

# Trust

Trust is typically framed in terms of individuals who trust and who are trusted, that is, individuals trust another individual or group. For example, teachers trust the parents of students or the students themselves. Hence, we speak of teacher trust in parents or teacher trust in students. The literature on trust is extensive, occurring in such fields as psychology, sociology, economics and other behavioral sciences. Nonetheless, there are common features that run through conceptions of trust regardless of discipline.

At the most basic level, *vulnerability*, *risk*, and *interdependence* are common threads pervading most expositions of trust. To trust someone is to make oneself vulnerable to another party, and with vulnerability comes risk. There is no trust without interdependence, that is, the interests of one party depends on the reliance of another. Thus, trust is a condition in which individuals or groups make themselves vulnerable to others under conditions of risk and interdependence.

## Faces of Trust

There are five common aspects or “faces” of trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness.

1. **Benevolence** is likely the most common condition of trust—the confidence that a trusted person or group will act in the best interests of that person or group; altruism of others is critical to trust.
2. **Reliability** is the extent to which one can consistently rely upon the other for action and good will.
3. **Competence** is often a salient feature of trust, especially when some skill is need to fulfill an expectation. Put simply, good intentions are not enough, especially, if the needed action requires skill.
4. **Honesty** speaks to character, integrity, authenticity, and the expectation that a promise or one’s word can be relied upon; honesty is a central component of trust.
5. **Openness** is the extent to which relevant information is shared, and that actions and plans are transparent.

## Definition of Trust

*Trust is a state in which individuals or groups are willing to make themselves vulnerable to others and take risks with confidence that others will respond to their actions in positive ways, that is, with benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness.*

Trust can be individual and personal or it can be collective and social. People can choose to trust other individuals or groups. The teachers of a school as a group or collective can choose to trust other parties, individuals, or groups. For example, a specific teacher may trust another teacher, or the collective body of teachers in a school may trust students in general. In the latter case, trust is collective and supported by the norms of the school. In sum, personal trust takes place at the individual level whereas collective trust is a property of a group or institution.

Two basic sources for trust relations in school are:

Forsyth, P. B., Adams, C., and Hoy, W. K. (2011). *Collective Trust: Why Schools Can't Improve Without It*. New York: TC Press. This book is a comprehensive review of the research in schools on trust and its development.

Tschannen-Moran, M. and Hoy, W. K. (2000). A multidisciplinary analysis of the nature, meaning, and measurement of trust. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(4), 547-593. This research article is an extensive review of the concept of trust across a variety of organizations; it is both a conceptual and empirical analysis of trust.