanding*-You understand my goals, values, motivations, concept of well-being; *Loyalty*-We come together when things get hard; *Keeping Agreements*-We do what we say we will do; *Openness*-We share information that enables us to make well informed decisions. He also states that very few organizations actually take the time to build trust, even though there is usually an acknowledgement of its importance.

2.5 Organizational Distrust

According to Rani et al. (2018), to have positive work outcomes, (e.g., job involvement, in-role behavior, extra role performance) among employees, organizational identification needs to be intact. Organizational identification is the “perception of oneness with or belonging to an organization” (Rani et al., 2018, p. 2) and is essential to the employee-employer exchange relationship (Kim et al., 2018). When an employee can identify with their organization, they feel committed to it because they have an emotional attachment and feel engaged in a reciprocal work relationship. Negative organization actions such as layoffs, globalization, reorganizations, reliance on contractual workers, and few opportunities for promotion and advancement impact trust and make it difficult for organizations to retain their employees’ level of organizational identification. Employees perceive these negative actions as psychological contract breaches, where their employer is unable to fulfill their perceived obligation. The result directly impacts the employees’ organizational identification (Rani et al., 2018, p. 2). Rani et al. (2018) define a psychological contract as a “state where two parties (i.e., employer and employee) interact within the organization and work systematically to get a job done” (p. 2). This psychological contract provides a basis for the “implicit and explicit obligations” that exist between the employee and the organization.

A psychological contract breach is defined as an “employees’ cognition of failure of their organization to fulfill its obligation toward them” (Rani et al., 2018). This breach leads to “organizational disidentification” where employees no longer trust the organization and psychologically disconnect from the organization (Rani et al., p. 2). The authors posit that “trust mediates the relationship between psychological contract breaches and organizational disidentification” (Rani et al., 2018, p. 3). They see the breach between the psychological contract

breach and organizational disidentification as a state of “panic and threat in which every individual believes that the employer is not concerned about their betterment, and therefore will not maintain their side of deal” (Rani et al., 2018, p. 3). This perceived breach results in a state where “employees engage in destructive actions and don’t perform as specified, but rather go against it” (Rani et al., 2018, p. 3).

Rani, et al. (2018) also attribute distrust to tenets identified in the Affective Events Theory (AET) which states that “any significant positive or negative event in the workplace triggers affective reactions that impact job attitudes and behaviors” (Rani, et al., 2018, p. 3) and can also be perceived as workplace traumas leading to organizational disidentification (Kim, et al., 2018). Emotional trauma caused by supervisors and managers or by organizational policies and procedures has a negative effect on peoples’ capacity to be effective and to perform optimally in their assigned job roles (Mias deKlerk, 2007). Emotionally traumatized workers are unable to increase their level of performance and are less likely to be open to or accept change.

Organizational policies and procedures like downsizing, outsourcing, mergers, restructuring, and continual leadership change are considered traumas that are experienced directly by an individual or vicariously by individuals who are indirectly involved (Mias deKlerk, 2007). These perceived traumas have a negative impact on the employees’ emotional well-being by challenging the employees’ sense of belonging and security. Moreover, trauma can be inflicted when power is abused, trust is betrayed, or an unreasonable increase in organizational policies and procedures like downsizing, outsourcing, mergers, restructuring, and continual leadership change are considered traumas that are experienced directly by an individual or vicariously by individuals who are indirectly involved (2007). These perceived traumas have a negative impact on the employees’ emotional well-being by challenging the employees’ sense of belonging and security. .

According to Mias deKlerk (2007), once a trauma has occurred, the individual internalizes the traumatic event and the “person’s nervous system becomes stuck on high alert” (p.16). Traumatic events also have a cumulative effect where new experiences can be linked to past traumatic events and generalized to the larger organizational system (2007). If the trauma is severe enough it can permeate throughout the organization to render it ineffective and low performing.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

Rani et al. (2018) indicated that affective events theory focuses on “any significant positive or negative event in the workplace [that] triggers affective reactions that impact job attitudes and behaviors” (p. 3). The researcher decided to place trust at the forefront of this study’s analysis to fully understand that impact it has on the operations and relationships between leadership members of the Local 105’s leadership team. AET has a long history of being a tool of understanding individual dispositions taken within an organization that, in turn, influence behavior (performance) and attitude (in this case, level of trust). A lack of trust between members of an organization or a team within an organization generally negatively affects employees’ capacity to not only perform well, but to work with others. Employees who do not feel they can trust others within their organization experience organizational citizenship to a lesser extent than those who can or do trust their organizational peers (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Sharifiatashgah, 2020).

The broader conversations about organizational trust and its impact on organizational operations and success have benefitted greatly from the understanding of how affective reactions shape performance and organizational effectiveness. This framework offers a critical perspective

on the role and necessity of trust. Under the lens of AET, this study developed new understandings on how trust is and is not manifested within a leadership realm.

3.0 Methodologies

This study will examine the experiences of Local 105's leadership team as it relates to challenges with trust from 2018 through the COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative case study research design was most suitable for this study because case study inquiry explained behavioral variations and examined the actions/response of members of the leadership team to the effects of COVID-19 (Yin, 2009). Qualitative research takes place in a natural setting (Miles et al., 2018) through observation and allows the researcher to explore individuals relative to a social problem (Creswell, 2009). For this study, case study design clarified the experiences of Local 105's leaders and the impact of the pandemic on Local 105 and its members. Each trust component is accompanied by a 'score' that indicates the number of interviewees whose responses included coded references related to the component.

Qualitative inquiry uses a naturalistic approach in real world settings (Golafshani, 2003) and allows for greater flexibility and spontaneity of dialog between the research participants and the researcher. Therefore, to better understand how union leaders thought and felt about trust among their teams and how effective they were in their response to pre- and during pandemic, interviews and participant observation were conducted for this study (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). The study employed open-ended interview questions to uncover trust issues, perceived or real, within Local 105's leadership and the impact of trust issues on decision making prior to and during the pandemic. This methodology was selected because the construct being studied was the perception of trust during COVID-19. The inquiry questions assisted with the acquisition and analysis of emerging themes derived from the interviews conducted with the leadership team to inform future interventions to increase and maintain trust.

3.1 Inquiry Questions

The following inquiry questions guided the study of the leadership team and their individual perceptions of their level of trust in decision-making within the leadership team and the success of their planning to address the needs of their members pre- and during the pandemic. The inquiry questions were:

Q1. What factors either facilitate or impede trust amongst Local 105's leadership team?

Q2. How would you describe how the COVID-19 pandemic further impacted trust among Local 105's leadership team?

3.2 Site and Participant Selection

Participant selection from Local 105 was based on specific criteria including:

- (a) current position classified as a member of the leadership team,
- (b) employed by the union,
- (c) have the responsibility of leading staff personnel, and
- (d) participation in the strategic planning process.

Additionally, participation in this study was not limited by age, sex, race, gender, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, religion, or length of time employed by the organization. As a result of these criteria, certain members of Local 105's leadership team were interviewed about their individual and collective experience of trust among the leadership team. Further, when selecting participants several assumptions existed. It was assumed that the participants would:

1. answer the questions candidly and truthfully.
2. provide objective responses devoid of intentional bias.
3. have a good command of the English language and understood the questions posed by the researcher.
4. be able to recall their experiences, during the COVID-19, that impacted trust among this leadership team.

Participants who met these criteria were emailed a consent form and asked to sign and return the form as well as give verbal consent at the start of the interview (see Appendix B). As a result, seven males and three females (Table 1) ranging in leadership capacity proved to be an ideal representation of experience and perspective. Moreover, respondents represented several ethnicity groups, including White, African American, Ethiopian, and Hispanic/Non-white (Table 1). Additionally, of the 10 participants, six held director roles; two held coordinator roles; one served in the role of president; and one participant was in transition.

Table 1 Participant Information

Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Role/Title
F	White	Internal Healthcare Director
M	White	President
M	Latino	Director of IT
M	AA	Member Leadership and Action / Education Director
F	Ethiopian	Internal Property Services Coordinator
M	Latino	Political and Community Coordinator
M	White	Political and Community Director / Deputy Director
M	Latino	Communications Director
M	Latino	In transition
F	Latino	External Healthcare Director

The sample was also well represented by leadership expertise as evidenced by professional roles and leadership capacities and the number of years in leadership, with more than half of the sample having served in a leadership role for more than three years (Table 2). The mode in this set of data is 4.

Table 2 Years in Leadership

Years in Leadership	# of Participants
0-2 years	3
3-4 years	4
5+ years	3

3.3 Data Collection and Management

To enable triangulation and facilitate validation of findings, this study utilized two data collection approaches: interview and observations.

First, one 60-minute interview with each participant was recorded. Recordings were done with both - a Sony digital recorder model PCM-D100 and Zoom. The purpose of utilizing two recording methods was to ensure a backup copy of the data was available in the event one technology failed. All participant names and identifying information were removed from transcriptions and participants were assigned a numerical ID and pseudonym.

The second data collection method was participant observations. The researcher attended two leadership virtual meetings between the members of Local 105's leadership team to capture field notes concerning the nature of interaction and collaboration between leadership members. Specifically, the researcher gathered data on the intensity and frequency of trust behaviors between members, as well as observed how communication and engagement was structured between leadership members.

3.4 Data Analysis

Upon initial outreach, it was determined that Local 105's leadership team consisted of 13 executive leadership professionals; however, only 10 respondents participated in this study. One interview with each participant was scheduled and conducted based on participant availability. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed and thematically analyzed by breaking down qualitative data into small units that were then organized into themes and stories that were related. The data collected from the individual interviews were reviewed several times and responses coded with initial codes generated from the literature and *NVivo* language. Next, the coding groups were reviewed in order to identify themes, categories, and patterns in relations to Broom's five trust components (i.e., honesty, understanding, keeping agreements, openness, and loyalty) as well as the existing literature.

Data collected from field observations were closely analyzed to identify the social composition of engagement between members of Local 105's leadership team. Using the data collected, the researcher determined the specific characteristics that either shaped or impeded trust and enabled the members of the leadership team to effectively manage the experience of trust both individually and collectively. All data was arranged in an Excel sheet that enabled the researcher to gain a full visual representation of the categories and frequency of patterns and themes to support assertions. Through this means of data analysis, the researcher was able to identify relationships and differences within the data and to connect participant responses within the leadership context.

The narratives that follow provide a retelling of each participant's story and experience. Presenting narrative inquiry in this manner is referred to as 'restorying' and is a form of data analysis that yields an 'illustrative data set' (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Further, restorying aids the researcher in identifying themes through definitive aspects of data.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

An essential component to quality research is data quality and trustworthiness. To ensure data quality and trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1986) identified four measures. The four measures include a) credibility, b) transferability, c) dependability, and d) confirmability. To ensure trustworthiness of the data for this study, the researcher, refrained from imposing their views on the participant's description of the phenomenon of trust (Chenail, 2012; Finlay, 2012; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Moustakas, 1994).

The data underwent four levels of review. First, during the interviews the researcher checked for fidelity by periodically repeating the participants' responses to the interview questions to check for accuracy. The second level was the direct transcription of the interview recordings by a reputable transcription service into a word document. During the third level, transcribed data was emailed to each participant. Participants were asked to perform one of two functions. First, to carefully read the transcribed interview for accuracy and if there are no changes required, reply to the email stating "no changes required." Second, carefully read the transcribed interview for an accurate reflection of the participant's true response. If a correction was required, the participant was asked to make the corrections and return the interview as an attachment to the email reply. The return of the corrected attachment served as the participants attestation of document review and acceptance. A "no response" assumed that there was agreement with the transcript.

In the fourth level, the researcher analyzed the data in several ways. First, a matrix coding query was run in NVivo to understand frequency of the five trust components. Second, the researcher performed initial coding using NVivo software and codes that were derived from the literature or *en vivo* codes. Once all data was initially coded, the researcher grouped the codes and

reviewed the groups for emerging themes around the five components of trust. Findings of these themes and other emerged themes are discussed below.

3.6 Positionality Statement

As is the nature of self-reflexivity, I acknowledged and aimed to make known my role in this research work. I, the researcher, am an organization development consultant and the founder of The Bennae Group. Professionally, I have provided organizations both big and small with change frameworks to accelerate transformation by improving organizational thinking, facilitating effective planning and execution, and prioritizing organizational learning.

Researching organizational leadership became an interest of mine following my partnership with several reputable organizations that, though financially and operationally successful, struggled with fragmented relationships between members of leaderships and internal stakeholders. Coming from a military background, I understand the power and necessity of trust and how trust serves as a lubricant of efficient functioning for an organization and its constituencies. I endeavored to prevent biases within my research by examining how my positionality may have influenced interpretations of the data and/or conversations with the research subjects prior to conducting any data collection. With this understanding, I was able to critically analyze the research data and prevent my biases from altering the experiences shared by study participants.

4.0 Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how trust works as an organizational construct within Local 105. To achieve this goal, a twofold understanding of the following areas was captured through interviews and participant observations with Local 105's executive leadership team: 1) how the leadership team at Local 105 thinks and feels about trust among its members; and 2) how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the leadership team members. The findings from the analysis presented in this section represent a culmination of leadership voices and provide a perspective into Local 105's leadership team's perception regarding the importance and necessity of trust as an organizational construct.

4.1 Trust as an Organizational Construct

For this study, the degree of trust was determined by five inductive components described in the review of knowledge: *honesty, understanding, loyalty, keeping agreements*, and *openness*. An additional component, *accountability*, also emerged from the data as being a critical byproduct of trust. These components served as initial codes and supported the development of the themes that emerged from the interviews and observations. Finding revealed that the highest level of trust within the Local 105 leadership team ranged from an individual being entrusted with very sensitive information to having no trust for the leadership team and needing to "wait to see" whether decisions made by the leadership team will be followed through.

Accountability was an additional trust component that was not originally identified, but that emerged from the data. The accountability component encompassed the predictable cooperation of team members, leading to members being able to clearly understand reasoning for decisions and actions that were taking place. In most cases, participants expressed positive sentiments toward the accountability of team members, such as this response by participant H8 who noted that, “I trust this team to specifically get done what we need to get done...no matter what.”

A matrix coding query was run to examine how the five components compared in influencing the development of trust. The results are illustrated in Table 3 and discussed in the following sections. The study participants primarily identified with more direct references between the experiences of loyalty (N=7) and trust amongst the leadership team, followed by keeping agreements (N=4) and understanding (N=4) and trust. Numbers in the ‘Frequency’ column of Table 3 represent the number of interviewees whose responses included coded references for this trust component.

Table 3 Influence of the Five Components of Trust

Trust Component	Frequency
Honesty	2
Loyalty	7
Keeping Agreements	4
Understanding	4
Openness	2

Additionally, the data revealed a distinction between trust levels during standard operations, which reflected a sense of individualism or compartmentalization and less of a collective team effort, and challenging times. In times of crisis, the study participants referenced

rallying regardless of level of trust. For example, participants expressed this sentiment in the following ways:

...the challenging times and doing work, that's where you're gonna build trust with me (Participant A1).

When you are going from crises to crises, you don't have time to think about trust, because it does not matter as long as you get it done. You build that higher level of respect for people who are right next to you doing the work, and I think that builds trust automatically (Participant J10).

Overall, the extent to which these five core components influenced the development of trust amongst the leadership team was moderated by contextual, organizational, and personal factors such as crisis moments, organizational structure, and personality, respectively. In the following sections, I describe findings about each component of trust.

4.1.1 Honesty and Trust

Honesty as a singular factor did not emerge within the top factors that facilitated or impeded trust across all leadership team members (see Figure 1) though it was mentioned by two members. Three out of 10 respondents identified “not completely being honest with each other” (30%) followed by “mostly honest and dependable” (25%) as the primary factors that impacted trust among the leadership team. The median score for the interviewees whose responses included the ‘Honesty’ component (Figure 1) was three.

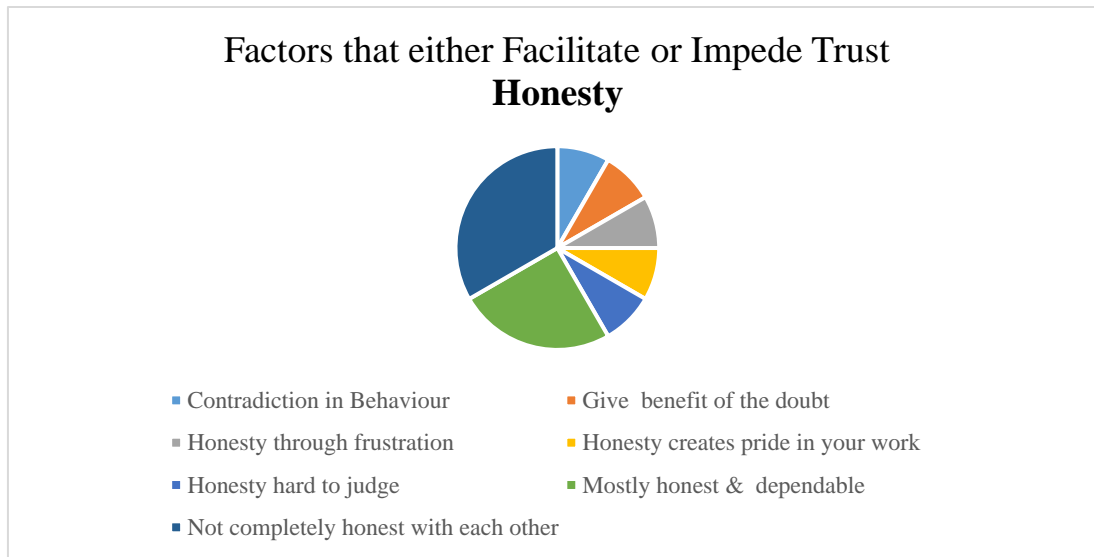


Figure 1 Trust Component: Honesty

Beyond the matrix coding, findings revealed that the study participants perceived the entire leadership team to be, “Mostly honest and completely upfront.” The participants judged honesty from the leadership team’s level of transparency based on their ability to “walk the talk,” or perform in a manner consistent with what was communicated. Behaviors such as gaslighting or falsifying information impeded trust and caused team members to make value judgements, as noted by this remark from one participant: “There are pockets of honest and dishonest people within the team.” This sentiment varied based on the individual being judged, with three-fourths of participants perceiving only 25%, or about one fourth of the leadership team as honest. The leader’s ability to be “completely honest with” other members followed by the sense that leaders were “mostly honest and dependable” shaped perceptions of trust within the leadership team.

Transparency was related to information gaps, which also resulted in distrust and affected work performance as people misunderstood why certain decisions were made.

The lack of access to information to the entire leadership team hinders the ability of some members to make timely contributions. Participant J10 recalled moments where this was the case:

Oh, there's something happening there that I wasn't maybe necessarily aware of because direct conversations aren't happening, or things weren't being brought up beforehand and it makes me wonder if I can trust this team.

Participant G7 expressed similar feelings:

I've also seen some strain...so you might have a six-month period where this campaign that is number one, and it's getting all of the attention and then for an extended period, it's not, and that's leading to mistrust and just people lashing out and not really addressing the fact that like, "Hey, I don't like that shit. I don't like that we're not the center of attention any longer"...What do we need to do to change that?

Moreover, a lack of transparency within the team prevented some individuals from participating in solution development, identifying corrective measures, and giving feedback. For example, participant H8 stated:

I get told what I need to know sometimes...but at least for me, I feel like I need to hear it 'cause then...I understand you more and why you made this decision, or why this was done, and I feel like that's really important, just to be able to work well together and trust people.

Another participant mentioned, "...you don't know enough to be able to say hey, this is not the way you should have done it" (Participant I9).

4.1.2 Loyalty and Trust

Overall, the study results illustrated that loyalty was related to the level of support for “each other’s well-being,” which was determined by the depth of the relationship with different people on the team. In his research on loyalty-based leadership and management, Reichheld (1993) noted that highly loyal relationships are integral to everything from performance to business strategy. As such, the depth of relationships generally helps make loyalty more measurable. Participant E5 stated,

I don’t think that we show up as much as we should when times get tough....and I feel a little bit of that...it’s different also with different people on the team. There’s also a strong attachment to the idea that challenges need to be addressed by particular people in higher roles with an expectation that the role-holder will handle the challenge. Some participants perceived a very strong sentiment of to each is his own.

Moreover, the ability to “understand” another’s life circumstances when providing feedback impacted trust. Study participant I9 recalled receiving feedback while on the verge of losing their job and described it as insensitive. They explained, “He’s kind of heartless...or he focuses on giving me feedback when I was like...man, I just kind of almost lost my job...don’t remind me that you saved me.”

The leader’s personality and the experience of others on the team were also key during interaction. Participant H8 recounted a situation in which leadership was “really brutal” in their approach and noted that “Their way of making comments or giving feedback can be easily misunderstood.” Participant G7 added that the leadership team had reservations about being completely honest, stating:

I don't know where people are at, right? And I've been between moments of being really pissed or frustrated with someone and just wanted to tear into them, like what the fuck are you doing, why are you here? Why are you wasting our time....you're screwing members..... versus I need to talk to this person and find out what's going on with them....what can I do to help you...what can I do to support you?

Level of trust also influences how well people in the leadership team understand and support each other: "I've also developed some additional friendships within the leadership group and people I trust and can talk to when stuff is just happening," said participant C3. Figure 2 illustrates the factors of loyalty that leadership members feel either facilitate or impede trust. Respondents identified "no support for each other's well-being" (N=6) as the primary factor that impacted trust among the leadership team. The median score for the 'Loyalty' component in Figure 2 was three.

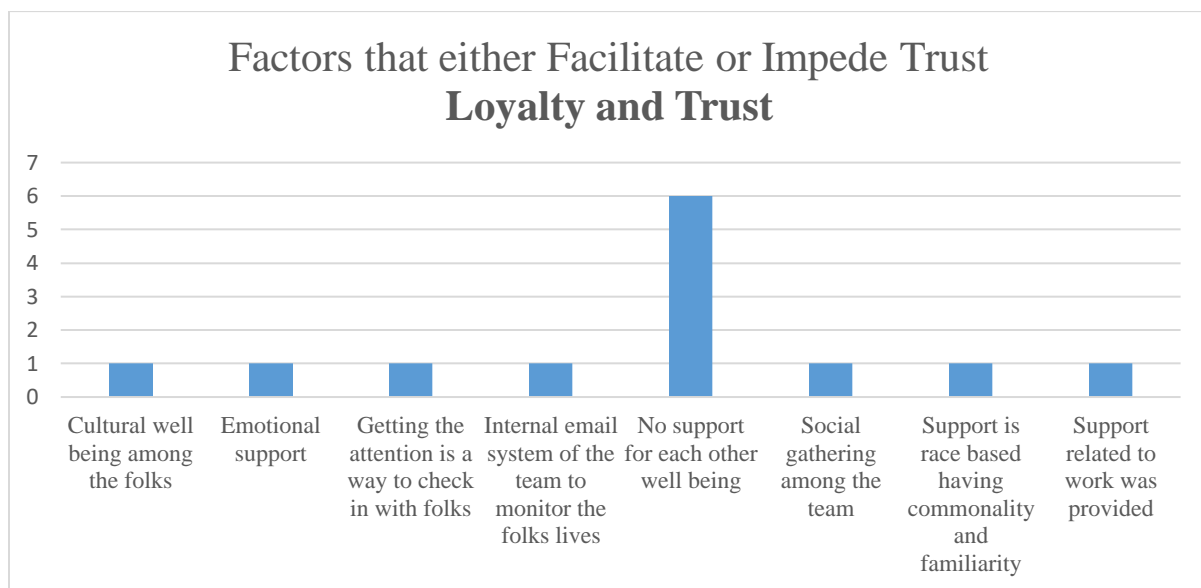


Figure 2 Trust Component: Loyalty

4.1.3 Understanding and Trust

Overall, study findings illustrated that understanding was related to the leadership team's commitment and ability to 'get the job done.' Level of commitment fluctuated based on contextual factors (Figure 3), namely no crisis and crisis work environments. Figure 3 illustrates that at least two respondents identified "trust that everybody will get the job done" as the primary factors that impacted trust among the leadership team. Moreover, Table 4 outlines team commitment levels in moments of crisis and non-crisis.

A comment by participant G7 supported this finding. They stated,

I see pockets of the leadership team coalescing and being very strong and coming together and having a bedrock of.... We are gonna get this done....we're gonna get through this sort of situation and accomplish what we need to get done.

The 'no crisis times'—or what participants deem 'normal conditions'—denote an environment where the organization is "at rest" (Redlein, 2020, p. 31) and operations and performance are standard and are not precipitated by requirements for innovation or any substantial change. During these times, organizational relationships are generally relaxed and objectives (performance- and operations-wise) are being comfortably and consistently met. Study participants, however, noted that their experiences of other team members during times of 'no crisis' are characterized by bouts of absenteeism, lateness, and excuses—all of which are factors that could impede with one's ability to 'get the job done' in a manner consistent with team expectations. An example, expressed by participant H8, indicated that, "...there are these Wednesday meetings...where decisions were being made, but people were dropping off, people weren't joining the meetings..."

Opposite of no-crisis conditions is the crisis work environment. Study participants experiences of shared responsibility in crisis and no-crisis work environments (Table 4) showed differences in response between the problem-solving approach seen during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the airport strike, skill gaps when people leave, and the 2020 elections, and during normal work conditions (Table 2). In a crisis—when unforeseen and extenuating demands in performance and operations are consistently occurring—Local 105 leadership members indicated that there tends to be a collective commitment. Everyone is present for, participating in, and contributing to team success. There is a higher level of commitment during crisis moments and things get accomplished while in normal periods; however, in normal conditions, the level of commitment to meeting their timelines wanes.

...in moments of crisis, I think everyone knows that they're gonna complete something. But then if we're talking about baseline, everyday work that we do, I don't think there's trust everywhere (Participant H8).

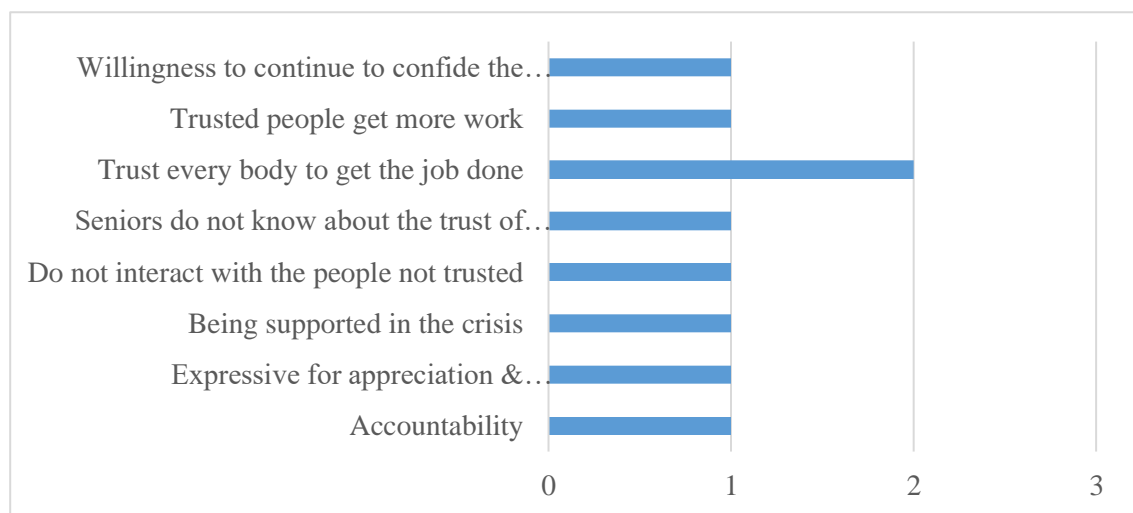


Figure 3 Trust Component: Understanding and Trust

Moreover, the collective effort that is experienced during crises is not sustained after the crisis is resolved. Some members in the leadership team slowly transition into the previous

individualistic behavior, “...in this past year, I’ve seen it go back to these sort of pockets, these like fractured pockets” (Participant G7).

Table 4 Participants' Understanding of Crisis and No-Crisis Work Environments

Participants' Experiences	Crisis Moments	No-crisis Moments
Levels of commitment	Collective commitment	Lack of commitment from some members
	“Everyone’s there, and everyone will put in however much work needs to be done, we’ll work 24 hours a day ‘til whatever needs to get done.” - H8	When it’s not hard...I think there are some people on the team who put a little bit more effort into it than others.
	“Through the pandemic and in the 2020 elections, I saw the whole senior team come together. That was the first time I’ve been at the local where I could really confidently say everyone on the senior team was pulling in the right direction.” - H8	“There are these Wednesday meetings...where decisions were being made, but people were dropping off, people weren’t joining the meetings...some people would show up and be like, “Are we having a meeting? What’s going on? We gotta make an important decision on this on the staffing issue.” - H8
		“That transition of folks leaving and everyone else picking the pieces and coming together and getting it done right has allowed also that process for us to grow through these hard times.” - J10

4.1.4 Keeping Agreements and Trust

Some individuals within the Local 105 leadership team demonstrated their ability to follow through with their work commitments, while others struggled to meet their work obligations. Whether people within the team kept their agreements varied based on organizational factors such as a lack of accountability structures, difficulty with communication, and inability to meet deadlines.

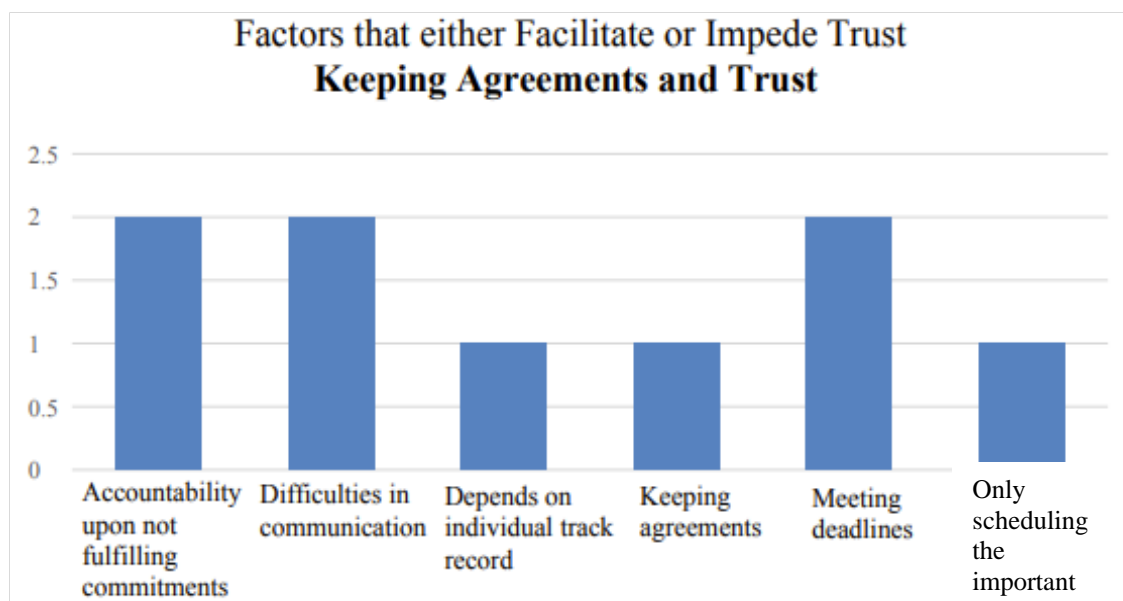


Figure 4 Trust Component: Keeping Agreements and Trust

Being accountable to fulfilling work commitments has a direct influence on the development of trust amongst the leadership team. Individuals expressed trust in those who take ownership of their work while perceiving those who do not as opportunists which leads to distrust. For example, participant D4 stated,

I'm gonna trust you when you do what you say you're going to do, when you follow up, right? And just because maybe I've known you or maybe you were the first person that,

um, I worked with, uh, that doesn't mean I'm gonna trust you, right? It's the day-to-day interactions on building trust.

In addition, not holding someone accountable when they didn't fulfill their commitments also impacted trust. Participant B2 expressed,

...we just had a recent situation where, from what I understand, one member of that team had not done what they were supposed to do for our Leadership Summit and the rest of the team found out like two or three days before the summit, like all the stuff that had not been done yet. And so they all got it done and event was successful and then no one ever loop back around with that person to say, what the fuck? This is bullshit. This stuff should have been in a week ago.

Trust building was also described as being able to express or communicate when one is not able to keep the agreement. Participant G7 noted,

...the caveat after that is if you can't, then just communicate. I'm gonna be totally cool if you say like, "Hey, I can't do this," or "I fucked up, I have to own this....whatever, rather than making excuses or not talking about it.

Further, members were drawn to individuals who have demonstrated reliability or a dependability in previous interactions for instance 'returning calls,' 'offering support,' and 'giving good advice.' Participant J10 clearly expressed this sentiment by saying,

...if there is a history of like "I'm tough on you because you never respond to my emails..." it builds up and so when that individual needs support or needs help, it's like the responses varies.

Issues related to ‘most deadlines are not met’ addressed the lack of resources invested in training staff on ‘how to’ perform administrative functions. This resulted in a resistance to the delegation of tasks:

...we have a trainer who does trainings for staff and members. That is their core function. When it comes to the admin stuff, like, turning in reports or certain paperwork, we don’t (F6).

...When we take on the work, we don’t do well with delegating out pieces that we may not have expertise in to get the project completed in a way that’s exemplary (Participant D4).

Moreover, a lack of transparency within the team prevented some individuals from participating in solution development, identifying corrective measures, and giving constructive feedback. Participant I9 indicated that, “You don’t know enough to be able to say hey, this is not the way you should have done it.” Comprehensive information is not accessible to the entire leadership team, and this hinders the ability of some members to make timely contributions, thereby leaving them to fall short on their responsibility to hold up their end of the work. Factors that participants felt most impacted trust are presented in Figure 4. At least two study respondents identified “accountability upon not fulfilling the commitments” (N=2), “difficulties in communication” (N=2), and “most deadlines are met” (N=2) as factors that impacted trust among the leadership team. Participant 10 recalled moments where it’s like,

Oh, there’s something happening there that I wasn’t maybe necessarily aware of because direct conversations aren’t happening, or things weren’t being brought up beforehand.” Individuals are not able to effectively express their dissatisfaction with the leadership’s approach to handling a project cycle.... “I’ve also seen some strain...so you

might have a six-month period where this Campaign A is number one, and it's getting all of the attention and then for an extended period, it's not, and that's leading to mistrust and just people lashing out and not really addressing the fact that like, "Hey, I don't like that... I don't like that we're not the center of attention any longer..." "What do we need to do to change that?"

4.1.5 Openness and Trust

How well people in the leadership team openly shared information, about themselves and work, with each other varied depending on personality and opportunities to interact. According to Young and Daniel (2003), people are more willing to open up to individuals with whom they have close and trusting relations. The most recent retreat revealed that such opportunities provided platforms for people to open up. Participant J10 described,

...last retreat where folks who are really like...oh wow, this morning piece was really good." And it was basically just like, "Why are you here? What's your path?"...it was so simple but at the same time, it was like, "Damn, we had never taken that time to do that." "In meetings I will talk if I think others value what I am saying. Most of the time If they don't ask, I don't say anything.

A thorough understanding of one's values, feelings, personality, and way of being assisted with fostering the development of trusting relationships within the group of Local 105 leaders. Research from Guest et al. (2008) indicates that trust aids in helping members embrace open-minded attitudes, thereby enabling them to accommodate diverse perspectives.

...if you come in with a different perspective, the trust in the relationship will be like hey, he does it so different, but I trust him enough, but I'm gonna let him do it, I'm gonna learn from it (D4).

However, some participants feel that the individuals within the Local 105's leadership team are not open, and this affects the development of real relationships and trust. "I don't trust the team, not because they're untrustworthy, but just because after five years, I still don't know these people, so I can't trust them" (D4).

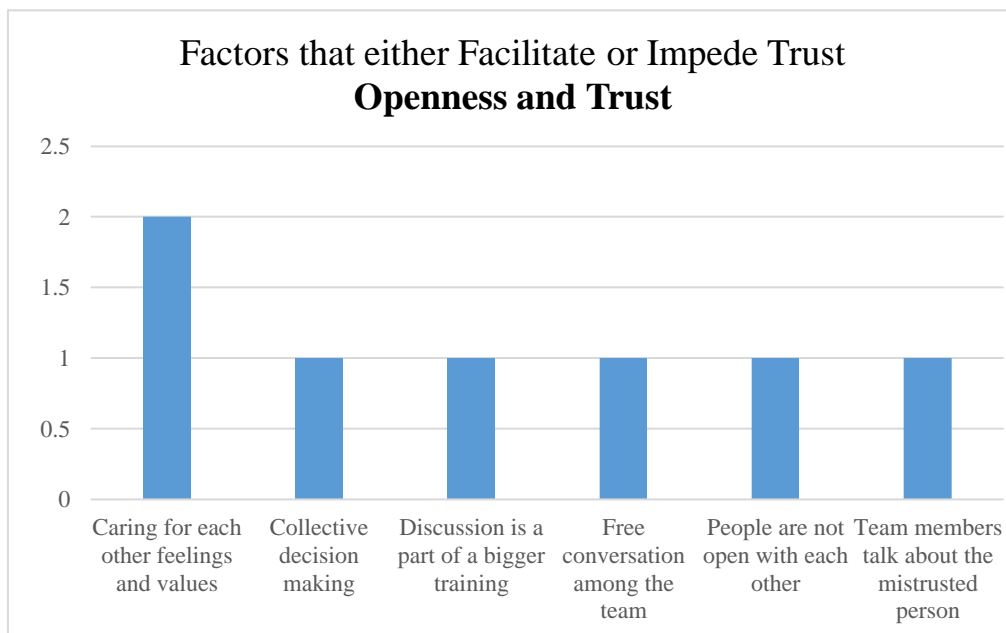


Figure 5 Trust Component: Openness and Trust

4.2 Accountability Structures

In addition to the five components described above, *accountability* also emerged from the data as a component that influenced trust within Local 105. The following sections provides a synopsis of the impact of accountability on trust within Local 105 leadership team.

The data revealed that a lack of accountability structures enabled dishonest behavior such as gaslighting. As a result, participants noted that they resorted to protective mechanisms like written communication to enhance traceability and verification. Most of the study participants felt that the effectiveness of peer accountability measures could only succeed if the senior leadership team developed the courage to hold “difficult conversations” and make “executive decisions.” Participant C3 expressed this sentiment concisely saying,

...peer accountability works to a point.....but at some point, somebody has to pull the trigger”... “I think individuals were afraid to pull the trigger on that kind of thing”....”So being a president, being a deputy director, you have to be able to make those decision.

Peer accountability experiences its own set of challenges, the main one being fear of holding difficult conversations with, ‘people on the same level’, and the perceived lack of moral authority.

“People don’t wanna take that extra step ‘cause they feel like, “Oh,” they could possibly be doing something better too, or maybe it makes them look bad as well.”

“I guess we don’t have jurisdiction over a kind of or anybody else’s. I don’t have jurisdiction over anyone else’s work to keep them accountable.”

Participant B2 added that,

“There were exceptions, some people within the senior leadership team were confident enough to “have honest conversations with people.

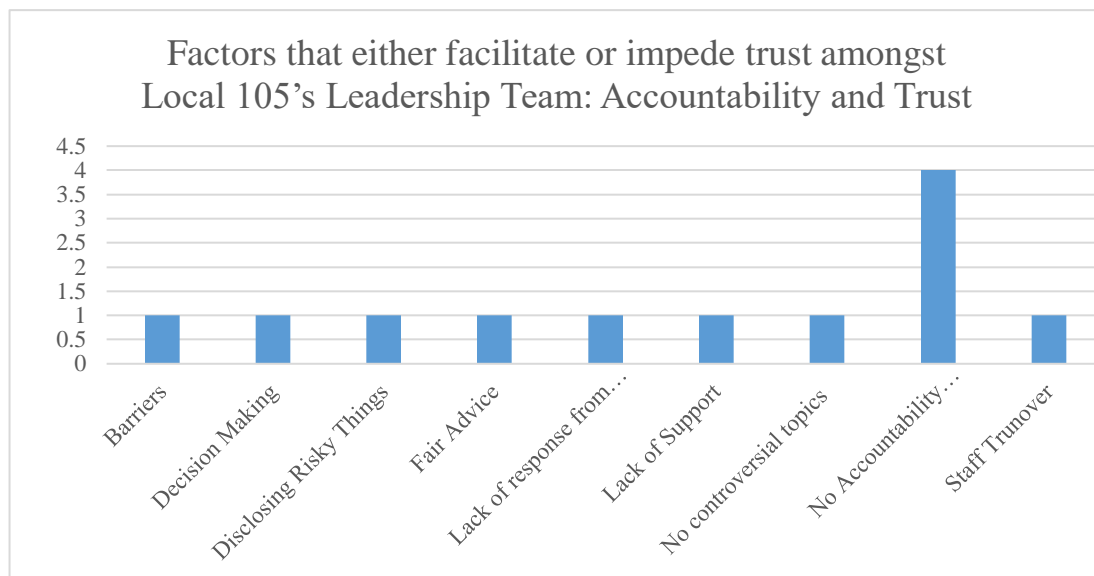


Figure 6 Trust Component: Accountability and Trust

The Local 105 leadership team has yet to establish a comprehensive accountability system that fully regulates the factors that are most influential in the trust process (Figure 5). At least two study respondents identified “caring for each other’s feelings and values” (N=2) as a factor that impacted trust among the leadership team. Figure 6 illustrate how study respondents identified “lack of an accountability structures” (N=4) as a primary factor that impedes trust among the leadership team.

Current strategies used to hold people accountable were described by two team members. Participant I9 described the strategy of “...writing up people who don’t do what they need to do. Participant J10 described several strategies including, “Work planning, check-ins, one-on-one kind of conversations...understanding of the work...and follow-up emails.”

The data suggested that a lack of an accountability system allowed for loopholes that would enable people within the team to not meet individual objectives. Further, the data suggested that

part of the challenge has been the inability to choose between a top-down approach and a peer-to-peer approach. Participant J10 explained a sense of, "...are we gonna hold each other accountable? Some people feel like accountability should come top-down, and then how are we held accountable by staff or are we not?"

4.3 Impact of COVID-19 and Trust

Beyond the components that impacted trust within Local 105's leadership team, the data revealed other themes that played a role in developing and maintaining trust during a pandemic. The following sections describe the major themes that arose from the data analysis.

The state of the global workplace has been significantly changed by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Rossette-Crake and Buckwalter (2022) note that upheavals brought about by the pandemic have in many ways "interfered with organizational trust" (p. 22). The narratives that follow capture the extent to which the pandemic influenced trust within the Local 105 leadership team and indicate how both themes had a positive impact on trust.

The study participants described the two components that appeared to further impact trust among the Local 105 leadership team: "pandemic has improved trust" (N=3) and "more grace and forgiveness" (N=3). Overall, the participants felt that there was an improvement in the level of trust during the pandemic. Intentionality and increased frequency of check-ins improved the level of trust amongst the leadership team. People took more ownership of their roles and responsibilities and that led to improved performance, higher levels of success, and trust. Participant J10 helped put this into perspective when stating,

Everybody has been putting in double the time and effort since the pandemic through our times. And then there is a little sense of acknowledgment as well...so I think that's helped folks level of respect and trust.

Participant F6 added,

...as people around the world are going back into the office more and more, our team has prioritized the well-being and safety of our staff and members, so we don't have them come into the office every day...which I think speaks volumes about the trust that leadership has for the staff.

The leadership team experienced frustration when people on the senior team and staff did not meet their obligations; however, given the challenges experienced in since the start of the pandemic, the leadership team expressed being more patient with the senior team and the staff. According to participant B2, leadership exercised “more grace [and] more forgiveness.” Some admit that it’s a tough balance between holding people accountable for failure and showing empathy for their situation. Depicted in Figure 7 are the factors that leadership members regard as being important to facilitating trust during the pandemic. At least three study respondents identified “pandemic has improved trust” and “more grace & forgiveness” and at least two study respondents identified “team working improved”, “team is more committed during pandemic”, and “solidified unity among the team” as COVID-19 pandemic factors that further impacted Local 105’s leadership team.

Participant G7 indicates how, without those factors, tensions can quickly rise and confusion ensues:

...there's been moments of being really pissed or frustrated with someone and just wanting to tear into them,"what the fuck are you doing, why are you here?" versus

like..."I need to talk to this person and find out what's going on with them." ... "What can I do to support you?"

The leadership team encouraged members to "take time off when sick or dealing with family issues" and "provided access to the Employee Assistance Program to support mental well-being". In this sense, leaders are providing room for members to "rest and regenerate" as a means of dealing with the increased level of stress that naturally accompanied the onset of the pandemic. As a result, people were also keen to tap into one's support system.

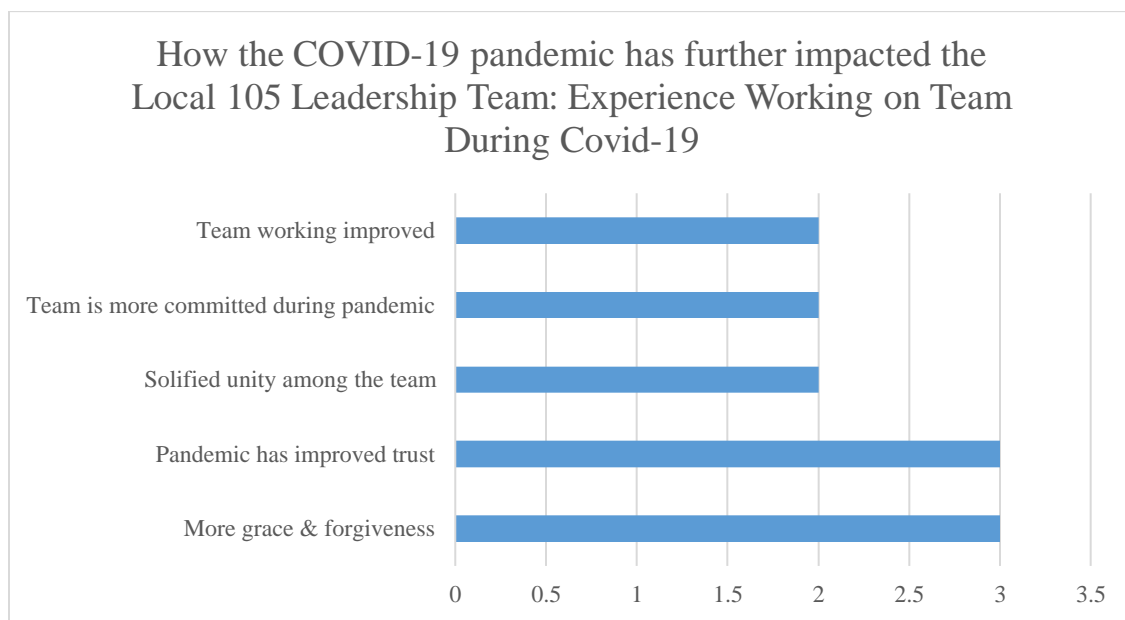


Figure 7 Experience Working on Team During COVID-19

4.4 Change in Work Environments and Trust

Study results showed that there were "no changes in roles and responsibilities" (N=3) (Figure 8). Three study respondents identified "no change in roles and responsibilities", and at

least two study respondents identified “change in role and responsibilities” and “increased stress” as COVID-19 pandemic factors that further impacted Local 105’s leadership team.

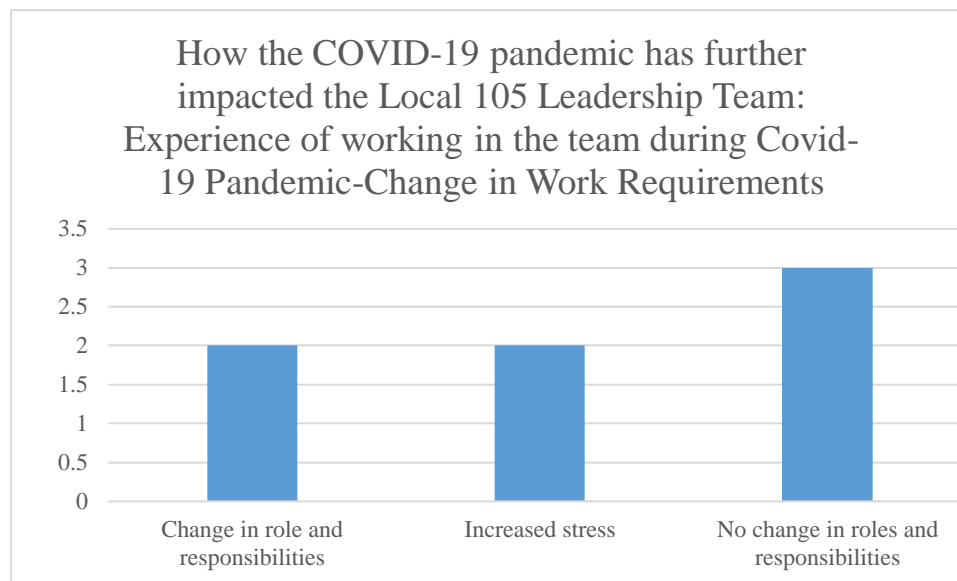


Figure 8 Change in Work Requirements

Despite working remotely and far from the close monitoring of the team leads, members within the Local 105 leadership were able to meet individual objectives contributing to team success and this led to improved trust in people’s skills and abilities. Successful work outcomes and the increased level of trust supported the hybrid model while other organizations resumed working from the office model. Participant J10 noted, “I think it has improved trust in a sense...” Additionally, Participant H8 stated, “I would say I’d lean towards we trust people a little bit more.”

From here, the cohesiveness and shared responsibility aspects of trust contributed to helping the leadership team embrace a more oriented approach to relationships and getting things done as a collective.

4.4.1 Cohesiveness, Shared Responsibility and Trust

Study respondents identified “team comes together in the crises” (N=5) as the primary COVID-19 pandemic factor that impacted Local 105’s leadership team.

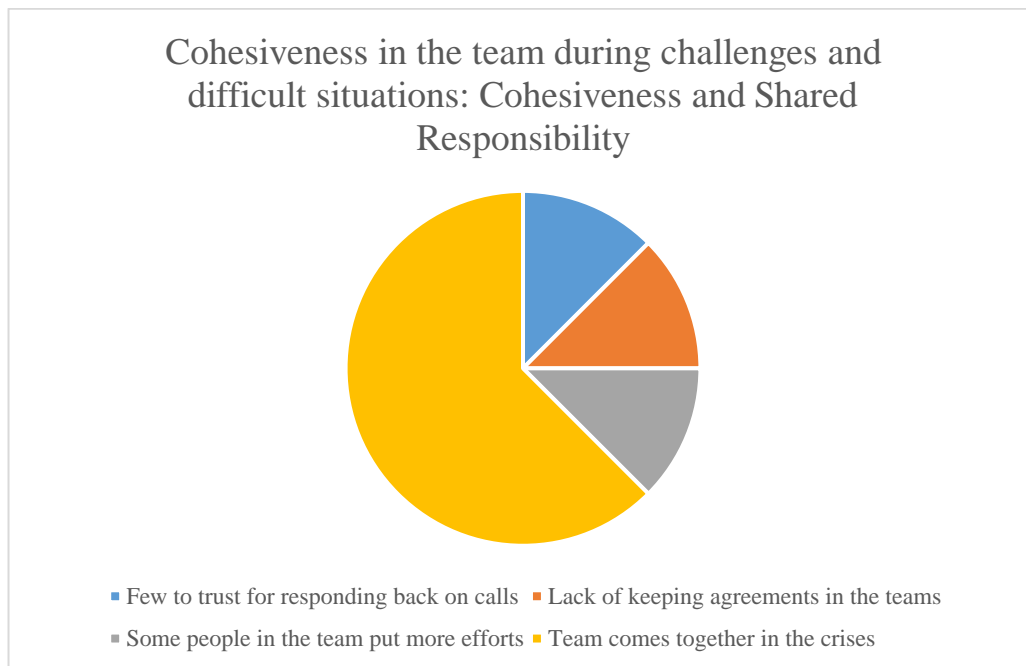


Figure 9 Cohesiveness and Shared Responsibility

4.4.2 Communication and Decision-Making and Trust

While the pandemic promoted team cohesion, it also introduced communication-related challenges and study participants stated that “in person working [was] more efficient” (N=2) (Figure 10). At least two respondents identified “in person working is more efficient” as a COVID-19 pandemic factors that further impacted Local 105’s leadership team.

“When we were in person meetings, I wouldn't be like, "Hey, I'm just gonna call this guy and talk to him really quick," it's like, "No, if I bump into him in the office, I'll talk to them." But when we all started working from home, we've gotten used to, instead of sending an email or

something more of a passive method of communications, we just give that person a phone call or we just have a quick meeting with them” (Participant H8).

The primary mode of communication during the pandemic was emails and, as noted by Participant F6, “....and in those emails is where we get whether people are not gonna be in the office for whatever reason....whether that's because they're sick.”

Information passed via the virtual platforms was rarely comprehensive. Information gaps not only prevented people from providing timely solutions but also influenced suspicion and distrust.

“One thing I've become very, very clear of now is that when there is a vacuum of information, your brain just creates whatever wild story there is. And it's usually not a good one. It's usually a negative one or a vindictive one...” (Participant G7).

Attempts to improve communication included resuming weekly in-person meetings, making regular phone calls to individuals, having one-on-one discussions with direct reports, and observing and questioning changes in behavior. People were more intentional about checking up on their colleagues unlike when they were working in the office.

“[If] I see someone specifically was usually very in a meeting is quiet, I'll try and talk to them afterwards” (Participant H8).

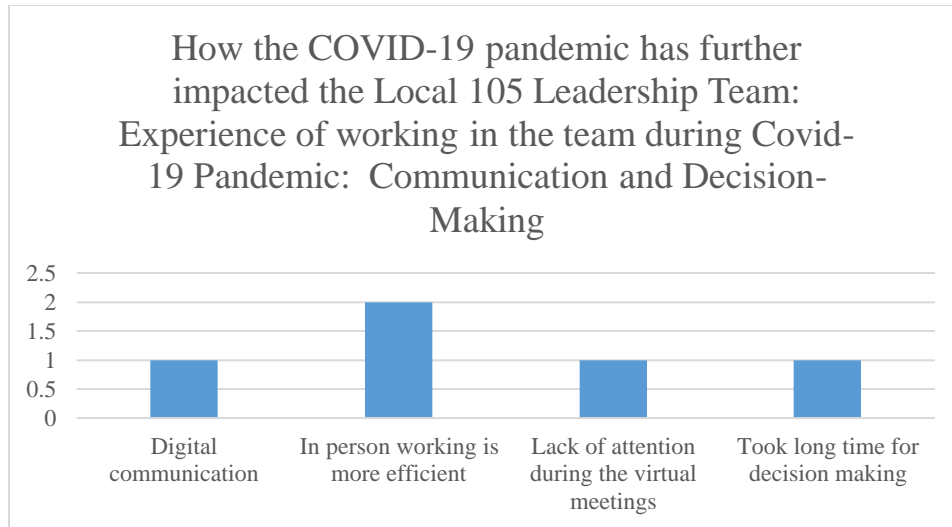


Figure 10 Communication and Decision Making

4.4.3 Virtual Experience and Trust

Study participants identified leadership training programs shifted to virtual” (N=2) and “virtual space is rough to work together” (N=2) as COVID-19 pandemic factors that further impacted Local 105’s Leadership team. Figure 11 shows that at least two respondents identified “leadership training programs shifted to virtual” and “virtual space is rough to work together” as COVID-19 pandemic factors that further impacted Local 105’s leadership team.

The leadership team shifted to virtual communication during the pandemic, however, it was not a very effective medium for communication as people were easily distracted and lost the nuances of in person communication such as facial expressions when people were off screen, full body movements, and actual physical touch. Use of virtual platforms such as ZOOM during the pandemic period made it harder to have candid and hard conversations and to solve problems unlike in-person meetings/ face-to-face conversations.

...it's harder to have hard conversations with people over Zoom...when issues have come up, somehow, it is harder sometimes to deal with that because you're, you know, it's very easy to talk to someone face to face (Participant B2).

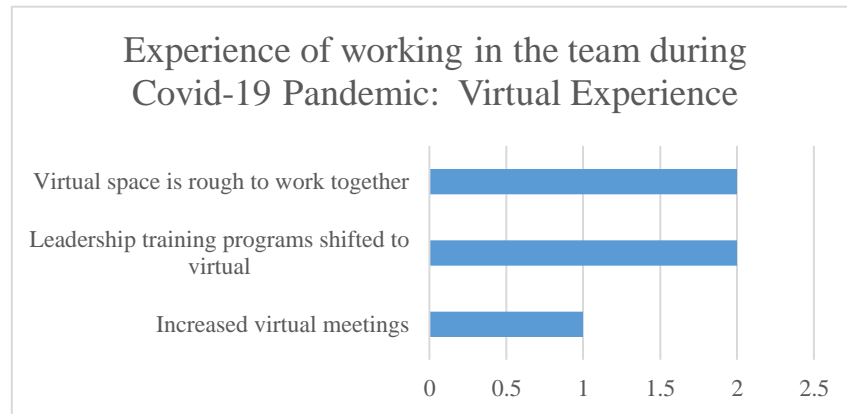


Figure 11 Experience of Teamwork during COVID-19 Pandemic: Virtual Experience

4.5 Meeting Observations

Two Zoom meeting observations were conducted with all members of the Local 105 leadership team to be able to observe how the leadership team interacted with each other. The researcher acknowledges that conducting a meeting on Zoom is not ideal for fostering conversations around what needed to happen to increase performance and interaction, but still was able to gather useful data. Both meetings combined provided a total of 140 minutes of observation. The researcher looked to see if the leadership team members displayed behaviors related to the five trust components i.e., honesty, understanding, keeping agreements, openness, and loyalty (Broom, 2002.) The researcher looked for the leadership members' ability to engage in discussions regarding work product development, completion and interdependence on one

another (keeping agreements); to have difficult discussions related to issues Local 105's leadership team was currently working on (openness); engage in collegial discourse when active discussion was warranted (honesty); ask questions related to personal well-being as well as collaborative verbal and non-verbal communications (understanding); their commitment to coming together when facing a challenge(loyalty); and if their ability to hold each other "accountable" if someone did not do what they said they would do.

Based on the observations, both meetings were organized and very task oriented and results focused. Not all trust components were observed but several were. For instance, participants displayed collegial moments where interactions were in response to inquiries from the meeting facilitator (openness) as each person did a subjective informal report out for their respective areas. Individually, the participants were very active and fully engaged in developing the work products from their individual areas (keeping agreements). They didn't appear to have any discussions related to crosscutting projects that would require collaboration as was seen during the peak of COVID-19. As issues related to COVID-19 have become more normalized, the team displayed more non-crisis behaviors (such as understanding) as it related to interacting with one another. The opportunity to observe this team in conflict where team leadership would have to hold honest conversations regarding keeping agreements and holding people accountable if they did not present itself. This could be related to the perfunctory nature of the meetings this researcher observed or the inability of the leadership team to bring up difficult conversations in the large group (honesty, openness). Overall, the trust components describe in the literature supports the finding from the interviews and appears to support the findings from the meeting observations.

4.6 Discussion, Implications for Practice, and Recommendations

The purpose of this case study was to understand how trust serves as an organizational construct within Local 105's leadership team. According to Covey and Merrill (2008), the phenomenon of trust within an organization indicates that the presence of trust helps to facilitate and maximize organizational successes. While the absence of trust leads to the decrease of successful organizational outcomes, effective leadership, and impacts professional relationships (Covey, 2006; Jiang & Probst, 2015). Many of the study participants describe having more trust for individuals that they had an emotional bond and professional relationship. They were willing to invest in the trust relationship when others inquired about their emotional wellbeing and genuinely care about what was going on in their lives. Further, participants looked for understanding from peers when they were going through tough times.

Diminished trust also resulted in a decrease in what McAllister (1995) describes as *organizational citizen behavior* in that Local 105 leadership team members do not act as "team players" in getting tasks done unless they are in a crisis. The self-motivation to go above and beyond for the benefit of the organization is replaced by doing the minimum and what is required, therefore, optimal performance is sacrificed. In this case, it would seem that trust would need to be at play first in order for organizational citizen behavior to exist and thrive.

Moreover, trust includes a cognitive and affective assessment that individuals engage in when making a conscious decision on who to trust, what type of trust to extend, and when to trust (McAllister, 1995). This assessment is based on successful historical interpersonal interactions primarily based on dependability & reliability (keeping agreements). Based on the findings, Local 105's leadership team members described keeping agreements as a primary component that

impacts trust among teams. The lack of accountability structures when agreements were not met severely eroded trust within this team.

Because leadership is an important element of every organization, it is imperative that leaders are aware of the components that successfully foster environments of trust. Organizational leaders, being constituents of the larger organizational system, must know how to engage in efforts that forge new pathways toward trust among both the members of the leadership team and the employees that these individuals manage. This results in “high-trust organizations” that have highly effective teams and perform optimally (Lewis, 2021, para. 2). Therefore, I offer the following recommendations for practice based on the study findings:

- Implementing the practice of “pausing (slowing down)” and giving individual and team feedback. By pausing between and during team meetings, these ongoing learning experiences could become embedded into the culture and modeled for the staff and members of Local 105.
- Experiential trust-building experiences could be added to organizational training and professional development for this leadership team, staff and eventually members.
- Supporting this leadership team in co-creating a system of accountability for each other and understanding the strengthening of the other five components would be embedded in this process.
- Introduce team coaching to support the leadership team in shifting its ability to build and maintain trust.
- Supporting the leadership team in creating non work related opportunities to foster relationship building.

4.7 Conclusion

The findings from this study present a premise that creating and maintaining trust is a non-negotiable leadership skill. The findings represent aspects of when trust is and is not functioning well in leadership teams. In addition to recommendations for practice, the researcher believes that findings from this case study compel further investigation and understanding of the impact of trust and trust dynamics, and the ability to do repair as ruptures happen in relationships would benefit the leadership team of Local 105. Understanding these additional factors might support the leadership team in building strong trust bonds. As accountability emerged as an additional component of trust, there is an opportunity to expand its definition: Accountability (Account....ability): The ability and willingness to relate to self, others and the systems in which we live. It is a higher form of relating to people and is the highest form of love. We don't bump up against each other's competence, we bump up against our willingness to be accountable. Finally, the researcher sees an opportunity for individuals of the Local 105's leadership team to gain a deeper understanding of their ability to trust oneself as a core part of their roles in organizational leadership.

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Appendix A Informed Consent

University of Pittsburgh
Informed Consent Form

Research Study Title: A Leadership Challenge: A Case Study of Trust Among a Local Union Leadership Team During a Pandemic

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: _____

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Tony Bennae Richard, a doctoral student in the School of Education, at the University of Pittsburgh. This study is supervised by Dr. Jill Perry, Dissertation Chair. This research involves the study of how a pandemic impacted trust between a small leadership team and is part of Tony's dissertation. You are being asked to participate in this study because of your membership on this leadership team.

You were selected for this study because you fit the research criteria of a person who is currently classified as a member of the leadership team, employed by the local union, have the responsibility of leading staff personnel, and participates in the strategic planning process of the local.

Before you agree to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the information provided in this informed consent form. If you have any questions, please ask the researcher for clarification.

Purpose of the study:

Trust is one of the key components necessary for having a highly effective and successful organization that represents shared strategic values. Trust is central to having high quality relationships between employees, their supervisors, and their organizations. When organizational trust between employees and supervisors exists and is based on successful communication and effective work relationships, a decrease in turnover intentions and an increase in organizational commitment and job satisfaction ensues.

It is pivotal to hear from individuals that were members of a small team and explore how trust among this team was affected by a pandemic. This shared experience will be beneficial in understanding how high levels of trust can be maintained during crises.

Number of participants in the study:

There will be 10-13 participants that are members of the leadership team.

What's involved in the study:

You will participate in one interview that will either take place in via zoom. The interview will also be recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed through a reputable transcription service. The interviews will be scheduled by phone or email. Transcribed data will be emailed to each participant to review for accuracy. The participant will be asked to perform one of two functions.

First, carefully read the transcribed interview and if there are no changes required, reply to the email stating “no changes required.”

Second, carefully read the transcribed interview and if there is information that does not reflect the participant's true response or a correction is required, the participant will be asked to make the corrections on the transcript and return the interview as an attachment to the email reply.

Length of the study:

The interview will last approximately sixty minutes. The participants review of the transcription for accuracy should take no more than thirty minutes. The total time involvement for participants is approximately ninety minutes total.

Risks of the study:

The risks involved with this study are considered minimal. You may experience some emotional discomfort during this process as you think about trust among this leadership team. If so, please let the interviewer know.

Benefits of participating in this study:

Learning how trust operates within human systems could improve relationships among this leadership team, enhance your leadership skills, enhance your ability to build and maintain trust with staff and members, and improve relationships between the staff and executive board.

Confidentially:

Study related records will be held in confidence. Your consent to participate in this study includes consent for the researcher, supervising faculty, and transcriptionist to see your data. Your research records may be inspected and/or photocopied by authorized representatives of the University of Pittsburgh, including members of the Institutional Review Board or their designees, for monitoring or auditing purposes.

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. The informed consent forms and other identifying information will be kept separate from the data. All materials will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office and only the researcher will have access.

The digital voice recordings will be listened to only by the researcher and transcriptionist, who has signed the attached Professional Assistance Confidentiality Agreement.

Any records that would identify you as a participant in this study, such as informed consent forms, will be destroyed by shredding approximately three years after the study is completed.

You will be asked to provide a different name for any quotes that might be included in the final research report. If any direct quotes will be used, permission will be sought from you first.

The results of this research will be published in my dissertation, used in a doctoral class paper, and possibly published in subsequent journals, books or presentations.

The security of data transmitted over the Internet cannot be guaranteed, therefore, there is a slight risk that the information you send to me via email will not be secure. The collection of such data is not expected to present any greater risk than you would encounter in everyday life when sending and/or receiving information over the Internet.

Voluntary participation:

You may or may not decide to participate or withdraw from this study at any time during this process. If you decide to withdraw participation during the process, all of your data will be withdrawn from the study and immediately destroyed.

Compensation

No compensation is provided for participation. The organization has allowed for the interviews to take place during normal working hours.

Study results:

You may request a copy of the aggregated results and the final dissertation.

Additional Information:

If you have any questions about any aspect of this study or your involvement, please tell the Researcher before signing this form.

You may also contact the supervising faculty if you have questions or concerns about your participation in this study. The supervising faculty has provided contact information at the bottom of this form.

You may also ask questions at any time during your participation in this study.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, contact the University of Pittsburgh IRB by email at _____ or by telephone at _____

Please sign indicating you have read, understood, and agree to participate in this research.

Return one to the researcher and keep the other for your files. If you receive this Informed Consent form through email, you may print one copy, sign it and email all four

pages to the researcher at tony@bennae.com while keeping the original for yourself. The Institutional Review Board of University of Pittsburgh retains the right to access to all signed informed consent forms and other study documents.

I have read the above informed consent document and have had the opportunity to ask questions about this study. I have been told my rights as a research participant, and I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research study. I shall receive a signed and dated copy of this consent.

_____ NAME OF PARTICIPANT (please print)

_____ SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

_____ DATE

Jill Perry, Ed.D., Dissertation Chair University of Pittsburgh

Appendix B Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Pseudonym: _____

Researcher: _____

Interview Format: _____

Research Question:

Q1. What are some factors that either facilitate or impede trust amongst The local's leadership team?

Q2. How would you describe how the COVID-19 pandemic has further impacted trust amongst the local's leadership team?

Part I: Consent

Prior to starting the interview, University of Pittsburgh requires researchers to obtain consent from potential participants. You should have received an electronic copy of the consent form, and I would like to review the document with you.

The form details my role, and the role of my principal investigator. As a reminder, participation is voluntary, and participation can be discontinued or withdrawn at any time. Your

decision to either accept or decline participation in this study will be fully respected and unquestioned. Do you have any concerns or questions so far? If you are willing to participate please give your verbal consent since we are on zoom.

Part II:

We will now go over basic protocol before starting the interview.

Introduction to Protocol

I am excited to learn about your experience and to fulfill the requirements for my dissertation, research must be conducted and I really appreciate your willingness to participate.

The only individuals and entity that will have access to information containing study participants will be myself as the researcher; my research committee; and the University of Pittsburgh's IRB. No leadership or executive authority with SEIU will have access to your interview data.

You are at liberty to join the study now and then withdraw your participation later. You are also free to exclude yourself from any phase of the study or to refuse to answer specific questions. Please be aware that I, the researcher, will be taking notes during the interview and that pauses may occur because of this notetaking.

This interview is projected to last between 45 and 60 minutes. During this time, I have a series of questions that I will ask to help me to understand how trust is facilitated by the Local 105's leadership team.

If at any time you would like me to reiterate or clarify a question, please let me know.

Do you have any questions? Is it ok to start recording? Ok, here we go.

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a member of the Local 105 leadership team?
2. How would you describe your experience of being on this leadership team?
3. Can you describe how you experience honesty amongst this team?
4. Does this team come together when dealing with challenging situations? If yes, can you provide examples?
5. What are some of the practices used by members of the leadership team to monitor and/or support one another's wellbeing
6. What has been the impact of the pandemic on trust?
7. Describe how well the members of this team do what they say they will do?
8. Do you trust others on this team?
 - a. If so, how do they know?
 - b. If not, how do they know?
9. How has transitioning to a virtual space impacted trust among this leadership team?
10. Describe how your role and leadership responsibilities have changed since the pandemic?
11. If there was one thing that would increase trust among this team, what would it be?

Interview Close

Thank you for your time today.

If you think of anything that I may not have discussed related to the leadership environment or experience at Local 105, please feel free to share more details.

A completed transcript of this interview will be emailed to you.