DesignIntelligence® Quarterly
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**PRAGMATIC DESIGN**

RELATIONAL
TRUST

# DesignIntelligence® Quarterly

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# Context: Relational Trust   - Michael LeFevre

Deep in the depths of our project endeavors, the rational types among us often wonder why things are going awry. We've checked all the project management boxes. We have our schedules, our budgets, even our communication infrastructures are set, but something is still missing from our having an integrated effective team.

Those who default to social belief systems are quick to tell us: It's the people, stupid.

Faced with the absence of our teams working well toward a common goal, we can almost inevitably attribute our failure to having forgotten to build trusting relationships with our teammates. Why so? How can we be so blind to the power of the people before us?

That's the question whose depths we will explore in this issue of DIQ: Why do so many of us, as so-called experienced leaders, still fail to grasp the magnitude of this principle?

Perhaps it's because we love the process of creation above all. Maybe it's that we are genetically predisposed to work alone to create, as we were encultured, educated and trained: "our art", a singular vision of creative or management genius. Could it be possible that our very skill at being creative blurs our vision

to have us falsely believe that our processes are rational, linear, sequential and predictable? Maybe it's the old post-war and Baby Boomer generation paradigms of American hubris: "work hard, compete, win – do whatever it takes – it' s all about you - it's the American way."

More recent generations are faced with assuming the mantle of responsibility for the social, business and built environments we've created and left for them. Now armed with liberating, empowering transformative new tools such as smart phones; central shared Google Docs; and ChatGPT, they are already migrating to work modes that more highly value the power of collaboration, teams, and a diverse team composition. They are more practiced in listening and working among varied perspectives. And at the core of it all - they understand the absolute need to understand and trust those they work with.

Yes, there were early achievers back in the 70's, the early champions of town hall meetings and building consensus, the socially aware "people persons", leaders of the Civil rights movement, even the radical and hippie factions who railed against trusting the government establishment knew enough to build strong common cultures – many of which were fueled by mind-altering drugs, free lifestyles and non-conformist styles of dress. But they were good listeners and empathizers: "Far out,

man." But each of these social movements still has something to teach those of us who spend our time in the world we call business: it is, and always has been, about: the people.

In this issue of DesignIntelligence Quarterly, we ask a wide range of thinkers to contribute their thoughts on those ever-perplexing aspects of the human condition in our contexts (architecture, construction, the built environment and business):

- How do we get along?

- How do we best develop trust, both within our own organizations and within those of clients, partners, competitors and constituents?

- How do we build the strong, integrated, synergistic thriving teams we need to innovate and solve wicked problems with clear, compelling, common missions?

- Can those of us who still don't default to strong interpersonal development and trust still be helped at our stage in the game?

The answers are – emphatically - yes!

As we observe the ever-shifting emphasis from technical to non-technical work over most of our careers, the data tells us: We need to, and we do, get better at becoming people-and-relationship developers and trust builders as we progress through our career arcs. To find out how, and share it with you, we've curated contributions from:

- Dave Gilmore, who examines leadership dimensions in his article *Leadership Trust.*

- Scott Simpson, who reminds us, *In Trust We Trust.*

- Paul Hyett, who borrows from AEC industry research and the work of Crow, Hausman and Scribner's "middle ring" in his essay, *Relational Trust.*

- Paul Finch and his critical look at contractual privity and duties in *In Design We Trust.*

- DeeDee Birch, whose essay *Old and New: Architecture Future at the Intersection of Innovation and Ancient Wisdom* considers sustainable design at a transcendent, higher level of care.

- My own true confessions as a practitioner, entitled, *Trust Me On This.*

- Mancini Duffy CEO, William Mandara's interview discussing his firm's reinvention: *Transition and Transformation. Tools and Trust.*

- AIA 2025 President-Elect Evelyn Lee, who outlines her agenda for change in the profession in *Disrupting Practice.*

- HMC leaders James Krueger, Jennifer Wehling and Sergio Lechuga, who share secrets to synergy in their essay: *Building Trust: Integrating Wellness, Sustainability and Diversity in Design*

- Walter P. Moore's Michelle Perry, who looks at workplace adaptation post COVID in her essay, *Trust in a Hybrid World.*

- IIDA EVP and CEO Cheryl Durst, who takes a journey through the perspective of the interior design profession in her interview, *Building Trust (From the Inside Out).*

- DI's Bob Fisher, who offers an intriguing perspective in his essay *Trust at Scale.*

We hope you enjoy this collection of advice from our tribe of proven professionals in whom we've placed our trust. We offer it to you in good faith.

*Michael LeFevre, FAIA Emeritus, Managing Editor*

# 2023 EDITORIAL ROADMAP:
## RELATIONAL TRUST



*To continue the discussion about Relational Trust, please contact us at mlefevre@di.net*

# BUILDING TRUST: INTEGRATING WELLNESS, SUSTAINABILITY AND DIVERSITY IN DESIGN

# Building Trust: Integrating Wellness, Sustainability and Diversity in Design

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Director of Interior Design, HMC Architects

Three HMC leaders share secrets to synergy.

## Beyond Minimum

In the evolving landscape of architecture and design, professionals are no longer focused only on meeting the minimum expectations of clients and stakeholders. Today's design leaders are confronted with broader considerations, including wellness, sustainability, diversity, equity and value. Beyond mere add-ons, these aspects are integral components of good design and should be seamlessly incorporated into every level of the design process. Achieving a harmonious balance among economic, social and environmental issues while accounting for budget, scope, schedule and project-specific factors is the key to successful project outcomes. Embracing such a multifaceted balancing act while pushing boundaries can create projects that minimize environmental impact and enhance the human experience. But how?

## First Things First

No attempt to do so can begin without first prioritizing goals and building trust. These two actions form the foundation for integrating wellness, sustainability and diversity into the design process. Architects can create meaningful, sustainable and inclusive spaces that cater to end-user needs by aligning client objectives, employing strategic design frameworks and involving diverse voices. Still, before they can start, they need to have common goals — and trust one another.

Traditionally, architects have been tasked with balancing economic, social and environmental concerns. While this remains crucial, today's design leaders face a more comprehensive balancing act that encompasses additional dimensions. Includ-

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ing wellness, sustainability, diversity, equity and inclusion in design is no longer optional; it is imperative. These aspects have become expected for those trying to create spaces that meet occupants' needs, respect environmental considerations and reflect the diverse communities they serve.

## Seeking Synergy

To achieve successful projects, design leaders must extend their focus beyond the fundamental economic, social and environmental factors. They must also account for project-specific elements such as budget, scope, schedule, client priorities, local opportunities and the project team's expertise. By holistically incorporating such considerations into their design processes, architects can create synergy — and find the sweet spot where these factors converge to maximize positive outcomes.

## Listening Frameworks

Each project requires a tailored approach to balance priorities effectively. As designers, we gain insights into client goals, needs and preferences by engaging them in extensive discussions. This process involves collaborative goal-setting and establishing priorities, differentiating between "need to haves" and "like to haves." To guide these discussions, we employ frameworks for design excellence that help us listen.

## Sustainability Mindsets

Because sustainability is good design, we embrace having a sustainability mindset at the core of the design process. While design excellence frameworks may address sustainability explicitly or implicitly, they encompass principles that align with sustainable practices. When we begin design with sustainability in mind, we add clarity to project goals. We inform project strategies. Beyond first-wave environmental aspects, we include social and economic sustainability by helping our clients understand that their building looks the way it does because it performs the way it does.

In our version of building trust, we strive to include diverse voices in the design process. This extends beyond traditional stakeholders and includes underrepresented groups, Indigenous cultures and individuals whose perspectives often go unheard. We recognize the importance of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) principles and create an inclusive environment where all stakeholders have a voice. Having a diverse group of people within our firm is where that begins. To serve every human being individually and entirely, design firms need people that reflect the diversity of our communities. Leveraging that diversity creates better designs.

## Making Choices: Tools Required

As designers, we have the lead in integrating sustainability and performance into design decisions. While our clients may be aware of sustainability concepts and potential, we are responsible for guiding them toward the best decisions based on data and performance. This includes selecting materials and systems that align with project goals.

To cope with an ever-growing array of choices and information, we employ project management tools to help clients make decisions. These tools, such as option summaries and our live "choosing by advantage" sessions, help clients visualize options, return on investment and performance data. They enable collaborative decision-making, but the recipe for synergy demands more than simple tools. Interaction and trust are the secret ingredients of consensus and better outcomes.

## Getting Together: Trust Required

To understand why, consider this recent HMC project case study. On a recent design-build project we conducted a "choosing by advantage" session in a "big room meeting" with all stakeholders involved. We made decisions in real time and graded them based on effectiveness. We "chose by advantage" and scored each decision together. As a result of this live, collaborative process and having shared common goals, our decisions stuck, and the project got built. We were not only efficient, but we also trusted one another. Though we try it on all projects, in

some instances we can only get some of the constituents to join us in the big room. That's where a different kind of trust enters: Those who can't join us live rely upon their trust relationships with us as we represent them and report on the outcomes.

These kinds of processes don't just encourage collaboration, they require it. Involving and including the voices and perspectives of many allows — and demands — the creation of inclusive, representative designs. In contrast to the architect-dictated days of old, such approaches foster a sense of ownership for clients that makes the designs their own. Through collaborative, inclusive design, we can deliver buildings that don't just meet the client's objectives, they positively impact the users' lives.

## Making a Difference

The spaces we create make a difference. We need to consider that when designing these spaces and engaging with diverse populations. To achieve that, our teams work closely together. We respect one another, and we work toward the greater good. There is something unique within this set of constructs, something that we value. We call it relational trust. We have to nurture it within our teams internally before we can build it with our clients and partners.

Relational trust is the foundation for integrating wellness, sustainability and diversity into architectural design. Designers can balance economic, social and environmental factors by

understanding client goals, employing strategic frameworks and involving diverse voices. This holistic approach — people and process, tools and trust — ensures sustainable, high-performing designs that promote inclusivity, wellness and a sense of client ownership.

By building and fostering relational trust, we can create meaningful and impactful spaces that contribute positively to the built environment and society.

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*Director of Sustainability, HMC Architects*

*With over 20 years of experience as an architect and a passion for the environment, Jennifer has a unique outlook on the challenges and opportunities that every project faces. She works with project teams to integrate sustainability into the design process while respecting the budget, scope and schedule constraints inherent in all projects. As director of sustainability at HMC, Jennifer takes a holistic approach to sustainability in the firm's design work and operations, guiding HMC in minimizing its footprint while maximizing its positive impact.*

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*As HMC's director of design, James plays a pivotal role in overseeing and strategizing ways to enhance the impact of HMC's work. With an impressive 22-year track record in designing facilities that make a positive difference in the communities they serve, James brings a wealth of experience to HMC clients. Previously serving as design principal, he has successfully led numerous projects in HMC's PreK-12 and Community + Culture practices. James's creative approach is deeply rooted in HMC's mission of design for good, and he is committed to providing clients with high-performance solutions that create a meaningful and positive impact.*

# TRUST ME ON THIS

## Q4: RELATIONAL TRUST

# Trust Me on This

**Michael LeFevre**

Managing Editor, DesignIntelligence

No matter how well managed, well intended and well organized we may be, we are nothing without trust.

Over a career that has now spanned seven decades, I've learned one thing: No matter how many schedules, lists, plans, budgets and to-do lists we may arm ourselves with, none of them matter if we don't have trust. Relational trust, that is. The kind that exists between two or more people. Trust me on this. More than an ironic musing, it's a fact. But what is trust, really?

## Trust Deconstructed

For many of us, trust is like art: We can't quite describe its qualities, but we know it when we have it. We can see it in one another's eyes. We have a feeling. But do we really understand what trust is?

Trust is an agreement, often a tacit understanding between two parties (or possibly between yourself and one of the other voices in your head if you're trusting yourself). It's an earned belief, endorsement or willingness to base your own future outcome on a shared intention or action by another person. Trust is based on judgment, experience, context or past performance. Trusting someone requires that you assume potential risk, real or reputational, but less so if your trust has been confirmed in the past.

Like a credit card, trust is the granting of current credit based on a belief or faith in a future action, outcome or state. It's an

affirmation or validation of character. I trust you'll do it. I believe you will. Like viewing a movie or theatrical performance, trust requires the suspension of question or disbelief that what someone's says or will do, their words or actions, will align with what they say they will. Trust is an implied or inferred assurance of a future condition.

Trust is based on the promise, belief or expectation of accountability or delivery. Like religious faith, trust may exist in the absence of evidence to inform it. Trust involves the sense between the parties — an intuition — that the right thing, the promised proper thing, will in fact be done. At its core, trust is always relational and contextual. Trust is a form of implied contract, entailing the performance of a duty, the consideration for which may be little more than the continuation of that same trust having been already established.

Trust can be looked upon as an investment between two people. It may exist in one direction or be mutual. A trust relationship, once broken, is hard to regain. Often long in gestation and hard earned, trust can be breached in an instant. In most of us, trust has parallels with the American justice system in its implicit nature. Just as the accused are innocent until proven guilty under the law, in most cases, we grant trust until our collaborator gives us a reason to take it away.

## Conflict Is Inevitable

By now we have learned that none of us can design or build much by ourselves. That's why we do it in teams. We have also learned that the disciplines of design and building are highly subjective. While both a science and a business, creating built environments is more notably an art. As such, by intention, we give ourselves license to do almost anything in pursuit of our projects in teams. And that's where the conflict comes in: With

free rein to create, and with team members of different minds and experiences, values and goals, conflict is inevitable and is where trust enters the picture. In managing such endeavors, our challenge is to establish common goals, set limits and use proven management guiderails to keep us moving in a common direction and between our self-set lines.

## Trust Required: An Admission

To explore the mysteries and powers of trust, let's look at a spectrum of cases ranging from intrapersonal and intradisciplinary trust to larger-scaled trust among teams, and then, to extradisciplinary trust — that is, the kind that exists between us and those outside our clans.

Over the years I've learned the hard way to deploy management tools in leading creatives. Without a budget or schedule, how is the team to know when our work is due, our plan to accomplish it or how much we can spend? Answer: We can't. But on too many occasions, even after creating and sharing these management tools, the real shock came when I discovered they still didn't work. The question is: Why?

In each case I shared them with my teammates, the team of architects and engineers working with me to produce our design and documents. Or perhaps our contractor teammate had shared their budget and schedule with us, the design team. Then, we promptly ignored it, didn't understand it or the tool simply failed us. Why did we slip into disarray so often? Because we lacked relational trust.

Let's dig deeper to understand. In our excavation, let's take the case where the contractor gives the design team a cost model to design to. We receive it in the meeting, publicly, with the owner. We even agree and commit to designing within said budget. And then we don't. What happens? First, it's likely that we will

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enter the exchange with an inherent mistrust of our construction management partner. Why? Possibilities abound. One might be that we were educated and accultured to nurture a healthy dislike for them in school. To wit, the stereotypical image and rhetoric of almost any modernist master architect and the accompanying sentiment about contractors as "foxes in henhouses" trying to "line their pockets" at the expense of quality or design. Another reason might be based on personal experience. Perhaps we had worked with them before and failed to meet one of their budgets. Either we had been responsible for over-scoping or over-designing or they had prepared an inadequate, underfunded project budget. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice: mistrust.

In the mistrusting team, and having been burned before, I, as lead architect, didn't trust the contractor nor their cost model. As a result, I chose to spend significant time checking their estimates, quantity takeoffs and unit costs looking for hidden contingencies, challenging them in public and pointing out their errors. The by-products of this mistrust and my duplicative efforts were not just a waste of effort (mine) but also a perpetuation of a spirit of mistrust among the team and movements that countered forward progress. This doesn't yet consider the time taken by the entire team to hear, backcheck and reconcile our challenges — a habitual time-waster in countless projects. Moreover, an equally hurtful outcome was the opportunity cost. Such efforts directed the labor of the design team away from our primary duties to design the building. Instead, we spent our fee doing tasks someone else was hired to do while getting further behind in our own work. The result of it all was to create additional mistrust and accelerate the tumultuous budget vertigo spiral. Our unwillingness to trust our partners was not an infrequent exercise. Rather, in our blind quest to achieve high design, we deployed maladaptive strategies on an ongoing basis. We architects — who fancied ourselves as aesthetic bons vivants — acted predictably in putting on the design dog, knowing full well in the thrall of design's allure we would again soon face the blasphemy of being

over budget. With seeming malice aforethought, we continued to subvert the process and ignored the duty of developing a trust relationship with the party fully able and responsible for keeping us in budget: the construction manager. Our sole strategy was to expect that some peripeteia, miraculous turning point or reversal of fortune would appear while we waited and hoped for some resolution or transformation. It never did.

Then and only then, after failing, we confronted our vulnerability hangovers as we pled with them to tell us what to do and how to return to budget.

Contrast that with those projects in which we trusted the contractor. We knew them or had experienced their stellar service in keeping us within budget in prior projects. We knew them to be honest, hard-working, similarly motivated to achieve excellence and to be open-book, clear communicators. In those instances, we trusted their work. They explained that they had solicited proposals from multiple qualified subcontractor bidders, shared their scope and variances. Their words and actions demonstrated their clear intentions to put the project first. What was the outcome of these projects? We trusted them. We didn't spend time redoing their work. We believed it. We took the time to ask questions in areas we didn't understand. When we found small, honest errors, we thanked one another for the discoveries, quickly fixed them together and moved forward. We refused to let errors fester or worsen, even shading and masking them on occasion to protect our teammates — because it was good for both of us to correct them. We had trust, relational trust, because we had earned it in mutually respectful and beneficial ways. What a difference it made. The simple existence of trust (enabled by our willing mindsets and motivations and backed by evidence, data and experience) made the difference in activating the effectiveness of our management tools. We believed and trusted in them. They worked! At least to the degree pos-

sible in the AEC context. These redemptive examples of trust stand as fond memories and shining examples. The projects that lacked trust retain their malodorous qualities in the dark, dank cellars of our minds.

## Recurring Scenes: Internal "Professional" Culture and Trust

Let's take another example, the kind of trust that exists among the design team themselves. There's a recurring scene in many design studios. It happens when the team is floundering to find a synthesis, when their design is just not coming together. That's when black-turtleneck-extreme-haircut-round-Corbu-glasses design woman comes in and says something deep and abstract. Something Peter Sellers might've said in the film "Being There." Something koan-like. Something like, "The materiality is real. Only when we do not see can we see clearly."

At this point, having received what they delude themselves to believe is clear direction from their spiritual leader, the architectural team — ever the design magpies — return to their studio with renewed vigor, intent on finding the next Louis Kahn-inspired, again-over-budget design solution. Why? Because they trust their leader implicitly.

In another similar studio elsewhere across town, in comes frumpy, rumpled-coat, smudged-glasses, mussed-up-hair guy. The person so intent on their work that they habitually neglect to tuck in their shirt, comb their hair or clean their spectacles. The result? They see the world through a professional-discipline-tinged, nonreality distortion field. Lost in the work they love, they have chosen to be incapable of performing life's common duties. Things like letting the dog out, being on time or remembering to put air in their tires, even after countless reminders from their spouses.

I know this latter type well because I had one as my colleague and mentor for three decades. His name was Terry Sargent. He was the most talented, capable architect I ever knew, and he classically exhibited the qualities described above. On one trip to visit him and tour one of his award-winning projects, we had to pull into a service station for air when I pointed out that his tires were nearly flat. "Yes, I know. Jean has been telling me that for weeks," he confided. The difference was, as a colleague who had fought alongside him in many architectural wars and a professionally respected voice, I was someone he trusted. He listened to me. Based on our trust, respect and long-established relationship, he broke his pattern of intentionally neglecting his duties at my request, because he knew I cared about him and had his best interest at heart. Then, we put air in his tires and within a few minutes willingly returned to being lost in our work.

These kinds of absent-minded professors and geniuses often rely on their trusted colleagues to get them through the day's practical aspects. I was one such ally for Mr. Sargent, and he was for me. He was my spiritual leader, the person I relied upon, whose judgment I put faith in even when it might entail more personal risk or work. Trust, indeed.

When it comes to the professions, we practitioners often value their core tenets more than we do our own well-being. In disciplines referred to as abstract truths or pursuits such as "law, medicine or architecture," it seems that trust is hard won and seen relative to its context among "the work." That is, if Joe tells me to put air in my tires and is only a lowly intern, real estate developer or, perhaps, merely my spouse, I can dismiss that advice due to Joe's low professional stature — as I value it. But if a discipline-trusted colleague makes that same suggestion, I'm more likely to heed it. I'm not saying this behavior is beneficial, merely that it demonstrates the power and depth of trust that
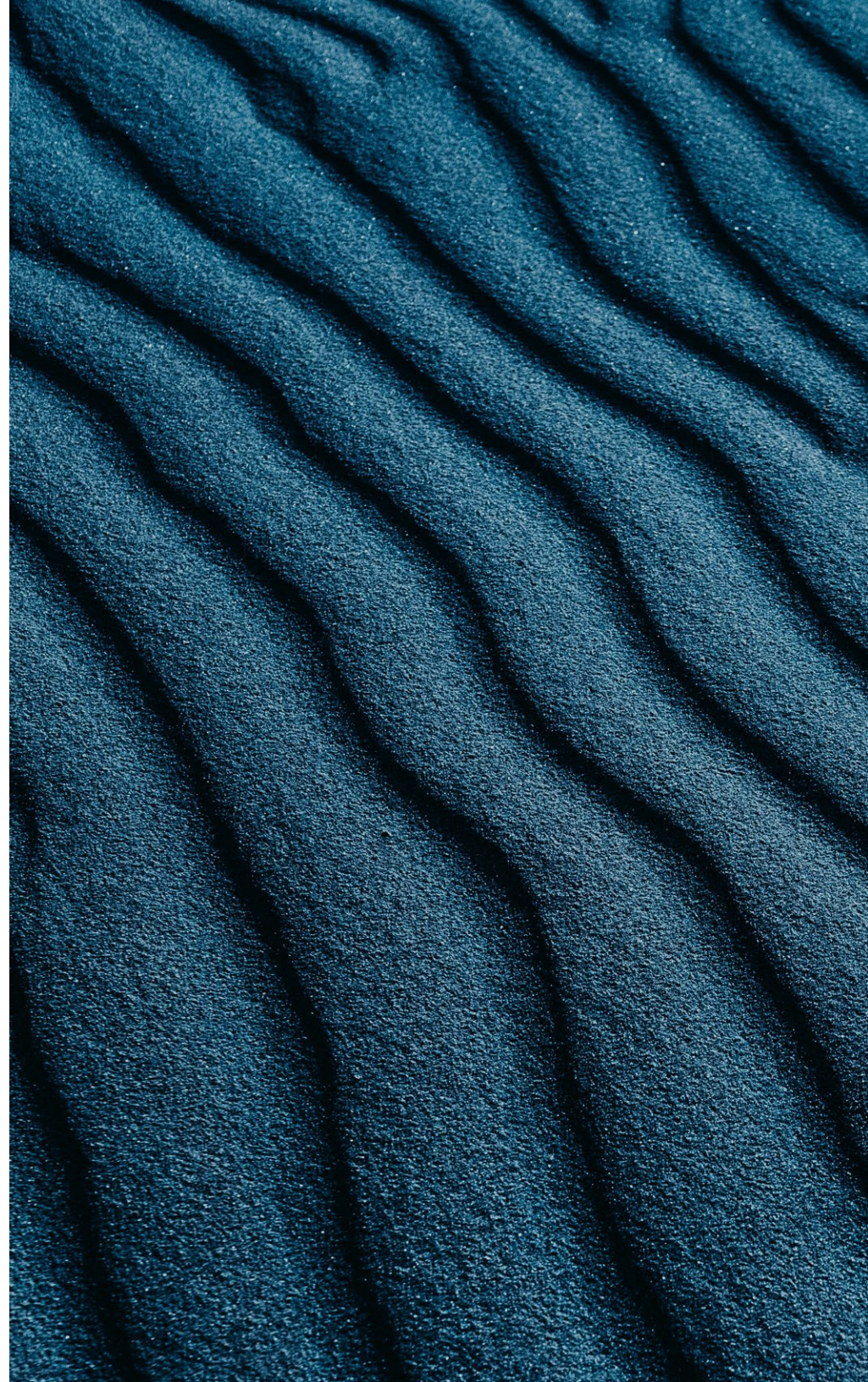
can result from shared, deeply held values. In fact, in many cases, by masking deep biases, such trust can be detrimental.

Plenty of other kinds of trust relationships don't enjoy the depth of the ones just described, but they must be nurtured nonetheless. Trust between peers, supervisors and subordinates, or any two people attempting to work together, is equally essential. While perhaps not as deep as the trust between close friends and colleagues, these other trust types operate with commensurate effectiveness.

## Trust Types

The demonstrable power of trust can be witnessed in many realms. These include the trust of our team, mission, vision, organization, clients, partners, individuals and selves. Before we can trust others, we must believe in — and have predictability and faith in — ourselves. Will we (and can we) do what we say we will to elicit and engender trust?

Beyond the myriad trust types, we can deploy the principle of relational trust at multiple scales. The process of building trust can begin with our next small action. When we say, "I'll have that drawing to you by noon," to earn trust, we don't send at it 3 p.m. We honor our small promise or communicate why we may not if something changes. Small things count. Starting now.

## Small World

Now that we have become global citizens in a small, connected world, our need for trust has grown to heretofore unimaginable reaches. In a time when our actions on one small, local project can have implications across the world — on supply networks, economies, political relations and natural and man-made systems — we need trust more than ever. But it remains hard to come by.

## The Intangibles

In the worlds of design and construction, change is implicit. We seek to bring about new realities by designing and managing projects. We design, procure resources and construct. Clearly these are tasks rooted in the physical world that can be managed by tangible tools. Any good project manager has a budget, a schedule, a to-do list and goals and objectives that define success. Simply manage these tangible project aspects, and life is good, right? Hardly. Experienced tacticians soon find that no matter how buttoned-up their tangible management tools are, when they lack trust and understanding among the humans that use them, said tools aren't worth the pixels they're printed on. Without these soft, human, relational factors we know as trust in place, none of the tangible physical things matter, and they certainly won't work for their intended purpose.[1]

## Building Trust

We've established how trust is built: over time, with effort and with a certain amount of blind faith, trial and error. With shared experiences and values. With time and work. Even more than mere time, a more valuable commodity to give another person is your attention. To care about and focus on them, to listen to their needs and seek your mutual interests. Attention is the most valuable thing any of us can ever give. Certainly, it's the most meaningful gift, in instances where you want to nurture a relationship with someone — and if you are interacting with them in any way — you should.

We can draw a distinction between interactions that are merely transactional and those that are more significant. That is: I need this from you (perhaps a newspaper from a sidewalk vendor in New York City), you need that from me (perhaps financial compensation for the morning paper) and we're done. Compare

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[1] *For an in-depth discussion of this topic, see my book, "Managing Design: Conversations, Project Controls and Best Practices for Commercial Design and Construction Projects" (Wiley, 2019.)*

this to a relational interaction intended to last over time, with enduring mutual benefit. But even in the newspaper example, how much richer is the transaction when it can be made to transcend the mere exchange of a commodity? Isn't it better when you know the vendor by name and when they remember you? You say good morning, you smile and you share a story or give energy to one another in some way. Perhaps an upbeat, human or even a sarcastic comment about the day. Simply better. Not all interactions need such humanity, but answer this: Where's the harm?

When it comes to trust, you don't know it until you have it. And the way to get trust is to give it — or give it a try. You take the small, courageous leap to give and establish a relationship with somebody and you hope they will reciprocate and act consistently, according to the patterns of behavior you'll establish now

or have in the past. If they fail, trust has been lost and must be restored. Mark Twain reminded us that "courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear — not absence of fear." We should remember his advice when it comes to building trust.

## Trust Techniques: Common Data and Seeking to Understand Differences

Many tactical tools and techniques are now at our disposal to help us build trust — simple foundational concepts such as taking the time to set up shared common data and information exchange protocols upfront. When we do that, we build a platform to share the lifeblood of our knowledge and communication systems, our common data. This is a far cry from keeping two sets of books done in different breakdowns or hoarding two data sets because we don't trust our partners. What better way to enable

trust? Share your data. What a signal it sends. Beyond data, on the interpersonal side, we can invest time in trying to understand our teammates' motives and processes and acknowledge and understand their differences. Take engineers, for example. Understand their why, their process and what's important to them. Why is calculating things to six decimal points important to them? Seek to understand, then honor their needs, then do the same for clients, constituents and the countless others on our teams. Celebrate that differences make us better and build and talk about trust.

## Earning Trust

How do we earn trust? It's simple. Do what you say you will. Have the other parties' and your collective interests at heart. Perhaps give more than you get. Act with good intention, as if you are trying to create and nurture a lasting relationship. Get and give something more than the perfunctory exchange of a commodity. "Star Trek" actor Leonard Nimoy famously said, paraphrasing:

"There's got be more to life than: 'I did what you asked, our transaction is complete. Now give me my dollar.'"

What about service, learning, growth and mutual investment over the longer term? Deriving joy or some other important feeling from the experience? Giving back or offering kindness to another? Even failure or some other valuable lesson to be learned? Your exchange could have been so much better if seen in a longer-term light and mined more deeply.

Right now, some of you — the hardened, grizzled, battle-scarred types who believe it's a dog-eat-dog world out there — are skeptical. "Bull hockey!" you exclaim. "Just get your dollar and leave." Fine. Given a choice, I don't want you on my team.

Increasingly, as I cross the thresholds of more decades, I'm finding that I'm the oldest person in the room. One benefit that brings is perspective. And that perspective teaches me that "it" is indeed about the people. "It" always has been. Despite my early beliefs that "it" was about design or business, "it" remains about the people — those who do the work, use the building and who are the connected constituents to the families and friends of those who do the work and use the buildings. Why? Because it's built into our DNA to connect.

## Connecting

How do I know we're built to connect? Try this test. What is the first thing we do when we're done with a project? We share it! We reach out to connect! Although many of us design and construction types are introverts with codependent relationships to our projects, when we finally finish one, I'd guess few of us return to our homes to quietly isolate ourselves. Hardly. We long to share the news. We seek connection. "Mom, Dad, honey, kids, roommates, my project is done! It got published in Architectural Record! It improved the lives of those who work there! It just achieved LEED Platinum Certification! I'm proud! I need to share my feelings with somebody! Let's go out to dinner and celebrate!"

## Fixed Pies and Zero Sums

Like love, trust is not a fixed-pie, zero-sum game. In fact, the more trust you give, the more that can be generated. It's a wonderful thing when a force like trust multiplies. Teams get built. Relationships thrive. Transcendent outcomes and miracles occur. But why and how? Because of trust. In trusting relationships, all our energy is directed to the same cause or goal. Toward positive ends. Forward, not sideways or backward. We want the same thing, and we trust one another to continue to do the right thing to achieve it. We don't micromanage. We don't question one another, except as helpful mentors, collabo-

rators and challengers to keep focus — and our collective bar of achievement — high. The best designers I ever knew developed a sublime ambidexterity: the ability to design and trust at the same time.

## Who Do You Love?

Bo Diddley's rock and roll song from the 1950s asked: "Who do you love?" In the working world, the more appropriate question might be: "Who do you trust?" As you move forward with your life's work, I hope you will learn to trust your clients, partners and colleagues and that you will start by trusting yourselves. With intention, you can learn to trust the process and the system— and along the way develop a keener sense of judgment and experience and a more practiced skill set when it comes to trust.

I hope you do.

Odds are, if you try it, no one will get hurt, eaten by jackals or swept away by large condors.

Trust me on this.

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> The best designers I ever knew developed a sublime ambidexterity: the ability to design and trust at the same time.
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*Michael LeFevre, FAIA emeritus, is managing editor of DesignIntelligence Quarterly and principal with DI Strategic Advisory. His debut book, "Managing Design" (Wiley, 2019) was an Amazon #1 best-selling new release.*

DesignIntelligence®
Quarterly

RELATIONAL TRUST

# Relational Trust

**Paul Hyett**

**Founder of Vickery Hyett Architects**

"The glue that binds a professional learning community is relational trust."

So claims Jerome Cranston, dean and professor of Education at Saskatchewan's University of Regina. A leading researcher in the field of relational trust among and between teachers and the principal within professional learning communities, his findings reveal that:

"Because relational trust appears to be critical to the functioning of a professional learning community, it may be unlikely that substantive school improvement can be achieved without close attention to it."

I suggest Cranston's work is highly relevant to everyone involved in the crisis that continues to engulf all sectors of the British construction industry, from those who design our buildings to those who construct them; from those who draft building legislation and codes through to professional indemnity insurers; and from product and component manufacturers to those who test and certify their wares.

That crisis emanates from the horrific fire that engulfed Grenfell Tower some six years ago on the night of 14 June 2017. Whilst Sir Martin Moore-Bick is now drafting his report on the findings of the public inquiry, which was commissioned in the immediate aftermath of the fire by then-Prime Minister Theresa May, Dame Judith Hackitt and Paul Morrell have independently delivered devastating critiques of, respectively, the U.K.'s system of building regulations and our product information protocols.

The impact of Dame Judith's report, "Building a Safer Future," has been profound: It is no overstatement to suggest that the new Building Safety Act, which came into force in early 2023, is almost entirely built on her recommendations. And for all those, particularly in the U.K. and U.S., who have in recent years advocated, presided over or simply welcomed the deregulation of their respective construction industries, it is a sobering thought that the consequences of the Grenfell Tower tragedy have been, seemingly overnight, to shift the U.K.'s status from having one of the least to one of the most regulated construction industries in Europe.

Morrell's work will, I suspect, prove to be equally important. Authorized in April 2021, his report, "Testing for the Future," was finally published by Government on 23 April 2023 — suspiciously, a good 18 months after its completion. An obvious complement to Hackitt's focus on building regulations and fire safety in terms of statutory controls and design, this second report has investigated the territories of product testing, certification and representation through trade literature — another world of astonishing mystery and confusion.

*Grenfell Fire*
*Image Courtesy: Paul Hyett*

So, whilst Hackitt has laid bare the confused complexity and ambiguity of a regulatory process, which she described as "not fit for purpose," Morrell, in lifting the lid on a Pandora's box of misrepresentation and deception in testing and certification, has exposed a world of process and protocols that is obviously completely unfit for purpose as well. He has also drawn attention to the extraordinarily fragmented nature of the British construction industry, which the following image — listing just some of the members and associate members of the Construction Industry Council (CIC) — illustrates only too well:
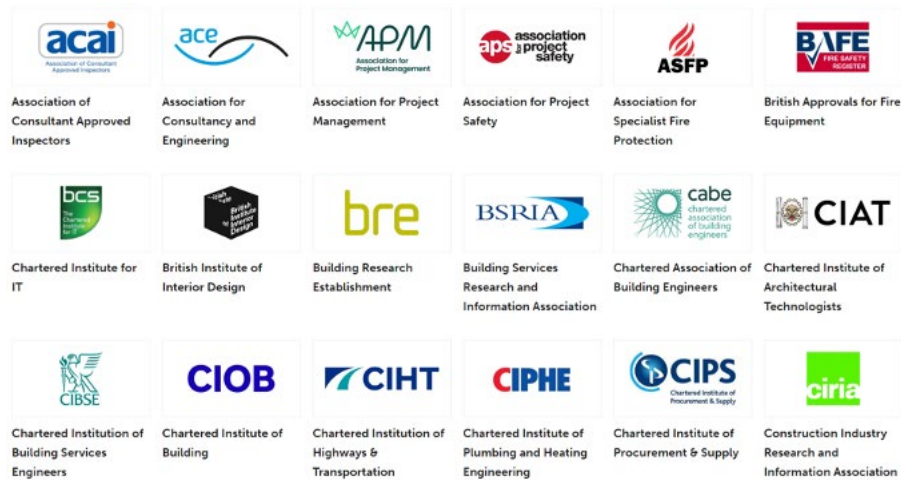


Diagram per CIC
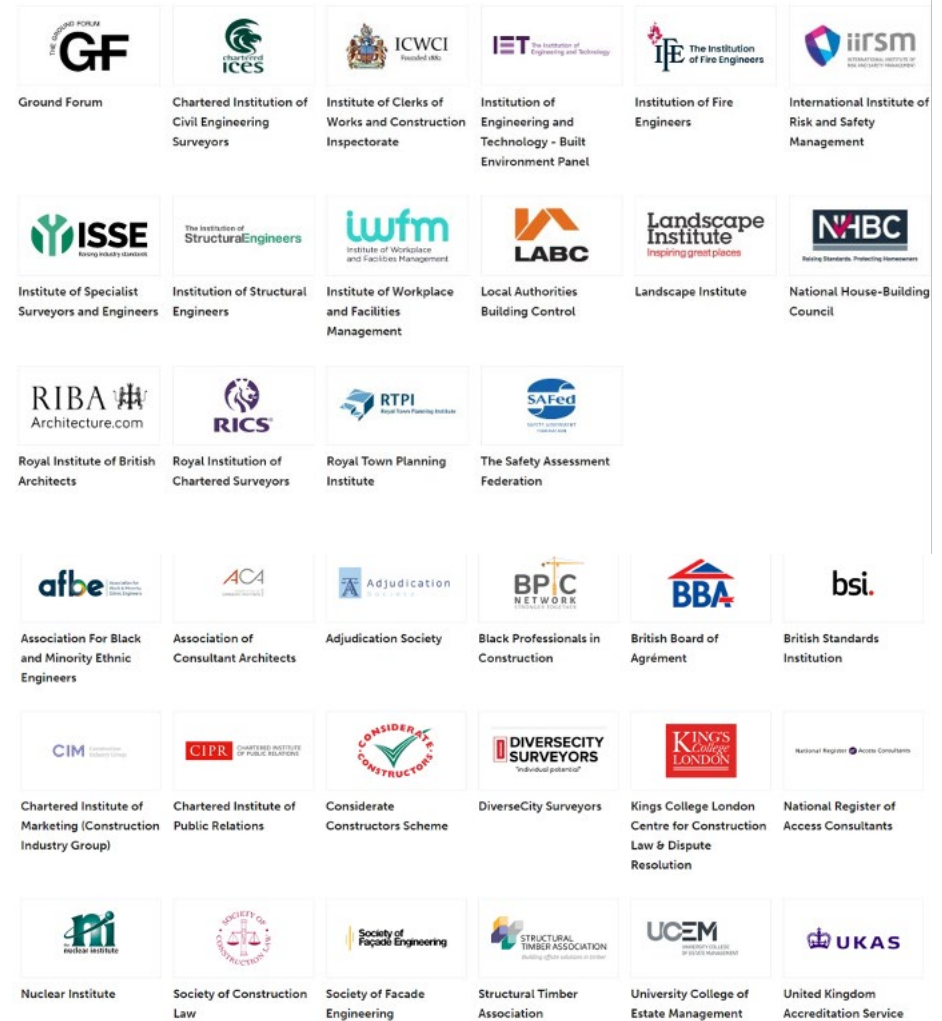
## Concentric Circles

British construction is represented by over 500 institutes, guilds and confederations. Together, they now face a monumental challenge in assisting their industry to regain any semblance of public trust. Nothing short of inspirational and dedicated leadership will recover that confidence, and doing so will surely take an enormity of effort and a considerable length of time, but start we must, and we must start somewhere.

Which is why I am so interested in lessons that might be learned from the educational community and the research of Professor Cranston. In a section of his report under the heading "Trust and Professional Learning Communities," he quotes Crow, Hausman and Scribner who, within their 2002 publication "Reshaping the Role of the School Principal," offered a model of professional learning communities that uses three concentric circles.

They describe the innermost circle as representing the teacher/pupil relationships, whilst the outermost circle represents the teaching faculty and the community at large. Against those contexts, the middle ring represents relationships amongst the faculty within the school. It is this middle ring and its mediation between the outside world and the inner workings of the classroom that became the focus of Cranston's study.

And it is this territory that offers profound lessons for our disgraced construction industry as it embarks on its mission to "clean up its act" and regain trust.
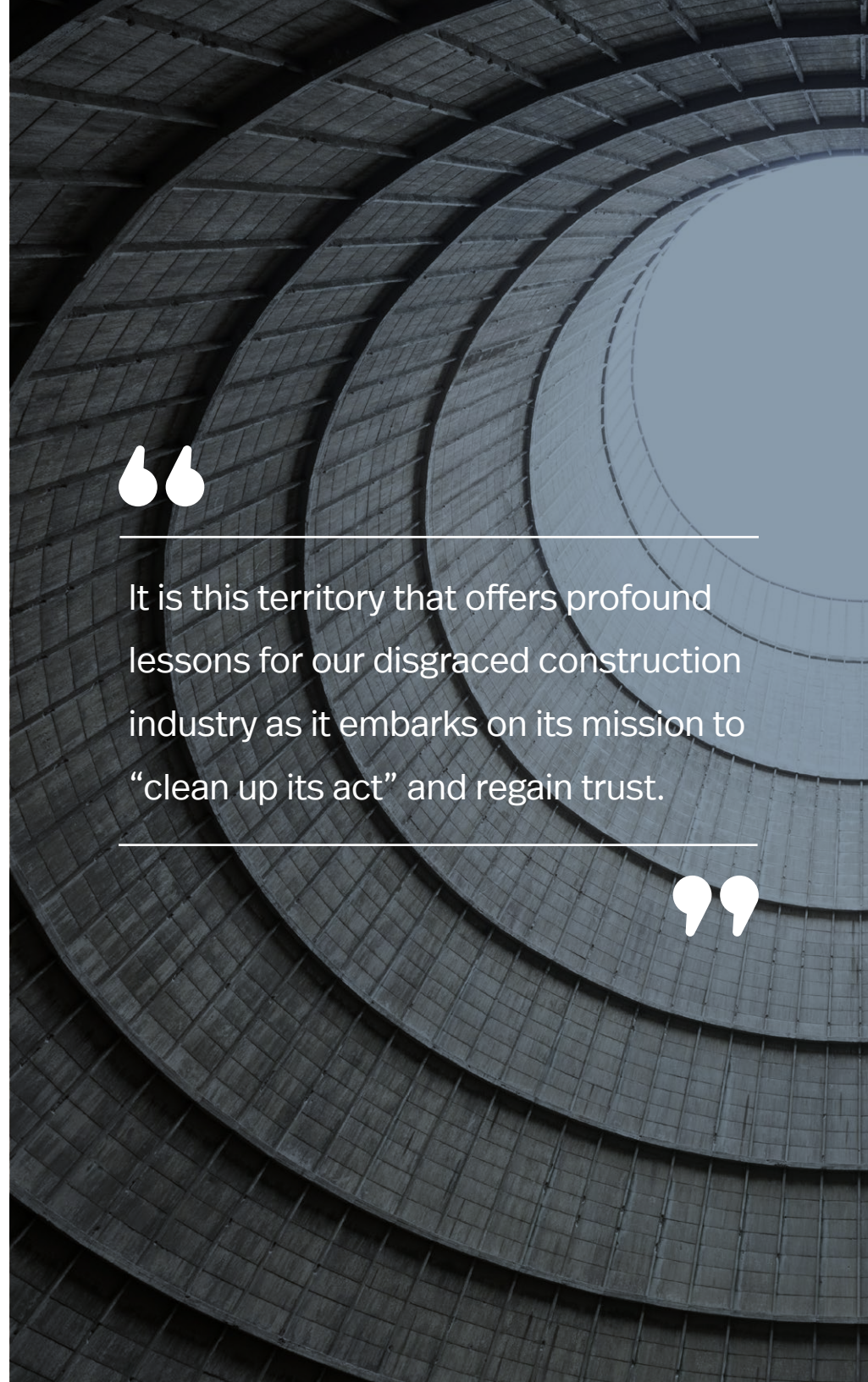
> It is this territory that offers profound lessons for our disgraced construction industry as it embarks on its mission to "clean up its act" and regain trust.

A useful analogy is to take the innermost circle as representing the relationships between corporate leaderships within businesses (all businesses across the construction industry) and the teams they employ, especially those beginning their careers. Against that, the outer ring would represent the community at large: the public who will live, play, learn, be healed, work and trade within and otherwise use the buildings we design and make together. Then, critically, the middle ring represents relationships between those many professional institutes, guilds and trade bodies, registration boards and associations and all the other discrete organisations that comprise our industry.

It is within this middle sector that so much has gone wrong. This is the area in which, in the interest of the wider community and those we lead in our effort to serve it, we should be creating the widest possible matrix of learned communities whose interrelationships are based on trust, knowledge sharing and mutual support.

But here we fail, for our construction industry continues along a trajectory of mistrust, suspicion, deception and exploitation. Instead of seeking conditions conducive to success (for example, investment in research, adequate design time, the development of mock-ups and prototypes and sharing information on failures), our industry continues in its irresponsible path of "packaging" risks and passing them downstream — and of setting contract conditions and obligations that grimly anticipate, and all too often precipitate, failure rather than laying grounds for success.

I will never forget a director of a major Chinese company disparagingly telling me, in contrast, that their industry embraces risk and collectively solves construction problems.

> **The glue that binds a professional learning community is relational trust.**

When I began my architectural education back in the early '70s, we were advised by our first-year tutor in no uncertain terms that, irrespective of any formal or contractual duties towards a "paying client," we have a higher duty to serve the public interest. This was a shot across the bows of those who might fall under the spell of the dastardly property developer, but the message was clear. The importance of those words and that sentiment cannot be overstated today. At a nanosecond to midnight the architectural profession, and the industry of which it is inextricably a part, face the ecological crisis that now makes an urgent demand for eco-responsible and sustainable design.

In trying to identify where and why things have gone so wrong, I would point to the introduction of Design-and-Build (D+B) contracting and the 1984 Building Act. The former was introduced as a way of getting ever earlier construction starts in the face of raging inflation, which, in the construction industry, peaked at 28% in the later 1970s. But whilst early starts against abbreviated and "just in time" production information lessened inflation's impact, it heightened clients' exposure to claims, so "novation" of design teams to so called D+B contractors was introduced as a way of ensuring reductions to client risk. Such procurement methods have since become the U.K.'s norm for almost all construction work of size, albeit at great cost to design and construction quality.

In parallel, the 1984 Building Act substantially undermined what had been an effective building control system by challenging the authority and autonomy of the building inspectors and district surveyors through the introduction of a parallel,
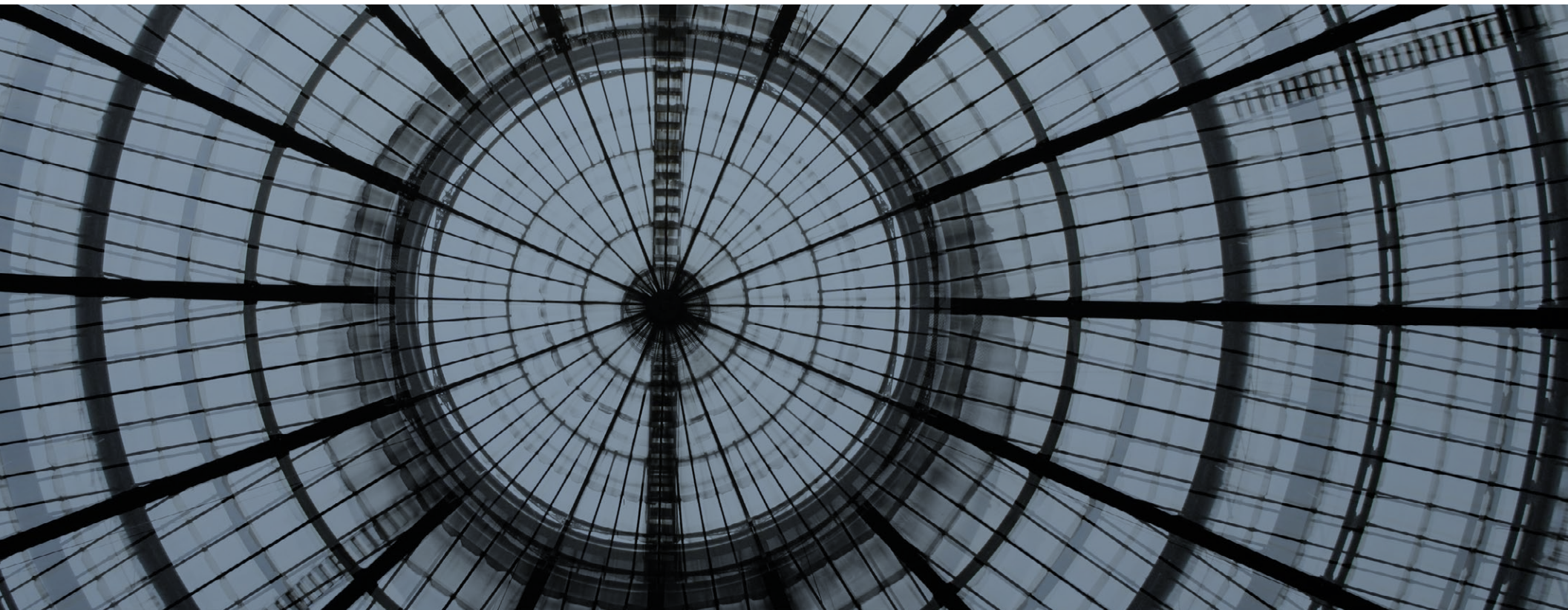
privatised arrangement of "approved inspectors." Thereafter, the state's municipal building control system, once respected around the globe, was progressively strangled through underfunding and the damage of cut-price competition to a point where, despite the ongoing hard work and determination of many within, it could all too often barely function.

Against that gloomy assessment, it is true that the U.K. continues to produce many examples, year on year, of stunning architecture delivered to the highest standards by outstanding construction teams. But the grim reality is that those achievements are all the more laudable because they are delivered through contractual, procurement and regulatory processes that generate dispute, ambiguity of responsibilities and confusion with unfortunate regularity.

The U.K. construction industry now faces its biggest ever challenge. In its efforts to respond, it would do well to become a learning community in a truly professional sense, perhaps adopting a reworking of Professor Cranston's mantra, quoted, as follows:

"Relational trust is critical to the functioning of a professional and dedicated construction industry. The substantive improvement so urgently required will be achieved through the securing of robust relational trust between its many constituencies."

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Relational trust is critical to the functioning of a professional and dedicated construction industry. The substantive improvement so urgently required will be achieved through the securing of robust relational trust between its many constituencies.

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*Paul Hyett is the founder of Vickery Hyett Architects, past president of the RIBA and a regular contributor to DesignIntelligence.*

# IN TRUST WE TRUST

PRAGMATIC DESIGN

## Q4: RELATIONAL TRUST

# In Trust We Trust

Scott Simpson

Senior Fellow in the Design Futures Council

On the back of every dollar bill there's a familiar phrase: "In God We Trust." Yet nobody's ever seen "God" in person, and "God" has multiple meanings and interpretations depending upon one's religious perspective (or lack thereof). The U.S. Constitution is notably clear on the principle of separation of church and state, and yet this unabashed reference to the divine prominently adorns our currency. What's up with that?

Also consider what "we" means. Just exactly who is, or are, the "we" in this context? It suggests a collective body politic, to be sure, but the people who comprise "we" come in many different shapes and sizes and possess widely divergent opinions and beliefs. What is it that binds them together in a sufficiently inclusive way to deserve top billing on the currency?

A dollar may seem like a real thing. It declares itself to be "legal tender for all debts, public and private," which is a rather sweeping statement. But the truth is that its value can fluctuate daily as currency markets ebb and flow. The dollar has lost more than 90% of its purchasing power over the last five decades. Viewed in that context, a dollar is really only a dime, and before too long may devolve to being a penny.

It's the last word, "trust," that gives the proposition its meaning. The true value of a dollar is ephemeral at best; it is worth only what we think it is at any given moment. There was a time when U.S. currency was legitimized by the nation's gold reserves, but that relationship was ended by President Nixon in 1971. As a result, dollars were no longer backed up by hard assets — only by the public's trust in the soundness of the currency. Like Tinkerbell in "Peter Pan," the dollar only works if you believe in it.

These same dynamics hold for private relationships. The average person may have a dozen or so close friends and perhaps several hundred acquaintances, but there is no way everyone can have a meaningful personal relationship with everyone else. To put that in mathematical terms, someone with a connection of some kind to 1,000 other people only knows .0000003 of the U.S. population — a number so small it's essentially zero. The rest must operate on the basis of trust.

> "Without trust, life's normal activities would be impossible."

Trust is a funny thing. It's both fragile and enormously power-ful. Trust takes a long time to build, but it can be shattered in a single careless moment. Like gravity, we cannot see it, taste it or smell it, but its effect is palpable and undeniable. Without trust, life's normal activities would be impossible.

Exercising the power of trust is one of the most important things leaders do. It was trust that enabled George Washington to hold together the ragtag Continental army in Valley Forge during the bitter winter of 1777. The soldiers had no food, blankets or weapons, but they had trust in their leader. Absent that trust, it is a certainty that the army would have dissolved.

Because trust is the ultimate form of currency in personal relationships, it must be spent wisely and well. Trust cannot be bought; it must be earned, one person at a time. The primary attributes of trust are predictability and consistency. When a promise is made, it must be kept, and when enough promises are made and subsequently fulfilled, trust begins to form. Properly nurtured, trust strengthens over time, and if it becomes strong enough, it can weather an occasional lapse or two. However, once broken, trust is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to restore in its entirety. People who intentionally break a vow may never regain full trust no matter how repentant they may be.

That is not to say that trust cannot admit to making mistakes. Believe it or not, human beings are imperfect, and despite the best intentions, they do not always perform as expected. When errors are made but then admitted, they can be repaired. In fact, a momentary lapse can strengthen trust if it is dealt with in a forthright manner.

What does this mean for leaders in the design professions? The nature of the business is that it largely deals with unknowns. Because design is a journey of discovery, the ultimate outcome is not defined at the outset of a project. There may be plenty of good intentions all around, but every design team must navigate a host of variables (some expected but many not) and despite best efforts, not all the initial promises may be kept. Does this mean that designers are inherently untrustworthy, making promises they are unlikely to keep? (After all, 30% of all projects in the U.S. do not meet schedule or budget.)

The answer is: It depends. Claims of "we exceed expectations" or "we will deliver on time and within budget" or "we will create the best (fill in the blank) ever" are unlikely to be met and of course should be taken with a grain of salt. However, a pledge to devote "our best effort" to achieving those same goals will be much more credible.

To be effective, design professionals need to develop deep trusting relationships with a wide variety of people: clients, consultants, contractors and review agencies having jurisdiction over the project, not to mention their own internal staff. In addition, there is a nascent trust relationship with thousands of people whom the designers have not yet met: the end users and the public at large. It follows that the ability to build and maintain trust is a key skill in the designer's toolbox.

With that in mind, it's odd that "trust" is not part of the curriculum in design schools. Perhaps that's because the need for trust is so pervasive it's simply taken for granted, like the air we breathe. After all, when people walk into a building, they assume without thinking that the building codes have been complied with, the structure is sufficiently strong, the lights will turn on and the plumbing will work.

> " After all, when people walk into a building, they assume without thinking that the building codes have been complied with, the structure is sufficiently strong, the lights will turn on and the plumbing will work. "

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> In the final analysis, trust is a leader's only currency. Like the mortar in a brick wall, it's what holds things in place.
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Successful firm leaders do not take trust for granted. Trust, and its corollary loyalty, are the table stakes for any leader's ability to inspire people to do their best work. Effective leaders continually focus on developing trust among their colleagues. When they have done so, they pay special attention to maintaining that trust, knowing their credibility as leaders, just like the value of a dollar bill, can fluctuate based on any given transaction. In the final analysis, trust is a leader's only currency. Like the mortar in a brick wall, it's what holds things in place.

*Scott Simpson is a senior fellow in the Design Futures Council and a regular contributor to DesignIntelligence.*

# TRANSITION AND TRANSFORMATION. TECHNOLOGY AND TRUST.

PRAGMATIC DESIGN

# Q4: RELATIONAL TRUST

## Transition and Transformation. Technology and Trust.

**Bill Mandara**

Chief Executive Officer and Co-owner of Mancini Duffy

**DesignIntelligence (DI):** We're talking with Bill Mandara, CEO and co-owner at Mancini Duffy. Welcome, Bill. Our theme for Q4 in DesignIntelligence Quarterly is relational trust. Your firm is in its third generation of ownership. You have experienced a transformation in technology and markets. Based on your success, you must be familiar with the principles of relational trust. I'd like to get into that in our talk today. Does that sound OK?

**William (Bill) Mandara (WM):** Absolutely.

**DI:** To lay a foundation, can you describe the firm's transition and transformation? For readers who may not be familiar with it, what was the firm — and what is it now?

**WM:** Mancini Duffy is a 100+-year-old national design firm. We started as Thomas Bruce Boyd Architect, then Halsey, Mc-Cormack & Helmer and now Mancini Duffy. It's a long history, but the most relevant part to where we are now happened in the 1980s. Ralph Mancini had an opportunity to get a large project, and while the client loved Ralph, he didn't think he could handle it. So, Ralph made a merger happen between Ralph Mancini Associates and O'Neill Duffy. They had a week to pull it together, and that became Mancini Duffy.

We're on our third ownership group since then. In the early 2000s, Ralph had started an ownership transition to Tony Schirripa, the former CEO. I took over that position from him, Dina Frank and other owners. Ralph retired in 2016. In 2017, Christian Giordano, Scott Harrell and I bought the firm.

I came to the firm via an acquisition. I was part of a firm called TSC Design that Mancini Duffy acquired in 2011. I ran our New Jersey office, and six months into the acquisition they got rid of it, so I came to work here in New York City at Mancini Duffy.

While I liked a lot of the people here, especially Tony Schirripa, it wasn't necessarily the type of firm I had planned to work at because it was corporate and interiors-focused. My background was in base building architecture, a more balanced mix of industrial, multifamily, base building, core and shell, and interiors work.

Christian was brought into the firm by Ralph Mancini to — unbeknownst to me at the time — lead the second ownership transition. Christian and I became immediate friends. We went to dinner before his first day here, and I didn't know what was happening. I didn't even know he was the guy until an hour, several bottles of wine and two steaks into it, and I said, "Oh, wow. All right. I really like this guy." We quickly figured out that while we are outwardly quite different, we're very similar. Similar beliefs, upbringing, values and vision of what we thought a firm could be.

Christian brought me into the fold of Ralph's plan and what he was here to do and asked me if I was in. I thought for two seconds and said, "Absolutely." So that was how I arrived here. Back then the firm had diagrams of how you had to dress. In my first days, several people criticized my footwear. I was admonished for wearing jeans to work.

**DI:** What were your reactions to those admonishments?

**WM:** Early on, I would sit in meetings feeling the freedom to say whatever was on my mind. I didn't have any long-term plans to stay, so I would just speak freely. Half the people would look at me like I had three heads, but the other half would say, "Wow, somebody's actually saying things that aren't the same thing everybody else is saying." I would call certain people out and it worked in my favor, which is funny.

**DI:** Being authentic and speaking the truth can earn respect and build trust. It seems to have for you.

**WM:** Yes. From there, Christian devised a plan to buy out Tony and Dina. To his credit, Tony said, "Come up with a plan and make me an offer." I give Tony a ton of credit. It isn't easy for people, architects in particular, who tend to have enormous egos, to let go. Tony had the foresight several years before we implemented the ownership transition to start handing over the reins to Christian, Scott and me and transition the firm from a buttoned-up corporate interiors firm to what we are now, so I'm forever grateful for that.

**DI:** A values- and trust-based transition. At DI we coach that as the basis for sound strategies, and you were clearly aligned. But you had earned their trust and the door was opened for you.

**WM:** Yes, it was. And Tony facilitated the ownership transition in the most gracious, forward-thinking way possible.

**DI:** How did that align with the shift in market types and technology?

**WM:** Christian and I are about the same age. I graduated from college into a recession. It took me a few attempts to find my first job. My dad was a contractor during those times, so I worked for him. We were building a convenience store in New Jersey, and I was in the sun laying 12-inch concrete blocks, so I was motivated to get out of there.

Graduating into a recession in 1994, after the tech breakdown in 2000, the aftereffects of 9/11 and the 2008 crash is where we started to make decisions. We both felt it necessary to diversify into new verticals because I saw firsthand how the financial crash decimated the company. Part of our strategy was work and relationships Christian and I already had, but also the need to diversify and expand into new sectors like hospitality, multifamily and health care.

**DI:** The crash of the financial markets and the recession decimated the company?

**WM:** Yes. Our biggest clients were financial institutions that happened to fall on hard times. In 2008 and 2009, that ungodly time hurt. Christian has a background in base building work as well, so we were able to take Mancini's corporate interiors history and merge that with Christian's higher-end base building architectural and broadcast work, and my industrial, base building and developer work, which got us started with some more diverse work types.

Over the years, we've brought in an expert in life sciences, and that's an important and growing sector for us right now. Organically, we designed one airport lounge, and the guy that worked on that said, "I like working on aviation stuff," and asked, "Can I develop this aviation practice?" We said, "Absolutely," and that's become another sector for us. That was a combination of organic growth as well as entrepreneurial spirit. The same thing can be said with our expansion into the education market.

**DI:** These were colleagues who had shown success and that you trusted?

**WM:** Yes.

**DI:** Your transformation was necessitated because of the financial crash and by a need to align with who you were in your reinvention. What, if anything, of the old firm did you keep or build upon?

# MANCINI:

**WM:** One of the things we wanted to build on and celebrate was Ralph Mancini's legacy. When we took over the firm, we did a brand refresh. Our logo now has two dots on the side that are a nod to the firm's history. Ralph was a pretty slick, snappy dresser who always wore these orange cuff links, so our logo has a little homage to Ralph. Mancini has a rich, century-old history that we were buying and leveraging to celebrate and build upon Ralph and those who preceded us. We still do a lot of corporate interiors, but adding to that gives us market diversity. A year ago, we acquired a firm, Gertler & Wente, that has an excellent health care practice, and that's really taken off. Since then, we've hired somebody who's also very experienced in that arena, and we're growing it further. They also had a multifamily residential practice we've added to and are developing, which has similarly become more successful. The more diverse markets and physical locations we can get into will insulate us against economic uncertainty and the healthier the firm will be.

**DI:** You've gone from a traditional, buttoned-up place to one that embraces technology. You brought a new perspective. Is that a function of the two of you being of the younger generation and growing up with that tool set?

**WM:** Part of it is our age. I'm in that lost generation, the Gen Xers nobody cares about. It's all about boomers, millennials or Gen Z — although I will say, we had some of the best music. Back to our technology migration, a young man here who was a few years out of school asked, "Christian, can you move out of your office? We need it to start exploring things like virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), 3D printing and all other initiatives." We said, "Cool. Go for it. Whatever. Let's do it."

That was the genesis of the technology we have now. We tried different things. I remember having a client take a phone and put it in some VR goggles, and he got a little seasick. After a year or so, our clients liked it. We started clearing out furniture in the office and setting up VR arenas for presentations.

That was the genesis of our current technology. Today, we have software developers, our own proprietary patent-pending technology called The Toolbelt and our process we call the 360 Design Session, where all our design processes and presentations are done live in VR or in a first-person, point-of-view video game setting, where we strip away the past pretenses. The old way of designing was to build a model, do all these things in 3D, then flatten it all out, spell check it and then pop it into PDFs or foam core boards and give clients three design options. They'd say, "I like this. I don't like that." We'd go away for two weeks and try again.

Now, we just put it all in this session live, look at it together, have some live design options our clients can choose from and move aspects of the design around with our clients in real time. Thanks to this unique process we created, what we've done would take another architect two weeks and we do it in two and a half hours! At the end of that session, we might have a messy Revit model, but we clean it up, and then it's done. Besides speeding up the design process, another benefit of our process is we've found a way to bring our clients into the design process. They buy into the design and their decision-making happens faster and more confidently because they're in an immersive environment where they can experience their projects firsthand.

Previously in schematic design, you'd do a neat rendering you'd send off to China. You'd put the right person standing in the right spot, and it looked perfect. A year and a half later, the client would say, "This doesn't look like that rendering." In this case, it looks like what it is because you're in the Revit model, and the software we developed that puts you there presents a more realistic situation.
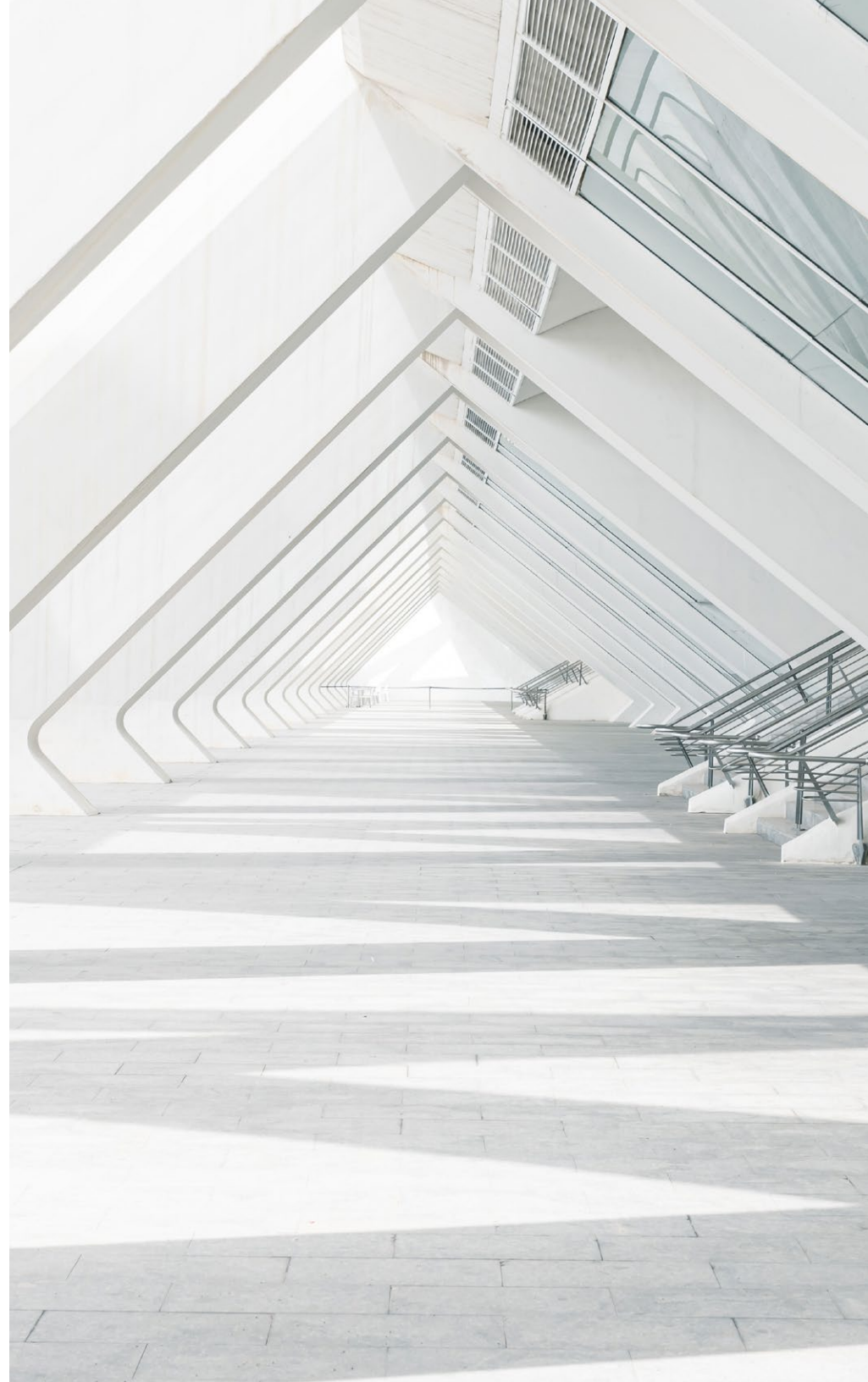
As the design process goes on, it gets updated with finishes and materials. By the time you get to the end of design, you're looking at a fully designed facility people have walked through. The results are significant: It moves quicker, decisions are made faster and it creates buy-in from the client. It avoids, "Hey, this doesn't look like the rendering. What the hell, man?" All that started with one gentleman asking Christian if he could have his office to try out his idea.

> The results are significant: It moves quicker, decisions are made faster and it creates buy-in from the client.

**DI:** A bottom-up, grassroots request from one passionate person has transformed your design and customer-interface process into being fully experiential — and trust- and confidence-building. How many years did that take?

**WM:** Seven to eight years from the initial ask. He is a principal at Mancini now. He's one of the most respected people at our firm, one of the smartest. If I've done one thing right, it was to hire him.

**DI:** Has he stayed on the technological path? Is he your CTO or CIO now?

**WM:** No, he's an architect. He also leads our technological charge, but he is an architect as well.

**DI:** To hear that you have fully transformed your process in that way is impressive when you're competing in New York against firms who have 100 years of technological resources and more money to work with. That's a great story.

**WM:** Yeah, a lot more money to work with. When people ask, "Hey, Bill, can I buy a $14,000 computer?" I say, "What? That's more than my first car ... I was 18 years old. I had a Corvette. It didn't cost that much. Come on."

**DI:** When I was leading BIM adoption at a national construction firm, I spent much of my life begging for money and had to teach people, "Let's present both sides of the equation" — not just, "Can I please spend money?" but "What is it going to do for us? What will it save?"

**WM:** We recognized that investing in these things would help us now. A lot of what happened here over the last 10 years or so is people would rise up with these ideas. In the mid-'90s, I was at a firm that didn't even have a network, everything was saved on floppy disks. I organized them all, set up a network and got all that done. Now we're extremely fortunate to have some amazing people here that have taken over.

**DI:** I love the trust and faith in your employees and the courage to give them a shot. How are your clients embracing these new technologies: the digital approach, virtual reality and such?

**WM:** Our clients love it. One of the first clients that embraced it was a restaurant client, and this was before we set up in our initial room. Our staff was literally putting tape on the floor as a VR arena. He would bring his chef in, and we'd model the whole kitchen. He would say, "Nope, this needs to be over here because I can't see the line cook." The restaurateur would also

walk through the space in VR. He's successful and has specific ideas on how close people need to be, and he would manipulate the tables and the space to bring the vibe of his restaurant to life. They were one of the earlier adopters of our 360 Design process.

I've yet to have a client say, "I don't want to use this weird technology." Everybody has embraced it 100%. We had a high-end corporate interiors project, and the head guy was based in Florida. We packed the VR gear in flight cases and flew down to Florida, set it all up and they loved it.

We did a huge relocation of a large company in rural New Jersey that moved to Newark. We set up a temporary VR station within their existing facility so employees could come in and see what the new facility would feel like — because it would take them an extra half hour commuting to work. That worked fantastically in convincing them because they trusted it, since they saw it and experienced it firsthand.

One of the earliest times I used VR was for a developer client whose building we were renovating in Manhattan. If you can find floor area in existing buildings by cutting holes in building floors, you can repurpose that space in the penthouse. We had an old industrial building we were turning into a Class A office building. We were putting in a new lobby, and we cut out a floor to get a double-height lobby space. The client said, "I think we should cut out two floors because it'll be more airy, we can add the roof and do all the things that make sense to maximize the value of the project."

And I kept saying, "I don't think you'll like it. You'll walk in this space and feel like you're in a Rice Krispies box." And after weeks of trying to get my point across poorly, we were able to put it in VR. I think I had it on my iPhone. We were standing in the street, and I said, "Hey, man, try this on."

He said, "What is this?"

I said, "This is your lobby."

He looked around and said, "Damn it, Mandara, you're right. Don't take the floor out." And then he took the headset off, and I had to grab him because he almost walked out into the middle of the street because he was a little seasick. But it was one of those moments where you say, "This works, man." I've yet to have a client say no. More often than not, our clients ask, "All right, this is great, but how much extra will it cost?" And we say, "Nothing, that's just how we work."

VR has been a game-changing tool for us. Not just in getting the work done more effectively but also in getting a competitive advantage because we compete with firms with more financial resources than us. That was a foundational idea when we started — that we were going to need something to set us apart.

**DI:** Fascinating, on the technology side, using virtual reality helps you bridge the understanding gap and builds trust. On the people side, I want to test a hypothesis against our theme of relational trust. Clearly, the old version of your firm doing corporate interiors for corporate clients was about trust. The financial industry breached the trust — and we had a big crash. You understood that and redirected the firm.

I was not taught in school that we were in the trust or customer service business. Do you emphasize in your firm that it is about your clients, not about you and your precious buildings. That you are in the people and experience business — almost to the point of being in the hospitality business yourselves?

**WM:** Yes. That is a point of emphasis. It would be different if we were in Idaho, somewhere other than New York City. But there are a million talented designers, architects and very talented firms here. Any job and project I've ever gotten, any client I've ever had is because of a relationship. They know they can text me on a Saturday afternoon and it will mean something to me. It's not just a project number. Any work I've ever gotten has been relationship-based.

And to your point, there's trust. I've had clients ask, "What is your design aesthetic?" It's always what's appropriate for the project. I've been doing this for a while now, and I've met so many people in this profession I can't stand because they're trying to build a monument to themselves and ignoring the clients' needs.

**DI:** That's certainly not a way build trust or strengthen a relationship.

**WM:** Exactly. We did the first headquarters for Peloton. It was a super cool project. They had a budget, and it was meaningful. As a team, we could say, "This is where you're going to spend money, and here is where we can do some nice things without spending money," and meet their budget. It wasn't about us. It wasn't about designing something that everybody would say, "Oh, Mancini did this!" It was about the client and their needs. That suggests who we are as a firm and says something about the people that work here.

**DI:** How do select your teammates?

**WM:** I've hired a lot of people. For the most part, I can tell within five minutes of talking to somebody if I want to work with them, if they'll fit in, if they're a real person. And you don't have to be like me, you don't have to like the same things or be from the same background. But if you're a real person and not putting up a facade, as long as all the other stuff works and you know what you're doing, you can be successful here. I don't love stereotypical architects. They're not my favorite group of people.

**DI:** I appreciate you sharing that. When I was researching, I found your website refreshingly human. There were some personal anecdotes about you and your staff and even pictures of dogs. Does that manifest itself in your culture? Is it formal or unspoken to build and spread that culture through your firm? Clients first, people first and trust? Do you train for it?

> Over the years, even more important than all those plans has been leading by example. Not just me, everybody in our leadership. It makes the culture visible and apparent. It makes a difference.

**WM:** We have our core values established. When we bought the firm, we went through a series of exercises with executive coaches to develop one, three, five and 30-year plans, all those things. And over the years, even more important than all those plans has been leading by example. Not just me, everybody in our leadership team. It makes the culture visible and apparent, which makes a difference.

If somebody comes here and starts making it about themselves, they'll find out very quickly that's not how we do things. We have people who have taken the reins of the talent portion of our firm for hiring and staff development. They've done an outstanding job defining what that is and who we are. It's apparent when you're here that there are certain ways we act and things we do.

I remind people, "On half our projects, the clients aren't doing what they do every day." If you're doing a developer project, that's different. But if you're moving a law firm from one place to another, they don't do this every day. It's stressful for them, so you've got to make it feel as good as possible for them during the experience. The spaces we design are beautiful, and design is important, but people remember the experience.

You spend a lot of time together on a project in meetings, on construction sites, in design, on phone calls, and if you're spending the time with people you like and you have a good time, then it's great. That's why a lot of clients become friends over the years. If you have an enjoyable experience, it's better for everybody.

**DI:** In hindsight that seems an obvious realization, but it's hard for architects to figure that out.

**WM:** Ego. It's all about the ego.



**DI:** If you want to read a great book about how we got in that mess, read George Barnett Johnston's book "Assembling the Architect." It's a long, scholarly read, but you read it and you turn into Homer Simpson, "Doh!" This is how we got ourselves in this mess. We tried to isolate ourselves, retain our power, protect and distance ourselves as being elite and exclude everybody. What a disaster. I have to believe working for your father on a construction site shaped your worldview about architects a bit.

**WM:** No question. Having grown up with my dad as a contractor and hearing him complain about architects all the time, I didn't have a choice in the matter, and I'm a guy who grew up idolizing his dad. I came into it thinking, "These architects are not my favorite folks in the world." When I came out of school

that was verified by getting browbeaten in practice and somehow learning through it all to be different, to base things on trust and be real.

**DI:** What do you love best about the firm?

**WM:** There are a lot of things to love about where we are right now. We have a well-rounded practice that's poised for more growth. We have an outstanding staff and a great group of leaders, beyond our five partners. They get it and have bought into everything we've talked about. They are real people, not the ones wearing all black and little round glasses, and they get it.

**DI:** Gaze out into the future in 10 years. Where might you take things. Where might you be?

**WM:** The next step is for us to grow the heck out of Mancini. We plan on expanding into other markets outside of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. We're targeting places like Georgia, Florida and Texas. We have a really good formula here that, to your point, should be obvious, but it's not for some reason. And that formula could translate around the country.

**DI:** Trust, real people and clients first — a fine formula indeed.

**WM:** Awesome. I enjoyed our conversation very much.

**DI:** Thank you, sir.

*William Mandara Jr., AIA, is chief executive officer and co-owner of Mancini Duffy, a national design firm with a 100-year-old history and tech-forward approach based in New York City. Bill comes from a family in the business: His father and grandfather were general contractors. He got the most thankless tasks during his teenage summers at his father's job sites. In retrospect, it was a great way to instill understanding and respect for the profession and a not-so-subtle hint from his father to consider architecture school instead.*

*He had been at TSC Design for five years when Mancini Duffy purchased the firm's assets in 2011, when he was named a senior associate. He was later named principal in 2014, became co-owner in 2017 and was named chief executive officer in 2018. Bill believes in consistency of vision and values: We should never put ourselves or our vision ahead of the clients. This consistency lets us respond to our clients quickly, with clarity and authority.*

*He lives with his wife and two children in Paramus, New Jersey.*

# DISRUPTING PRACTICE

PRAGMATIC DESIGN

# Q4: RELATIONAL TRUST

# Disrupting Practice

### Evelyn Lee

Global Head of Workplace Strategy and Innovation at Slack Technologies, founder of the Practice of Architecture, and co-host of the podcast "Practice Disrupted."

**DesignIntelligence (DI):** We are talking with Evelyn Lee, the recently elected AIA president in 2025, president-elect in 2024. Congratulations, and welcome.

**Evelyn Lee (EL):** Thank you.

**DI:** I've interviewed a handful of AIA presidents in my book, "Managing Design," but this is my first opportunity to talk with one fresh from celebrating a victory. The national election just finished in San Francisco in June. How are you feeling?

**EL:** I'm feeling pretty optimistic at this point. I was exhausted, and I went through a period of asking myself: What do I do now, especially immediately after the campaign? Now that it's happened, requests on my time have been rolling in. Things were filling up even before the election ended, and now the 1:1's have really begun to pick up again. I'm not in any official capacity right now, not even on the AIA board, but it's been great to see the enthusiasm.

**DI:** You were off on a break after the election. Did you go somewhere fun?

**EL:** We planned a family vacation earlier in the year — a bit of a family reunion in Florida with my dad's side of the family, and then we went up to North Carolina to visit my in-laws. Some nice family time.

**DI:** Happy to hear that you are refreshed and recharged. First, thank you, from me and thousands of others for your commitment to serving this crazy business we all love. You've made a huge commitment to serving the practice of architecture. Can you share how your decision unfolded and when you decided to run?

**EL:** I had a lot of encouragement. When you're on the board and have served in leadership for as long as I have — I've been involved in AIA leadership for 20 years — you get a lot of encouragement from the leaders who came before you to continue to step up. I've tried to pass this same kind of encouragement on to other individuals as well. I officially said yes to running for AIA president as I was finishing my role as the first female treasurer of AIA National. That was toward the end of 2021, when you had to formally announce at the annual meeting in December. I actually ran last year and lost to Kimberly Dowdell, our 2024 president. I then took a good, long, reflective break before deciding to do it all over again and run this year.

**DI:** I'm glad to hear that kind of support network is in place and continues to be strong. Kudos to you for your persistence and for continuing to pass on the encouragement. I have a sense of your agenda, but I'd like to dive into that more. You're carrying an important mantle for one of the biggest issues in our profession these days as a woman president, the AIA's third in a row. That's a clear indication of the demand for continued change in a profession that has been predominantly led for decades by white males. Will correcting the imbalance in women and people of color and diversity within the profession continue to be a point of emphasis?

**EL:** When Kimberly Dowdell ran, even her past focus as NOMA president was about increasing the diversity pipeline for architects. We've been talking ever since she graciously opened herself up for dialogue while I was campaigning. I'd say my campaign is complimentary to hers, what she hopes to do there. A big part of who she represents as the first Black woman as AIA National president is to ensure we expand the pipeline. My concentration has always been on designing and building better architecture businesses, ensuring we don't have a leaking pipeline and answering the question: How do we make the decision to stay in practice as great as any alternative to choose a different path?
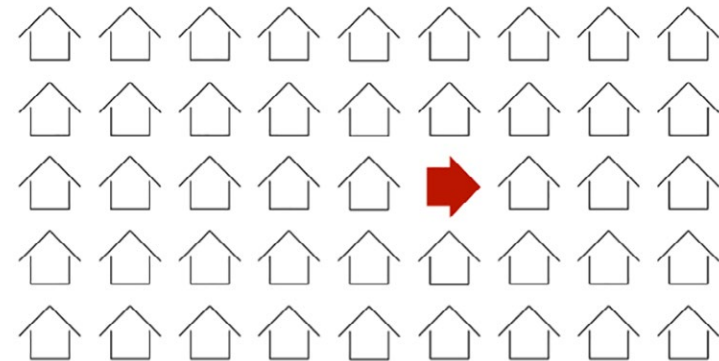


PRACTICE DISRUPTED

with Evelyn Lee and Je'Nen Chastain

*Image courtesy Evelyn Lee*

**DI:** Your podcast, "Practice Disrupted," which you co-created with Je'Nen Chastain, by its very title conveys the impression that change is afoot in the architectural profession. Why is change needed, and what is your focus for doing that?

**EL:** As somebody who has left the profession, this might sound a bit odd, but I've said this publicly numerous times: My critique of the profession and the industry is not because of my dislike of it. It's just the opposite. Ultimately, I just didn't see a place for myself in the traditional roles within the profession, and that is why I had to leave it and approach my desire for change from a different vantage point.

My focus is on the business of architecture — how the business of architecture needs to change, expand and evolve. One example I cite often is that there are great leaders in firms right now that would love to be able to provide parental leave for new parents. In the tech field, working at a company like Salesforce, for example, parents get six months' parental leave for newborns and growing families. That's a benefit that architecture firms, especially small- and medium-sized ones, have a hard time competing with because they simply can't afford it. If people aren't billable for that long, how do they provide the overhead to support individuals to do that? For me, a lot of these equity issues requires that we change the business model or perhaps developing new models of business for the practice so that we can, in fact, treat our employees as well as we want to treat them.

> **My focus is on the business of architecture – how the business of architecture needs to change, expand and evolve.**

**DI:** What other issues are top of mind?

**EL:** Changing the business of architecture is a huge challenge, especially within a one-year term of office as president. But the other issues that are always top of mind are how we talk about the value of architecture. We have a lot of people sitting at many different tables who can speak to the value we bring as architects. Not only within the built environment, but from a broader perspective, opening up our institute and our profession to find a new way... I like to call us outsiders. To find a new way to bring fresh, previously unconsidered perspectives and experience sets or valuable folks who might have left the profession back into the AIA as an organization and back with us architects as well as others trained as architects who have pursued different paths. I've always said, just because they might have left the profession of architecture, I don't believe their love of architecture went away. How we reconnect with those individuals is top of mind for me, as well as changing the business. So much of each of these issues — changing the business, increasing the value of architecture and bringing outsiders back in — is in the forefront of our minds and in line with what we're seeing from the next generation coming into practice.

Generation Z is really committed to their communities. They are very vocal about working for socially-drive or mission driven organizations that allows them to grow in multiple ways, not always following a linear path. They want to work in mission driven organizations that allow them to have a life beyond work. How do we begin to do all that within architecture? That's the question. How you look not only in terms of the business model, but also on the entire employee experience side.

**DI:** Years ago, I had the opportunity to do a project with IDEO, the first firm I was exposed to that had someone called "director of employee experience". What a wonderful thing to focus on and a great need in the profession of architecture — all hopefully directed so we can enhance our clients' experiences. It's time to redirect the focus away from ourselves and our buildings and shift it to our clients and constituents.

**EL:** Right.

**DI:** Your decision to leave traditional practice was significant. Can you tell us about that?

**EL:** It was a decision only made more difficult by architects themselves. We are often taught that there is only one path to leadership within the industry and to step away from that path was unimaginable. Ultimately, when I made my decision to change course, I went back to school for an MBA and an MPA, a master's in public administration.

**DI:** When I find a fellow disrupter like you, a kindred spirit, it's funny because it points out: Who among us is trained to be a change agent? We didn't get that in our insular cultures in traditional architecture school. We're trained to believe we're great collaborators and great leaders, but do we really have those skills? You did something to rectify that. I commend you for taking action to retool yourself. Did going back to school arm you for the road ahead?

**EL:** It offered me a better understanding and appreciation of what was happening outside of architecture. If you look at the professional development of architects, whether it's Continuing Education Units (CEUs) or the type of programs architects tend to go to, it's all about project management. Beyond project management, we could do so much more around practice management, business and entrepreneurship.

Going back to school made it clear that *we think we are so special.* In many instances, we don't believe we can learn from other industries. But other industries are trying to be innovative and be thought leaders, and they're running similar design teams. There's a lot we can learn from other industries about managing those kinds of high-performance teams. If anything, going back and getting my MBA clarified what we aren't doing.

**DI:** Tell us more about your background. Did you explore traditional paths in school and practice? How did you come to realize that traditional practice was not for you? Who did you work with? How did your eyes open?

**EL:** There were several aspects. I was never the best designer in school. I realized that. A part of me always wondered where I fit in the profession. If I'm leaving school to not be a designer, what will I do? So, I worked at a firm called WD Partners, and I was doing site adaptations for Home Depot stores. Commercial work. What attracted me to WD Partners was they were working on branding with franchises and how you carry branding all the way through to the built environment. That interested me. Then, I worked at a firm called Dougherty and Dougherty. They were acquired by Perkins Eastman a few years ago. With them, I was doing K-12 schools and community buildings. The last built project I worked on was the Newport Coast Community Center, a project I got to see through from conception to completion, but I also worked on quite a few schools in California. Part of that process was going through the Department of the State Architects in a low bid environment with contractors.

I was set off by the fact that we worked with a lot of horrible contractors who were looking for errors in our drawings so they could change-order their way to their profit. The fact that the system was setting us up for failure was not very exciting for me, and there's nothing that can fix that, unless we change the low

bid process, which is a valuable cause to try to change. In short, working in that environment was really off-putting for me.

**DI:** I share your pain. I was fortunate in my career to be exposed to CM at Risk and collaborative approaches with great partners that kept me going longer.

**EL:** But what I discovered through that experience is that I really liked project management and the construction administration side of things. Also, organizational design, building in better operations, processes and policies to gain efficiencies. I lean into that now with the work I do.

**DI:** Were there any epiphanies, events or realizations — so good or so bad — that dramatically altered your course? Any light-bulb, serendipitous or milestone moments along the way?

**EL:** No, it was cumulative. The biggest thing I was fighting was everything I had learned in school, in practice, in the AIA and in all the time I had invested getting to this point, do I step away from that? And if I step away from that, where do I go? That was ultimately the biggest struggle I had internally.

It was a number of things building up over time and then finding an opportunity to take a break away from that. I went to work for a nonprofit organization called Public Architecture, which has since closed. But that was the chance I needed to reflect on my next steps in the industry.

**DI:** I appreciate your honesty. Who were and are your mentors or important peers?

**EL:** I have a lot of incredible mentors who have helped me through different times throughout my career, all of them gained through friendship with my AIA involvement. They include the other seven past female national presidents, including Helene Dreiling, FAIA; Kate Schwennsen, FAIA; Elizabeth Chu Richter, FAIA; and the current president, Emily Grandstaff-Rice, FAIA.

**DI:** A stellar list to be sure. A historic, courageous group.

**EL:** Thank you. I'm honored to be a part of it.

**DI:** How would you describe your leadership style? As the head of an organization of 100,000 egotistical architects, you'll be faced with influencing and setting direction for an incredibly diverse group of constituents. Some are practicing in one-person firms and drawing by hand, others are global giants pushing the edge of digital practice. Some believe sustainability is the only agenda item and others simply work on, oblivious to the impacts of their projects. You will lead fringe factions as well as the mainstream you propose to disrupt. How do you plan to build momentum and move the needle for all of practice — a discipline which seems more than ever to need its direction reset? How do you find the common threads?

**EL:** A lot of what I do at Slack and what I have been doing involves listening and driving toward consensus. I am most interested in understanding the various needs of all our members. An interesting paradox is that many small firms feel like AIA's leadership only listens to the large firms, and the large firms feel like we only serve the small firms. If that's the case, I sometimes wonder who are we truly serving well.

I feel like, and heard this often throughout the campaign, that there is greater need for business acumen and entrepreneurship throughout the AIA and throughout the profession. I believe the need for better leadership development in general, and finding outside inspiration for leadership, is going to continue. But I will always have my ear to the ground when it comes to trying to understand what our members are struggling with most.

There are a lot of ways to reach me. Many people reach out to me on LinkedIn to talk to me and open conversations. Another thing about my leadership is, and I say this candidly, my mind is

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always open to change. I believe that everyone grows and changes over time. That's the natural progression of personal growth.

I would also say my convictions can be changed over time if the correct case presents itself. As a leader, I'm always open to navigating through what change means. When do we need to lean further into change and when must we also rely on history, what we've done in the in the past in the AIA, to inform our decisions going forward?

**DI:** Those are leadership attributes, to listen and be adaptive. One potential critique of the AIA, as an organization with many factions, is that it could be said that the AIA has been historically focused on maintaining the status quo. But perhaps a little boat-rocking is in order. To do that, some have said we must work at larger scales, at systemic government and legislative levels, using interdisciplinary alliances to generate real impact. Do you agree? If so, what are you considering in this regard as first priorities?

**EL:** The AIA already works with and has strong relationships with many other organizations, especially when it comes to advocacy. If anything, one of the first things we can do is be better communicators about all the work already being done. I feel like a lot of our membership doesn't even understand half of the work we are doing on their behalf.

**DI:** Probably true.

**EL:** In the advocacy area especially. We are sending a delegation to COP 23, so we're interested in organizations immediately adjacent to the built environment. But we're also reaching out to other organizations with even bigger impact on world economies and decisions. We're trying to make sure we have a seat at the table.

**DI:** What do you love to do most?

**EL:** I really appreciate talking about the future of the profession and understanding, especially from up-and-coming leaders and even new graduates, where they see their careers going forward. I like to work on how we can start designing now for an organization and an industry that provides a place for them. How do we do that? Those are the conversations that get me excited.

**DI:** Can you share your vision for the architectural profession in 10 years? Dream for us. Disrupt our comfort zones.

**EL:** If anyone can conceive of what our profession looks like 10 years from now, I would be surprised. I imagine there are going to be many more roles we didn't even think could exist in the profession. Due to technology and the pace of change, we can't even predict them. If anything, my hope is always going to be that our profession has greater influence and is more widespread than ever before. That the voice of architects in the built environment and in our communities is elevated. That would mean our profession is strong and doing well.

I used to love these kinds of questions when I was a new graduate and people asked me, "Where do you see yourself in five to 10 years?" But as somebody who's been in the profession 20 years, I can't say where I want to be five years from now. That's because of how quickly change happens and the fact that career paths are no longer linear. So, I feel like that's a hard question to ask or answer.

**DI:** Fair enough.

**EL:** But to the extent that architects are seen for the value we want to be seen at, we need to be at the tables we want to be at. We need to truly be thought and knowledge leaders for everything around the built environment, our communities and the

health, safety and welfare of the public in general. If we're doing that, that would mean we're well positioned for success in the future and this is a profession and an industry people still want to be part of.

**DI:** As we talk about people encroaching and taking some of our roles, if we're interested in becoming more engaged in business, there's no reason why we can't integrate and become inclusive in all directions.

**EL:** As others come in, we can go out and become smarter about the world at large, in business. Maybe that's part of what it means to be a better architect and create a future where we're more influential.

*Evelyn Lee, FAIA, is the first-ever global head of workplace strategy and innovation at Slack Technologies, founder of the Practice of Architecture, and co-host of the podcast "Practice Disrupted." Lee integrates her business and architecture background with a qualitative and quantitative focus to build better experiences for the organization's employees, clients and guests. She is widely published, wrote a monthly column for "Contract" magazine for over three years, frequently contributed to "Architect" magazine and is working with Architizer to develop recurring content on the business of architecture. Evelyn has received numerous industry awards, including the 2016 40 Under 40 award for Building Design + Construction and the 2014 AIA National Young Architects Award. She served as the first-ever female treasurer to the AIA National Board in 2020-2021 and was recently elected to serve as the 101st president of AIA National in 2025.*

IN DESIGN WE TRUST

PRAGMATIC DESIGN

Q4: RELATIONAL TRUST

# In Design We Trust

Paul Finch

Programme Director, World Architecture Festival

## What lies under the covers of collaboration?

The Pulitzer Prize-winning novel "Trust" by Hernan Diaz is an intricate exercise in historical, psychological and literary perspective. It concerns two lives and the way they are lived or, rather, the way they were lived according to accounts written by people (themselves artificial literary creations) with personal axes to grind. It is all very French, in the same sense one might regard that old film favourite "Destry Rides Again." The story is reviewed by different characters from their individual perspectives. Which version you believe depends on the extent to which you trust the narrator or imagine you yourself know what happened. You have the evidence of your eyes — but a film, like a novel, is only rarely a documentary.

The worlds of design and architecture have aspects of both literature and film that inform them. These qualities also inform the view of critics, clients and all those who play a part in delivering the ambitions of designers in the real world. In the narratives about the creation of a design and a building, what weight do you give to the narratives of those concerned? To what extent do you trust their individual accounts because of your own personal experience — of the building, its type or the constituent players?

Formally, the extent to which trust is or is not justified may be tested in court because of a falling-out between the multiple parties involved. At what point might the trust inherent in any decent collaborative project vanish? Because of technical failures or cost over-runs? Or is it an attempt to recover money from

anyone with an insurance policy? At the start of the project, even those that end in tears, we assume the parties were prepared — not only to work together, but to believe they could achieve their mutual objectives.

The question is whether that belief is justified. That is to say, on what basis can a notion of "trusted relationship" be extended to the parties involved. Even if clients believe they have such a relationship with their various consultants, contractors and sub-contractors, how do they know similar relationships exist between the other parties? The multiplicity of relationships between corporate entities is complex enough but add to that the relationships between all the individuals who may be involved and you have a Sargasso Sea of potential disagreement and conflict.

Attempts to avoid the potential for tension generated multidisciplinary working as an approach, as with firms like Arup and Building Design Partnership in the U.K. and Nikken Sekkei in Japan, plus large construction companies with their own architectural departments.

All one can say is that whatever the advantages may be, these have not become universal ways of working. And it is not immediately apparent why large organizations are more trustworthy than small ones or that corporate relationships are more significant than those of the individuals who actually design, cost, engineer, programme and deliver the project. In the end, the question of trust in construction projects comes down to personal relationships. It is not like buying medical insurance or a newspaper from a company; it's more like whether you trust the doctor or the reporter.

Trusted relationships, if the phrase is more than lip service, can express itself in the way projects are run and insured. For example, when Terminal 5 at Heathrow was procured, the client bought project insurance covering all those concerned with the design. The deal was simple: If any of the parties found they had made a mistake, or were alerted to one, they would imme- diately tell the entire team and take responsibility for rectifying the error. This avoided legal disputes, compensation disputes and delays, instead prioritising the importance of delivering the project on time and budget.

A "pot" of bonus money was available for the team at the end of the project; the only penalty for the offending team member was to lose some or all of their share of the bonus. The philosophy was clear: We all make mistakes, but we are better off to address and sort out those mistakes early rather than keeping antagonis- tically quiet and self-focused in our lawyer-protected silos while the problems worsen and compound.

Trust is hard to earn but easy to lose. Lawyers are people you need to trust, but in relation to construction in the U.K., they are doing their best to drive out any idea of trust in favour of an aggressive and (to me) unethical approach to client/consultant relationships.

The sad situation currently involves lawyers writing contracts for architects under which they are obliged, if they wish to win the commission, to take responsibility for the designs of other consultants with whom the architect has no contractual rela- tionship. It is an offer some feel unable to refuse.

Do such lawyers relish their Mafia-style behaviour?

> " It is an offer some feel unable to refuse.
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*Paul Finch is the programme director of the World Architecture Festival and a regular contributor to DesignIntelligence.*

# NEW AND OLD: ARCHITECTURE'S FUTURE AT THE INTERSECTION OF INNOVATION AND ANCIENT WISDOM

PRAGMATIC DESIGN

Q4: RELATIONAL TRUST

# New and Old: Architecture's Future at the Intersection of Innovation and Ancient Wisdom

DeeDee Birch, MDS, LFA

Sustainable Design Consultant and Writer

DeeDee Birch examines entrusting our future to a higher standard of care.

In the face of a climate crisis that has caused some of the most volatile weather patterns in recorded history, the urgency and extent to which the building industry must transform is ever increasing. The 2023 Sixth Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) found that "human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1 degrees Celsius above 1850-1900 in 2011-2020."[1] The authors oscillate between warnings (pertaining to topics ranging from irreversible biodiversity loss to food insecurity, crumbling infrastructure and deteriorating human health conditions across the world) and calls for immediate action. Our most vulnerable global communities have already felt and borne the intensity of the crisis.

Burgeoning efforts to decarbonize our buildings will explode in the coming months and years. A small subset of forward-thinking firms has already begun to make high-impact systems and materials substitutions to lessen the effects of former solutions. The industry has seen timber framing and hemp insulation — both materials with low embodied carbon — replace traditional post-industrialization materials like steel framing and extruded polystyrene foam insulation. This method of design and specification, still performance-driven but more holistic in its understanding of energy and resources, will become critical and more widespread moving forward. As the IPCC report states, "for almost all basic materials — primary metals, building materials and chemicals — many low- to zero-GHG intensity production processes are at the pilot to near-commercial and in some cases

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[1] *IPCC, Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report, March 20, 2023, 4,* https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_FullVolume.pdf.

commercial stage but they are not yet established industrial practice."[2] The research around embodied carbon of building products is growing in breadth and specificity, and low embodied carbon products have already hit the marketplace; it is just a matter of widespread adoption and application.

As the industry races to decarbonize buildings, many firms are also considering modularity and material and building reuse to create a circular economy. Science has told us that mature ecosystems are more productive than new ones and that not only are forests carbon sinks but so too are grasslands and oceans; we must reevaluate the value and method of our extraction practices. All the tree-planting campaigns in the world cannot replicate the carbon sinks that existing established and diverse ecosystems function as today. The cradle-to-cradle framework in which building materials reenter our biological and technical nutrient cycles time and time again — instead of extracting new resources each time — will be pivotal in the widespread decarbonization of our buildings. Efforts and mandates to electrify the built environment and decouple it from dirty energy sources have even begun to trickle down even from the federal policy level.[3]

All of this comes, hopefully, just in time.

A substantial degree of responsibility for the climate crisis rests on the shoulders of the architecture, engineering and construction industries; the built environment produces 40% of global emissions and shapes the physical, mental and emotional lives of billions of people throughout the world. Those in the United States spend more than 90% of their lives indoors. We'll need more than decarbonization and electrification not only to halt but heal our warming planet.

The future of architecture delves deeper than decarbonization, electrification and adaptive reuse. Today's disaggregated and rapidly evolving industry, riddled with dozens of building and product certifications, must undergo a paradigm shift. And it is an exciting time for it to do so. The confluence of research and technological advancements across various industries has given designers unprecedented precision with which to design our world.

## Human Health Innovations

Innovations in our understanding of biology, ecology, chemistry and medicine have led to remarkable changes in our understanding of human health and the impact the built environment has on collective well-being.

A significant area of innovation lies in the emergent field of green chemistry. The Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976 grandfathered in thousands of unevaluated chemicals already used to produce building products, consumer goods and food packaging. Most of these chemicals remain unregulated by the Environmental Protection Agency. As studies find many of these chemicals in human urine, blood, lungs and even newborn babies,[4] growing evidence shows their detrimental impacts on human health, ranging from increased risks of cancer to obesity, asthma, autoimmune diseases and neurological development issues.[5]

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[2] *IPCC, Climate Change 2023, 53.*

[3] *U.S. Department of Energy, "Biden-Harris Administration Announces Steps to Electrify and Cut Emissions from Federal Buildings," December 7, 2022, https://www.energy.gov/articles/biden-harris-administration-announces-steps-electrify-and-cut-emissions-federal-buildings.*

[4] *Environmental Working Group, Body Burden: The Pollution in Newborns, July 14, 2005, https://www.ewg.org/research/body-burden-pollution-newborns.*

[5] *The Parsons Healthy Materials Lab, Material Health Design Frontiers: Prescriptions for Healthy Buildings (London: Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd, 2022), 122-133.*

Just a few of the thousands of chemicals of concern have been tested, proven dangerous and addressed in building product development. Manufacturers have long since eliminated the use of heavy metals like lead and radon, for example, and products without volatile organic compounds have hit the market in recent years. Efforts to address chemical toxicity continue to grow with scientific discovery. The conversation around persistent bioaccumulative and toxic chemicals has expanded in just the last couple of years, addressing mounting concerns over PFAs and other endocrine disrupters like BPA.

Green chemistry is the pursuit and development of new, healthier chemical compounds that either eliminate or radically reduce the use of toxic and hazardous substances in material goods. While green chemistry is a "philosophy that applies to all areas of chemistry," its impact on the products for the building industry will shift our conception of green building.[6] It will address all lifecycles of a chemical compound or product instead of considering the singular stage of occupant exposure, just as architects must do for buildings and the millions of products and materials that comprise them. Additionally, green chemistry should aid in the design and production of goods that make it easier to have buildings certified by even the most stringent sustainable building certifications, namely the Living Building Challenge.

Yet material safety and development remain a fraction of the information at practicing architects' disposal, and 21st-century architecture demands that practitioners move beyond material health alone.

In the 1970s, sociologist Aaron Antonovsky was developing a model of health he termed salutogenesis. Published initially in his 1979 text, Health, Stress and Coping, Antonovsky flipped the traditional, predominant pathogenetic model of medical treatment on its head. He suggested that instead of viewing
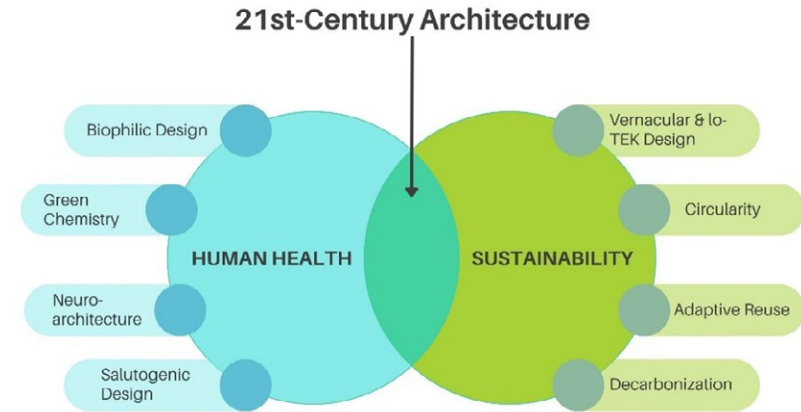


*Author Diagram*

human health as a binary of health or illness, humans all exist on a health ease/dis-ease continuum with myriad factors that consistently move people toward health or illness. He called for medical practitioners to examine the origins of health instead of illness and identify factors that moved people toward the health end of this continuum. Notably, he defined health as something beyond the mere absence of illness or disease, though Antonovsky focused a great deal on the role of mental, emotional and physical stress in human health outcomes. In his salutogenic model, stress factors accumulated until they manifested as an illness. Therefore, facilitating health meant actively designing for not only physical health but also mental and emotional health; the more one avoided those negative stress factors, the healthier they will be.

Antonovsky argued that people needed what he coined as a strong "sense of coherence" to exist on the health end of his health ease/dis-ease continuum. One's sense of coherence is comprised of three central components: (1) comprehensibility,

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[6] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Basics of Green Chemistry, last updated May 9, 2023, https://www.epa.gov/greenchemistry/basics-green-chemistry.

in which the stimuli from one's internal and external environments are structured, predictable and explicable; (2) manageability, in which one has the proper resources available to meet the demands posed by stimuli; and (3) meaningfulness, in which one finds challenges worthy of investment and engagement (this is perhaps the most important component, as it refers essentially to one's meaning for life).[7] Antonovsky's work holds enormous implications for the design of the built environment. With a salutogenic design approach, occupant stress management becomes the foundation of any building program, and addressing the three components of a sense of coherence serves as a roadmap for salutogenic architecture. Comprehensibility has perhaps the most direct relationship with the built environment in that it demands one's physical environment invite clear courses of physical action and provide clarity. However, architecture can also support a sense of manageability and meaningfulness by providing physical and emotional support and integrating opportunities for connection and community into its design. While frameworks and approaches for salutogenic design are just beginning to take shape, they highlight the narrative potential of architecture and promise a new standard for healthy buildings. Aspects of this salutogenic model reappear in both biophilic design approaches and neuroarchitectural strategies, explored below.

Just as Antonovsky was developing his salutogenic model of health, several of his contemporaries were uncovering the value of the ancient human-nature connection in contemporary life. Roger Ulrich's landmark 1984 study demonstrated that views of natural settings improved the recovery time and process for postoperative patients; it concluded that nature has restorative effects on people.[8] In the same year, biologist E.O. Wilson popularized the biophilia hypothesis through the publication of his book Biophilia, which proposes that humans have an unmet evolutionary and genetically predetermined need to associate with the natural world. In 1989, Stephen Kaplan and Rachel Kaplan published a study that established and laid the foundation for Attention Restoration Theory, which posits that time in nature is cognitively restorative. A continuation and extension of all these ideas came in 1991 when Roger Ulrich proposed the Stress Reduction Theory, which echoes components of his 1984 postoperative patient study: Nature reduces stress and restores people's minds after mental fatigue.

Research surrounding human responses to nature throughout the latter half of the 20th century stressed the importance of understanding evolutionary biology in relation to the built environment; findings made clear that the human brain has not yet caught up to the rapid innovations and technological advancements of the first and second industrial revolutions. While we operate in a world powered by screens, spend our days moving through increasingly urbanized blocks of concrete and high-rises and dwell in standardized buildings fueled by mechanized HVAC systems, our brains are practically identical to those of our ancestors living on the savannah and they require the same foundational inputs: fresh air, natural light, exposure to other living plants and animals, tactile sensory information, seasonal and temporal awareness. Architecture firms must now confront what these findings mean for the world they design and construct.

The foundational studies and texts by Ulrich, Kaplan, Wilson and others inspired two biophilic design frameworks, pioneered first by scholar Stephen Kellert and later by the consulting firm

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[7] Mittelmark, Sagy, et al., eds., The Handbook of Salutogenesis (Berlin: Springer, 2016), https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-04600-6.

[8] Roger S. Ulrich, "View Through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery," Science 224 (May 1984), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/17043718_View_Through_a_Window_May_Influence_Recovery_from_Surgery.

Terrapin Bright Green. Both frameworks identify the elements of the natural world people need and provide pathways for integrating those elements into the built environment in meaningful ways, ranging from designing with fractals to the integration of natural light and direct, tactile relationships with natural materials.

Similar acts of translation are occurring between scientific study and critical design theory in the realm of neuroscience. Until recently, 17th-century philosopher Rene Descartes' notion of dualism in which the body was merely a vessel for the mind remained relatively standard in neuroscientific thinking, even if slightly advanced since then; the human brain and body operated as entirely separate entities, with the body leveraging its five senses to feed information to the brain to process. However, contemporary research suggests instead that all cognition is a product of a deeply collaborative mind-body-environment paradigm. Instead of a linear connection between the body and the mind, there are a series of feedback loops that shape our experiences and identities — between our bodies, brains and environments. Furthermore, up to 90% of human cognitions are unconscious while only 10% of cognitions are conscious and paired with language. The 90% of nonconscious cognitions occur in part due to the vast number of human sensory tools at our disposal. Contrary to the prevailing conception of the five human senses, people have dozens of senses, ranging from proprioception and interoception (one's sense of their body in space and one's sense of their internal body and its parts, respectively) to thermoception and gustatory senses.

This new conception of human cognition, navigation and identity recognizes that people are embodied — that everyone experiences the world in a body that actively shapes one's understanding of the world as it moves through time and space. Our thoughts shape our experience of the built environment, and our physical experience of the built environment then shapes our thoughts in a never-ending cycle.

In her book "Welcome to Your World: How the Built Environment Shapes Our Lives," architecture critic and scholar Sarah Williams Goldhagen explains the built environment as "a living ecology of affordances," in which affordances are opportunities for action.[9] This is how people move through the world, scanning their physical environments for opportunities to act with constant nonconscious cognitions that include sensory impressions and emotions.

Neuroarchitecture also addresses the inexorable link between memory, language, identity and architecture. Language and metaphor help people make sense of the world. As the mind-body-environment paradigm suggests, language influences our experience of the built environment and vice versa. Every person serves as their own narrator in life, constructing storylines in real time and in retrospect. Collections of these storylines and experiences form memories, which become a foundational component of identity. Every memory embeds itself in a physical setting — it cannot exist without a temporal and spatial context. Therefore, architecture functions as a stage for people to play out their lives, and architects have the chance to curate that stage for the best possible outcomes.

Neuroarchitecture, in many ways, is synonymous with multisensory design, and humans are finicky creatures to satisfy when it comes to sensory input. Overstimulating spaces become cognitively draining while understimulating spaces can drive boredom and irritation. Furthermore, human sensory impressions are cross-modal in that the senses do not operate in isolation. Rather, they continuously influence each other. It will be up to design practitioners to research and develop target sensory goals for their projects based on program and context.

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[9] *Sarah Williams Goldhagen, Welcome To Your World: How the Built Environment Shapes Our Lives (New York: Harper, 2017).*

All these areas of research and design theory — salutogenic design, biophilic design and neuroarchitecture — acknowledge that buildings prompt biochemical changes in occupants. As architectural design psychologist Jan Golembiewski writes in "The Handbook of Salutogenesis": "Architecture can be psychologically manipulative, for better or for worse."[10] Lighting conditions influence circadian rhythms, and building material colors and tactility can influence one's sense of thermal comfort and appetite. The Academy of Neuroscience for Architecture (ANFA) is a leading resource for neuroarchitecture, but as more robust frameworks for neuroarchitectural design emerge, practitioners have the opportunity to embrace an increasingly nuanced approach to creating spaces that reinforce positive affordances, self-identity and comfort from myriad sources.

All this research makes clear the opportunity for radically healthy buildings in the 21st century, as well as how much we inherited from our ancestors. We inherited instincts about safety, nourishment, happiness and community. The interdisciplinary approaches explored here, while giving practitioners such precision and an opportunity for intentionality, also point backward. In addition to sound instincts, we have also inherited a legacy of countless culturally and climate-specific approaches to creating habitat and shelter that unconsciously promoted these health outcomes and existed in symbiosis with surrounding natural systems. Practitioners can integrate every health-oriented solution into their current projects, and it will still not be enough because, ultimately, the only healthy built environment for people is one that can withstand our changing climate.

## The Role of Vernacular Architecture and the Lo-TEK Movement

In 1964, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) featured Bernard Rudofsky's exhibition "Architecture Without Architects." The exhibit explored community-driven vernacular architecture from more than 60 countries and sparked a conversation that questioned the prevailing attitude toward buildings as "machines for living." In the years since, the conversations and texts about global vernacular architecture have continued, particularly as a response to the climate crisis. John May's "Buildings Without Architects: A Global Guide to Everyday Architecture" delineates the direct relationship between vernacular architecture and green building:

> Vernacular architecture, by its very nature, is built from local materials that are readily on hand and is thus defined by the geology and ecology of the region as well as by local climate conditions. Constructed by the community using traditional tools, these structures are highly practical, energy efficient, and blend with the landscape. These buildings carry many of the attributes that we are now seeking in 'green architecture' as we struggle to adapt our built environment to the demands and concerns of the climate change era.[11]

His examples range from the Caribbean chattel house, designed without nails for easy disassembly so the structure could move with its nomadic inhabitants, to Iranian desert towns that leveraged underground water supply systems, known as qanats, and ornate wind catchers so that occupants could survive in some of the most extreme desert conditions on the planet.[12] Both of

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[10] *Mittelmark, Sagy, et al., The Handbook of Salutogenesis, 260.*

[11] *John May, Buildings Without Architects: A Global Guide to Everyday Architecture (New York: Rizzoli, 2010), 8.*

[12] *May, Buildings Without Architects, 13, 83.*

these structures offer contemporary architects lessons about designing for material circularity, adaptive reuse and extreme climatic conditions without dependence on mechanized systems.

The process of remembering and studying vernacular architecture has paved the way for the Lo-TEK movement (Traditional Ecological Knowledge). Julia Watson, a designer and professor at Harvard and Columbia, explains in "Lo-TEK: Design by Radical Indigenism" that Lo-TEK is "a design movement to rebuild an understanding of indigenous philosophy and vernacular architecture that generates sustainable, climate-resilient infrastructures."[13] Watson's examples of Lo-TEK design include the Waru Waru, or agricultural terraces, in Peru, which are made up of raised planting platforms and canals in the flood-prone area of the Lake Titicaca basin.[14] The raised planting areas prevent crops from washing away while the influxes of water fertilize the soil through the breakdown of silt, sediments, algae, plants and fish and animal residues permeating their crop systems.[15] Watson cites other examples like the living root bridges of the Khasi people in India. Their living infrastructure withstands some of the highest levels of rainfall on the planet and demands decades of planning and patience.[16] While operating at larger infrastructural scales, Watson's examples excel at many of the same challenges facing the architecture and design industry: using low embodied carbon materials, producing no waste and working in symbiosis with natural systems.

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[13] *Julia Watson, Lo-TEK: Design by Radical Indigenism (Los Angeles: Taschen America, 2020), 20.*

[14] *Watson, Lo-TEK, 34.*

[15] *Watson, Lo-TEK, 39.*

[16] *Watson, Lo-TEK, 55.*

The climate crisis highlights humanity living beyond the boundaries of the systems that support all life on Earth. Human-driven development cannot continue to override and overextend the planet's ecological systems, neither can buildings continue to be standardized and mass-produced like machines, as they have been throughout the last two centuries. The architecture of today's context must reflect a realignment with natural systems; our buildings must facilitate living within our planetary boundaries through the inventive use of new structures, construction methods and readily available materials that do not harm human or ecological health.

Any examination of vernacular architecture inevitably concludes that cultural identity, spirituality and belief systems, and tradition inform vernacular architecture as much as locally abundant materials and climatic conditions. The fig trees used to create the living bridges, for example, are a cultural keystone species for the Khasi people.[17] Unlike most contemporary architecture, vernacular and Indigenous architecture function as physical representations of deeply held values and narratives. John May stresses that modern vernacular architecture already exists in the of form Earthship houses, which use both local natural materials and recycled synthetic materials, and ad hoc squatter settlements in countries such as Brazil and India.[18] However, neither of these examples provides insight into scaling the most compelling aspects of Indigenous and vernacular design — climatic and cultural specificity — to apply to large-scale projects. The question remains: How does one reconcile community-driven, ancient, culturally specific and spiritually embedded construction methods with today's secular, modern culture of convenience, comfort, profit-driven economics and individualism?

For current architecture firms to practice with the same degree of innate specificity of vernacular architecture, the design process must fundamentally shift. The term "place-based design" will take on new meanings as firms consider more deeply not only the local climatic conditions, ecological needs and readily available materials but also the value systems of the client and occupants in relation to the building program. Just as biophilic design, neuroarchitectural and salutogenic frameworks will play greater roles in the architectural design process, so too will areas of research like biomimicry, which studies and mimics nature's solutions to solve human-driven crises. The adoption of a design process that mimics and embraces the climate and cultural specificity of vernacular architecture provides firms with a unique opportunity to advance a vital broader cultural shift in our societies, one that reimagines our social hierarchies and embraces responsible stewardship instead of dominion over the natural world.

## Contemporary Architecture Challenges

Current architecture firms face steep challenges as they evolve their practices to marry the past with the future. Buildings play a pivotal role in rebalancing the relationship between people and the natural world — a missing link in spurring meaningful action to combat climate change. Furthermore, the built environment must actively alleviate the strain currently placed on various global systems. Buildings should help localize food systems, improve human health outcomes and create viable habitats for biodiversity. Architects must embrace the integration of architecture with cultural and ecological identities and the unique energy and nutrient flows of specific places to create successful designs for them.

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[17] Watson, Lo-TEK, 55.

[18] May, Buildings Without Architects, 172-176.

Climate change will also drive concurrent fundamental shifts in our political, economic and social systems. Designers practicing in today's context face not only the challenge of creating radically healthy and high-performing buildings but also to do so inside of economic and political systems that are each rapidly responding to the climate crisis in their own ways. Within the building industry, methods of manufacturing, the recalculation of the cost of environmental degradation, demolition and waste collection and management systems, all stand to alter the way those in the AEC industries design, purchase and construct their projects.

To build anything in the face of a destabilized climate and deteriorating human health is to leverage the most advanced research about ourselves and the natural world to satisfy our core, evolutionary needs. Buildings must nurture the ecosystems we belong to and rely on to breathe, eat and drink while still fulfilling our basic need for shelter. In today's context, design and construction demand ancient wisdom, local and reclaimed materials, an acknowledgment of our biology and an understanding of the role people play in broader ecosystems. Practitioners can echo and honor the wisdom of vernacular architecture armed with the specificity of modern-day science.

Firms must be prepared to adapt quickly, embrace a highly multidisciplinary approach and push for the most holistic, sustainable solutions with their clients and stakeholders. The future depends upon and has entrusted itself to architects realizing the potential of the built environment to support human and ecological needs.

> Architects must embrace the integration of architecture with cultural and ecological identities and the unique energy and nutrient flows of specific places to create successful designs for them.

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# Leadership Trust

Dave Gilmore

President and CEO of DesignIntelligence

Dave Gilmore examines the necessary conditions.

## Conditions

Leadership trust results from a myriad of conditions. Key among these are developing leadership depth, understanding connotations, a keen ability to sense context and read the room, and being ever vigilant to guard against hubris by avoiding prideful falls, fostering loyalty, and earning respect. Like the engendered trust that can result from them, each of these pre-conditions is mutual, reciprocal and relational. In other words, a two-way street. To better understand, let's examine each of these aspects a bit more.

## Depth

Inch-deep leadership is pervasive. It may be a mile wide in every direction, but that's not what makes for sustainable, effective leadership. In leading, it's the depth that counts, but what is depth? What about leadership depth distinguishes it from other marks of effective leadership?

In this regard, depth is manifest through multiple expressions. Expertise, wisdom, judgment, resonance and more: All are different yet interdependent attributes of expressed leadership depth. It's not difficult to express counterfeit alternatives to depth because most peers and followers don't recognize the genuine from the bogus. Most are influenced by first impressions, but first impressions are just that — first takes awaiting secondary understanding to be confirmed or contradicted.

This is where the shallow leader falls into the trap. They're too quickly satisfied and resolved from what they sense and feel in themselves as a leader that they deceive themselves into believing their wit or expression indicates depth. They may believe that a newly acquired bit of knowledge or know-how has transformed them into an expert others should follow.

Followers should be wary of the inch-deep leader who is self-convinced they are indeed a leader. As leaders go, so often go followers. Following a shallow sort will most likely result in you too becoming shallow. Only a brief satisfaction accompanies shallowness, and it leaves the shallow unfulfilled and looking for the next filling. Once on this treadmill, it's difficult to get off simply because other alternatives seem too much. After all, depth takes time to develop and that's not an attractive dynamic to impatient, shallow sorts.

Leadership depth is multifaceted and multidirectional. It's not confined to our ideas of relative space, as in a vertical measure from surface down, a one-dimensional perspective. Leadership depth is multidirectional through awareness and response and occurs across a broadened landscape of perspective and expres-

sion. Achieving such a quality requires understanding in context and interpretation of multiple meaning and connotations. When these conditions are met, and consensus is reached by both the leader and those being led, the essence of trust is within our grasp.

## Connotations

After leadership depth, the next valuable skill is interpreting connotations. Connotations are odd but commonplace. They attach themselves to any number of things and have the power to alter objective realities, shift truth toward falsehood and blur clarity toward opacity.

Someone once defined connotations to me as emotional baggage one associates with memories, objects, people, words and more. One person's connotation about a thing may be the opposite of another's regarding the identical thing. By nature, connotations are wholly subjective and generally unknown to everyone but the individual who has them. But these always personal associated meanings, in context, hold great power in enabling communication and common understanding.

The pervasive nature of connotations is beyond calculation. They are everywhere, with everyone, all the time. There is no separating connotations from the nature of being human. They are a matter of the mind, fed by the senses and contextualized within the experiences of each of us. The word "connote" draws meaning from context, by definition. Never isolated, they constitute a chain of prior senses and experiences. Memory reflects connotations and, with all its filters, channels connotative power.

As a leader, being front-of-mind conscious of how connotations affect communication is central to effectiveness. So often, I find myself speaking to an audience only to discover many different interpretations of my words and intentions being reflected back to me. Connotations filter transmitted meaning and alter received and perceived meanings. This is also the case with biases. Biases are another powerful filter to communication's effectiveness.

Leaders can't possibly know the connotations operating in others' minds, but they can speak directly to them by reinforcing the meaning of words, statements and sentiments. Far too often we simply speak and expect others to receive what we say without distortion. When I do that, I'm being irresponsible with my messaging and obtuse toward those I'm communicating with. Effective leaders know anything worth saying is also worth giving the extra effort to close misinterpretation gaps. In dialogue, this takes on the form of asking for reflection back from the hearer to validate if what was said and meant was received as intended.

Effective communication is a central responsibility of leaders who care about their organizations, teams and employees and wish to build trust and understanding among their teams, but it's not always convenient. In fact, it rarely is, but it's essential.

## Contexts

Leadership ways and means range across a broad range of expressions. Effective leadership leverages awareness and discernment to read the room, assess and express the most effective manner for each situation. Said another way, there's no "one way" of leadership. Given that the theme of leadership is primarily applied to the context of humans leading humans, the seemingly endless permutations of human dynamics make for a varied and oft-confusing field of application for the would-be leader seeking optimal effectiveness.

I came across a team of people this past year who illustrate the dynamics I'm talking about. In this group of seven people, the following behaviors presented themselves during the three days I was with them:

- Executive A from the East Coast of the US. showed undisguised disdain for Executive B, who was from a southern state. It seemed everything the southerner, Executive B, said was met with rolled eyes, sighs and under-the-breath mumbling from Executive A.

- Executive C seemed consistently out of touch with the themes, topics and dialogue occurring in the days we all met together.

- Executive D was the positive person in the room. They always showed up with a smile, a warm handshake or pat on the back and complimented just about everyone in the room each day for their contributions. Funny thing about it, though: Executive D rarely added anything to the body of knowledge being shared in the room and volunteered to be the overall note taker for the sessions.

- Executive E and F seemed Velcro'd together for the entire multiday set of meetings. They sat together, ate together and walked together whenever the team would go outside the meeting space to a restaurant or other venue. Each had iPads and took their own notes. To anyone paying attention, it was clear they were texting back and forth throughout the days of the gathering.

- Executive G was the CEO and stayed with the agenda for the entire week, without deviation. Even when the dialogue begged changing direction or staying with a topic longer than the allotted time, this executive took pride in their punctuality and discipline.

Each of these leaders seemed unaware of the reality that leadership expressions are varied and require better of each. The CEO seemed resigned that the team's apparent dysfunctions were to be accepted, and they were to play the cards they were dealt. Trust was clearly absent.

Effective leaders stride into every situation with their awareness antennae attuned to reading the room, observing the manner of each attendee and adjusting to best communicate with and positively impact each for the common good. Effective leaders are fixed on the core principles of trust, purpose, clarity and relationship and, from these principles, apply awareness and discernment to initiate and respond.

I've heard too many would-be leaders state in one way or another, "This is just the way I am," as an excuse for not adapting to dynamics to communicate better and make the impact all are hoping for. If that's you, reconsider if leadership is for you. If, instead, you're willing to release such a stance and take on the role of an authentic leader who leads for others, not yourself, you're on the way to becoming the effective leader we so often talk about. You're becoming who can build and earn trust.

## Respect

Hubris is a term seldom used in modern language. From the Greek, it means, "the pride that comes before a fall." It's that flavor of pride that always ends with a bitter taste in the mouths of both the prideful leader and those they failed to lead. But what does it mean when the definition refers to "a fall"? What does it mean to fall in or from leadership?

The first sign of hubris is the fall from respect. Leaders who operate from blind pride repel and repulse others. When this happens repeatedly, respect is lost and the fall occurs. People don't respect self-positioning, self-promoting pride that seems blind

to everything else but one's own agenda. Pride-driven leaders can rarely walk back what their pride has compelled them to state or judge. It's just not in them to humble themselves, admit they were wrong, offer sincere sorrow for the offense or ask the wounded party for forgiveness. Any leader who can't do this doesn't deserve the respect they're so determined to achieve. They're simply missing the point of leadership. So often, that means trust.

## Loyalty

Another fall from pride's determination is the fall from loyalty. Plenty of people follow leaders they don't respect. I suppose this is because they need the job and see no other alternatives. These folks regularly criticize the leader behind their back but show up each day to stay employed and hope for a bonus; loyalty is the last thing they will give to a leader who has fallen from pride's manner. Loyalty is won over time by consistency of manner: caring for others, listening well and responding well, inspiring the better and best in others and covering for the employee here and there on off days. Loyalty, like respect, is hard won but readily lost.

Still another fall from pride's drive, the hubris that precedes the fall, is the fall from trust. When one operates from self-centeredness, people are quick to observe it and know what motivates such a leader. Trust is a precious gift given and earned from a life lived in honesty and truth. Not all lost trust is the result of pride's doing. Sometimes it's the result of a prideful other who blunders a decision, looks for a scapegoat to assign blame and publishes falsehoods resulting in your being the victim of fallen trust. I've been there. It hurts like crazy to be lied about and for others to lose their trust in you when it was all false, yet you weren't given the opportunity to correct the record. All you can do is go on being the leader you've always been: Operate out

of confidence, humility, care for others and do the right thing. Respect will return from those who understand the values you live, and that's enough.

I'd rather have respect, loyalty and sincere trust from those I serve as a leader than the accolades of other leaders and the compensation that comes from over-performance of the profit and loss statement. When it's all said and done, people forget the plaques on the wall, the bonuses paid and the track record of a leader's promotions. They remember the kind of person you were, the care you gave to those on your team and the impact you made on the organization and clients you served.

In the end, each of these qualities combine to form a synergistic whole. Together they create the kind of mutually beneficial trust between leaders and followers that is a requisite to any healthy working relationship. Having examined these traits, one question remains:

What kind of leader are you?

> Effective communication is a central responsibility of leaders who care about their organizations, teams and employees.

*Dave Gilmore is the president and CEO of DesignIntelligence*

DesignIntelligence®
Quarterly

# BUILDING TRUST
# (FROM THE INSIDE OUT)

# Building Trust
# (From the Inside Out)

**Cheryl Durst, Hon. FIIDA**

Executive Vice President and CEO, IIDA

IIDA's Cheryl Durst discusses issues facing the interior design profession.

**DesignIntelligence (DI):** We're with Cheryl Durst, Executive Vice President and CEO of IIDA. I want to start with a quote from the IIDA website:

> "In 1997, Cheryl joined IIDA as the Senior Director of Education and Professional Development. Promoted to Executive Vice President and Chief Executive Officer in 1998, she began the task of rebuilding and redefining the organization, which was teetering on the brink of bankruptcy and closure due to organizational mismanagement. Despite this significant challenge, Cheryl implemented an aggressive fiscal redevelopment and turnaround strategy."

That's an impressive opening statement. Can you share some background on your organization and its origin story?

**Cheryl Durst(CD):** In the late '80s, there was a decided movement to more closely align existing design organizations. At that time, there were more than a dozen design organizations dedicated to the interior and to the physical environment. Those organizations came together and decided to create one coherent organization. By 1989 or 1990, the movement had a name, Unified Voice.

By 1991 there were seven dedicated partner organizations in Unified Voice. By 1994 of those seven, three ultimately came together to create IIDA. One of them, the largest, was IBD, the Institute of Business Design. CFID, which was the Council of

Federal Interior Designers, was primarily designers working for the federal government, but also state, local, and municipal concerns. And ISID, the International Society of Interior Design, was the smallest of the three, and it was a residential component. The other two were primarily commercial design organizations.

Those three ultimately created IIDA. There were some other interesting organizations like the Institute of Store Planners (ISP) that were a part of the larger group of seven. It was an evolutionary moment for our industry when these three ultimately came together to create IIDA.

**DI:** Who drove the movement to converge and the decision to focus on commercial interiors?

**CD:** It was very much a volunteer-led effort. There were designers like Cheryl Duvall who had her own firm, Duvall/Hendricks, in the Washington DC and Mid-Atlantic area. Designers from all over the country who were leaders in the profession, in their own firms and in larger firms like Gensler. Art Gensler was an early IIDA proponent and supporter, as was David Mourning, who was the CEO and founder of IA.

There was broad support within the volunteer community. It wasn't a group of executive directors from a bunch of associations fomenting this merger. Rather, it was designers and architects explicitly advocating for the meaning of commercial interior design.

If you consider the history and the period from the mid-'60s onward, the office had become a force. It was a cultural phenomenon. When we think about attitude and behavior in the context of the built environment, the office tells a story. This group of volunteers — architects and interior designers —were explicitly

talking about what does "work" and the workplace mean, in the context of business, strategy and humanity? That was one of the early underpinnings of the conversation within IBD, and ultimately, within IIDA.

**DI:** It's amazing to hear that history. What's going through my mind is now here we are 30 years later…

**CD:** And we're still having that conversation…

**DI:** Yes, the time has come to…

**CD:** Have it again. I know.

**DI:** Post-COVID, what is the office? The office generated an industry. We had commercial real estate and urban centers, but the office became a thing, a way of life and working. It shaped society. But now, after the pandemic, what is remote work and what is the new office? It's so interesting to consider it in that context.

**CD:** It's fascinating when you think about the conversation. Obviously, commercial design is more than just the workplace, but many of the early conversations we had in IBD, and consequently the early days of IIDA, were centered around productivity, satisfaction and happiness. About the employees and the people who inhabited these spaces being created by designers. And not just designers and architects, but also manufacturers.

The early conversations that created IIDA involved the entity now called MillerKnoll, (previously Herman Miller and Knoll), along with Kimball, Interface, and Milliken. The furniture sector, as well as floor coverings, was instrumental to our existence. Steelcase was one of our first charter industry members. They helped support the founding of IIDA, as did USG.

> To further connect interior design and architecture is a not-so-subtle goal of mine.

It was very much a conversation around the importance, meaning and wherewithal of the built environment. The Merchandise Mart and NeoCon were instrumental to our history. IIDA was chartered at NeoCon. The Mart was supportive of all of these conversations. NeoCon is about the commercial design industry, office furniture, all those showrooms and manufacturers resident in the Merchandise Mart. It was a culmination of a moment, a cultural milestone in our industry.

**DI:** Wasn't that the time in the evolution of design practice when discussions about the value of design and business started? A Design for Business awards program emerged, and Art Gensler and many others understood the importance of business in his firm. As you said, it was a moment in time. The older I get, the more I appreciate learning this history.

**CD:** Absolutely. So true. And it's not just the analysis and research around the workplace, but it was about the celebration of workplace design. Our Interior Design Competition is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Our Will Ching Design Award is celebrating its 31st anniversary in 2024. We have successfully continued those programs, expanding to some one dozen international design competitions, but those two were originally IBD competitions. One notable pillar of IBD was to not just to "talk" about design, but also to celebrate commercial interior design and those creating the physical environment.

**DI:** Who was Will Ching?

**CD:** Will Ching was one of the founders of IIDA and one of the founders of the Governing Board for Commercial Interior Design Standards. He was a tireless design advocate and successful interior designer in NYC throughout the '70s, with notable clients like Chubb and Time, Inc. The award named for him celebrates firms of 5 or fewer – recognizing that small firms are mighty and that design excellence and superior client service don't require a "cast of thousands".

**DI:** Thank you for laying that groundwork. Let's shift and talk about you, how you got here and came to have what appears to be an amazing impact over your 26-year IIDA tenure. Because I didn't see in your bio that you have a background in design.

**CD:** I am not a designer. I went to school in Boston — to Boston University. I was a dual major in journalism and economics. I was educated as a writer, a technical writer, specifically. Early in my career, my husband and I lived and worked in Washington DC. At the time the Kennedy family owned the Merchandise Mart in Chicago, but also the Washington Design Center in Washington DC. I was the director of event planning there.

For a brief while, I was also the director of education. I was charged with organizing educational programs for interior designers. Chronologically, this was pre-IIDA's existence. But that need, that requirement for education, was predicated on introducing legislation in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia, recognizing interior design as a profession. And so, the Washington Design Center needed a comprehensive curriculum because continuing education is always a critical and essential component of the introduction of legislation.

**DI:** Well, I can tell by talking to you for 10 minutes, you're another great example of a cross-disciplinary person, initially a so-called outsider, who brings skills in communication, speaking and writing, and adds incredible value.

**CD:** Communication skills are always incredibly important — especially for those in professional services. Prior to my work in this industry, I was a high school teacher.

**DI:** That explains much.

**CD:** That ability to communicate and articulate design has been a thread throughout my entire career. I started with IIDA as the director of education. I'm in love with narrative, storytelling and the written word. I believe it is a skill designers should have. I'm a firm believer that to support a profession, you need to be able to coherently articulate what that profession is.

**DI:** Too often we grumble and grouse at cocktail parties about our lack of perceived value or profitability. Well, they sure didn't teach strategy, storytelling and persuasion back when I was in school to provide us with the skills to escape that vicious cycle.

**CD:** It should be a part of the curriculum, don't you think, for both interior designers and architects? As well as presentation skills — to tell the story of design. I love that our profession is so passionate and dedicated. But to be able to verbally tell the story is essential. Obviously, designers are phenomenal storytellers through the spaces they create. A space tells a story. But to also be able to articulate that in narrative form or verbally, or when you're pitching to a potential new client, is an important skill for designers to possess.

**DI:** Let's shift to our theme for this quarter at Designintelligence: relational trust. As humans and businesspeople, the ability to tell stories implies and requires trust between the parties. When I was in school, there was almost a lack of trust between us and our clients, and us and our consultants. We were taught that talent wins out, that we're the lone genius, and the clients need to be "educated" because they don't know what we cape-wearing geniuses are going to bring to them in great design value.

Trust can have so many types. Within the interior design discipline, among collaborators and partners, between architects, contractors, manufacturers, clients, users… Do any of those kinds of trust strike a chord?

**CD:** Top of mind is the designer / client relationship that requires trust on both sides of the equation. Since Design in its totality is an art, a science, and a business — it's not just "one" thing. It's not like when I go to see my cardiologist, and she is talking to me specifically about heart health.

When a designer is talking to a client about a project, they are talking to that client about a multiplicity of factors that include attentiveness to the bottom line, the return on investment, about change management, about longevity, about culture, about both "people" and "place" requirements. And perhaps most importantly, about the two largest investments made by any organization: people and real estate. The conversations around interior design are multiple, varied and comprehensive. They deal with so many crucial things. The ability for that designer to articulate value or discern what might be most important to that client, and then for the client to have trust in that designer, demands entrusting them with your bottom line, your capital — both financial and human, the health and well-being of your employees and of course the health and well-being of your brand.

If you further peel back the ecosystem of design, you will note we have a complicated distribution network: product manufacturers, designers, dealers, and clients. Then a project manager, and maybe a tenant or owner's representative. When you think about all the people around the table (or the Zoom call) when a project is being launched, from an integrated standpoint, knowing how that project is being led takes tremendous trust. You're layering in construction, right? You're layering in a general con-

tractor. That's a lot of people on a team. Whether we're talking about integrated medicine or integrated design, the ability for all those professionals at that table to have not just the trust factor, but the respect factor, too, is paramount.

**DI:** As we compare ourselves to other industries, they all have big ecosystems too.

**CD:** True.

**DI:** And just as many players. We always talk about our large, complex, fragmented industry but the issue of trust is still at the core. I was halfway through my career before the idea of listening to the client, engendering trust or caring about what they or others do, was ever introduced. What's your take on how the interiors industry differs from architects and engineers? Having seen three decades worth, how is that happening in the interiors profession as contrasted to architecture?

**CD:** Earlier you cited being halfway through your career as an architect before developing collaborative or team acumen. I believe for interiors that capability, that skill set, comes much earlier. Because interior design is so dedicated to supporting not only the human beings in the space but also the team creating the space, and the client that is "aspiring" to the space — and paying for the service.

**DI:** And their hands-on work…

**CD:** Yes. Whether it is commercial, residential, hospitality or retail design, interior designers are obsessed in the best sense of the word. They're obsessed with humanity. How human beings are being maximized or how the experience of human beings will be maximized in a space is at the top of the food chain for interior designers. At an earlier stage in their educations and careers, you hear interior designers talking about a "people first"

ethos. Interior design is a people-first profession. Before you even get to the creation of physical structure, you're assessing how human beings are emotionally related to, attached to and affected by that physical structure.

**DI:** If we agree that as a class of people, interior folks have perhaps been more oriented to customers and listening and trusting, then let's put that in the context of our changing world. We've got environmental issues, social issues, pandemics, misinformation... At DesignIntelligence, we're calling them concurrent crises. As a collective profession, we have always been challenged with engendering enough trust and value to be as profitable as we should be. Now you've got Phil Bernstein at Yale teaching classes in new value modes and entrepreneurship. That's so welcome. Let's not sell billable hours or time or drawings! Let's come up with a radically different way to do that. What's the thinking along those lines in the interiors profession, around increasing value and generating trust?

**CD:** For decades, interior designers have been paid for "what" they do — the output of a project, but not necessarily paid for thinking – for important and revelatory strategic outcomes. If you ask the average human being, what is the output of an interior designer, they're going to think about an aesthetically pleasing, functional place that supports a human being. But the rigor of the thinking that creates that place and the experiences that occur within that place and the relationship of that place to business outcomes will not be the first thing people think about with regard to the practice of interior design.

Where we see the evolutionary shift in recent history for interior design is that every engagement with a design firm doesn't necessarily result in a physical place. Because interior design is consultative, right? We have lived through the era of design thinking. The term has become a bit of a fad or cliché. But when

it first came into popular lexicon, there was a genuine desire to talk about design thinking as a process with definitive valuable outcomes.

You now see firms — large, medium, and small - actively engaging in the essential consulting model of interior design, where designers are being paid for how and what they think. Sometimes that thinking may result in a physical project, and sometimes in a change of process or culture. It results in a positive change of some sort for the client. This level of problem-solving fosters innovation that speaks directly to the value of interior design.

A fair portion of my career has been about connecting value and communicating value, so when the public, or a client, or a legislator, or an architect for that matter, hears "interior design," there is the realization that there is inherent value in that the profession. We know the professions of interior design and architecture have not always "gotten along" in the best of worlds. There have been many comparisons and much questioning of the value of interior design from our colleagues in the architecture profession, even though many classically trained and educated architects have practiced in the interior environment.

**DI:** Are you seeing a growth in consultative or strategic services in revenues and firms taking that on?

**CD:** Absolutely. And not just the largest firms. Most firms, although still very much engaged in project work, are providing, particularly in this semi-post pandemic moment that we're in, an expanded scope of services that has its roots and origins in answering the question: "How do we get employees to return to the office?" Everyone is asking what is hybrid work? What is distributed work? What does it mean and is there such a thing as returning to the office? That's a conversation about the physical environment, but it's just as much about emotion and attitude.

Clients are turning to firms that maybe they have traditionally worked with in one way but are now having strategic conversations with them about human beings and the workplace, to think differently about people, place, strategy and the future.

**DI:** The other side of that question is what I'll call encroachment. The major management consulting firms and real estate firms are getting into design consulting. In my day, we would say, "These people are just selling fear and mistrust. They're going to the clients and building trust, and they're taking work away from architects and interior designers!" Now, the optimistic, inclusive way to think about that is: "That's not an erosion of the profession, that's an expansion of the profession. Talented architects and interior designers are going to work for these people and we're all coming together." What are your thoughts?

**CD:** Well, the McKinseys and KPMGs of the world — the accounting, auditing, and consulting firms — have purported to have design expertise for a long while. We know that on the broker side, the JLLs and CBREs are engaging their clients in conversations about real estate, and in some instances, those are design conversations. I think we're at a crossroads moment: Who gets to be an expert? Whether that's an expert on climate change, or an expert on demographics, sustainability, inclusion or design, is the ecosystem of design large enough to accommodate all these experts? Perhaps only clients can tell us, but I am aware of large clients accepting design advice from organizations that purport to have design expertise, and then those same clients need to spend more money and time on top of money and time they've already spent to have that work or that engagement reanalyzed or redone by actual design professionals. That's a reality in our world.

Is it encroachment? That's an interesting and provocative question. But if a consultant comes to a client and says, "I can provide you a design solution," and they are not qualified to

provide that design solution, either by accreditation, education or experience, that's when we need to support clients in being smarter about how they're selecting their design experts. Some of that is a question around qualification. Some of it is being tied into your consulting firm so tightly that you don't know you can look outside that consulting firm for other expertise. But it's a bit of a wild, wild west out there with a lot of people entities and organizations grabbing design or the outcomes that design can bring as an expertise when they're not qualified to do so.

**DI:** For so many years, our reaction as architects would be simply to grumble, complain, and ignore it. I don't think that worked well. To recognize the context, embrace it, deal with it, and either join it or do it yourself, or provide even more value and more trust than they're doing because you are more qualified in so many ways. That's my editorial comment.

**CD:** Michael, a firm recently invited me to participate in a presentation to a client. I sat in on the pitch. The client very candidly said, "Why should I choose you, design firm A, when I could choose another consultant, a real estate group, to provide design consultation?" The designers at the table were very surprised at the candor of the question. And the response was both interesting and apt if you think about where the emphasis was placed.

The principal designer said, "My goal as a firm is to support you, your organization, and your business goals in that space. A broker's goal is a signed lease. If you look at the objective at the end of the process, where's the priority?" I thought that was a great way to respond. And I have since seen many more instances that typically happen in these pitch situations where clients are asking these very pointed, relevant questions that have everything to do with design as a business.

**DI:** What a wonderful answer, and what a great way to build trust between you and a client. Hopefully they could back that promise up and deliver on it.

**CD:** Well, they got the job, and I believe they did deliver.

**DI:** Fantastic. At Designintelligence, we have a strategic advisory component. We want to be a trusted advisor. One of the first things we remind our clients of is what you and I have been talking about. That is, the future is talking to us. Are we listening? What is it telling us? I'll turn the question to you, as an organization, how are you responding? How are you looking and responding to the future?

**CD:** Yes, the future is talking to us and it's not whispering either! It's right here right now. And as a profession, how will we contend with the complexity of physical space? And increasingly, it won't be just physical space, it will be virtual, and augmented and enhanced and blended. How are we translating and maximizing the human experience in all the different ways we're going to relate to "place" in the context of entertainment, hospitality, retail, healthcare, education, and of course, work? How will we all live together? How will we coexist, not just in a classroom or dorm room or home, but on this entire planet? And what about diminishing resources and an expanding population?

Designers need to be comfortable with and cognizant of foresight and the future. The skills around foresight and being a futurist from multiple aspects. One of the things I love most about this profession is how multifaceted it is, how multidisciplinary. How embracing of constant change and complexity not only aids evolution, it encourages it.

For interior designers to be adept at being the broadest thinkers possible bodes well for their future preparedness and foresight acumen. I'm not supporting only designers who specialize, but I'm a firm believer that designers are serial specialists. Grounding oneself in broad-based thinking with the disciplines and the vertical markets, but being conversant with how to be a futurist about the physical space, human beings, and the environment will bode well for the interior design profession.

**DI:** That diversity is so smart and optimistic. As things get more complex, we've generated roles for specialists, we still have roles for generalists, and now, new roles for enablers to connect both types, which is what I spent the last 20 years of my career doing.

**CD:** So many projects now are not only multifaceted, but they're using multiple firms. McDonald's recently relocated their headquarters from the Chicago suburbs to the West Loop in downtown Chicago. Three distinct firms worked on that project. There are many other examples of the intellect and value that multiple firms bring to projects.

Is this a case for building a discipline around managing how work happens when multiple firms are on a project? It's certainly characteristic of hospitals, and large corporate clients. Who is that professional with the best aptitude for managing multiple firms and the design process on a project and who can bring three (or more) distinct points of view together for one single client? And, of course, ensure the timely and budget-positive delivery of a project?

I believe that person is a design practitioner, a design specialist who is immersed in outcomes. Not necessarily what we now call a project manager, although there are certain inherent elements. How will we educate these project team specialists? What is the curriculum for that kind of design professional? I am fascinated by how our industry will be educating its next generation of professionals.

And, of course, I would love to have educators join us in that conversation.

**DI:** My book, *Managing Design*, touches on those questions. It's been a long-standing debate between schools and practice. There are only so many hours, and we have to get accreditation, and you can learn those skills somewhere else. It goes on forever.

**CD:** Right. And nobody really wants a seven-year path to a design degree. But it makes me wonder if we're including the most critical components in education. Are interior designers being prepared for confronting a world of business? A world of science? If you look at design and new construction, one of the fastest growing areas in almost every city is the life sciences.

There's a fair amount of knowledge required for that specialty building type. Designers are definitely rising to that challenge, but for many of them the knowledge is gained through on-the-job training. Education is a great backbone to prepare you to go out into the world, but the complexity of our world and our profession is breeding multiple bodies of knowledge.

How are we preparing our professionals to face this new world of the physical environment? What do consumers and clients want and what do cities need? We could be creating design specialists in the urban environment. How does what happens in a city from a design standpoint tie directly to economic wherewithal, tax base, equity and inclusion? You're not getting that piece of it just yet in a design education.

**DI:** To cope with a more complex world, what kind of business relationships, strategic alliances and synergies do we need? As an organization, or in any member firms, can you cite any examples of people who might be looking at new alliances? The old way was: I'm an experienced, talented person. I know it all. It processes through me. Now we have artificial intelligence, the internet and big, complex teams. On the relationship side, do we need to open our arms more broadly to cooperation instead of competition? Are you seeing any of that in the interiors world?

**CD:** When we talk about new kinds of relationships in our industry, it's interesting to look at the relationship many firms have with product manufacturers. Product manufacturers aren't just selling products. They commission a tremendous amount of
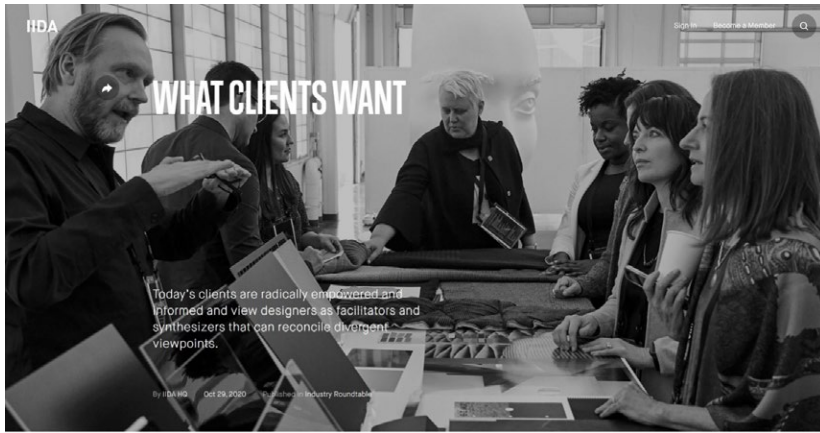
research. They have their own end user relationships. I'm seeing a greater synergy as we continue to recognize we're necessary to one another in that ecosystem. I'm also seeing stronger relationships between product manufacturers and design firms working cooperatively with the client as opposed to competing to get in front of the client first.

That's just another level of trust I've seen improve over the years. It sometimes feels like interior design is a team sport, and that can get complicated for the client.

We did a book series called *What Clients Want*. We told the story of the value of design but had the designer and the client tell the story. I would venture to say trust is the most used word throughout all four volumes of that series. And it wasn't instant trust. It was built over time. Because many organizations had an inherent mistrust of design and the design process.

**DI:** I appreciate you sharing that. The fact that the word trust is prevalent in your books is serendipitous for us in this conversation. Let's bring it back to you. Your story is remarkable, what

you've done with the organization in your several decades there. I also want to learn your secrets — how you built trust and consensus within that organization to become such a great leader?

**CD:** My mom had this great aphorism: "Work is easy. People are hard." Whether it is a staff member, a client, or a firm, I deeply feel I've been entrusted with running this organization. To do that I've made a deep investment in understanding people and their motivation. I firmly believe IIDA was created out of love — a love for this profession and a desire for value, integrity, and dignity.

In everything we've done as an association, value, integrity, and dignity, along with knowledge and community, have been my pillars. Those are related to the pillars for interior design as well. Seeing this organization transform from a bankrupt, distrusted organization into a credible, respected and forward-looking leader in the built environment is incredibly rewarding.

We've now made that shift. In addition to serving our members and the commercial interior design industry, we've grown to become a knowledge and learning organization, educating our members and the next generation of designers as well as the broader industry and even potential clients. One example is our

"

Work is easy. People are hard.

"

Design Your World program, started in 2020. There, we teach a course in commercial interior design to high school kids from under-resourced communities who haven't had exposure to the power of design. We're teaching them to see life through the lens of design.

I am optimistic about that, because we know our industry has not always been the most equitable. It hasn't always been representative of the world. Introducing a new community to the value of design has been an amazing journey. It reinforces my belief that interior design is one of the most optimistic professions. You have to believe in human beings to provide and create for them.

**DI:** What a wonderful, hopeful, positive outlook. Cheryl, I've so enjoyed telling stories with you today. In particular, learning more about your story, that of your organization, and how you have done much to restore trust and respect within IIDA. They're stories our readers can learn from. Thank you very much. I hope we can continue the conversation.

**CD:** I hope so. To further connect interior design and architecture is a not-so-subtle goal of mine.

**DI:** A noble goal indeed. You're a true pro. Thanks for making it easy.

*Cheryl Durst is Executive Vice President and CEO of the International Interior Design Association (IIDA). An exceptional communicator, innovator, and visionary leader, she has spurred progress, driven change, encouraged the expansion of the interior design industry and is committed to achieving broad recognition for the value of design and its significant role in society.*

*Cheryl oversees IIDA's strategic direction and heads its International Board, setting an agenda that leads the industry in creating community, advancing advocacy and continuing decades of work toward equity. She is a member of the International WELL Building Institute Governance Council and a Trustee for Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art and the NYSID. She has been referred to by Interior Design magazine as "an ambassador for innovation and expansion, and a visionary strategist." Cheryl was inducted into the prestigious Interior Design Hall of Fame in 2016 as the recipient of its first-ever Leadership Award. She is the first African American woman to be inducted into the industry's Hall of Fame.*

*A lifelong knowledge enthusiast and voracious reader who has considered librarian, astronaut and journalist as potential careers, Cheryl never walks away from meeting someone without gleaning a bit of their story — a talent she currently employs on her monthly podcast, The Skill Set, which focuses on the intangible skills that make us good at what we do.*

*ABOUT IIDA*

*The International Interior Design Association is the commercial interior design association with a global reach. We support design professionals, industry affiliates, educators, students, firms and their clients through our network of 15,000+ members across 58 countries. We advocate for advancements in education, design excellence, legislation, leadership, accreditation, and community outreach to increase the value and understanding of interior design as a profession that enhances business value and positively impacts the health and well-being of people's lives every day.* [www.iida.org](http://www.iida.org)

# TRUST IN A HYBRID WORLD

PRAGMATIC DESIGN

# Q4: RELATIONAL TRUST

Michelle Perry examines organizational trust in the post-COVID workplace.

# Trust in a Hybrid World

**Michelle Perry**

Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO), Walter P Moore

Few of us were prepared for the changes in how our organizations do business since the COVID-19 pandemic. The ways in which we work, build relationships and connect are no longer straightforward or predictable. To adapt strategically, at Walter P Moore we have adopted a hybrid model that incorporates the best aspects of working from home and in our offices. As an example, working in a hybrid model helps us be more efficient by reducing commute times and working smarter. Beyond efficiency, it can also increase employee engagement by improving work/life integration. But it can also present obstacles in onboarding and mentoring of employees and in ensuring we foster a true connection to each other and our culture. While such connections are difficult even when we are in the office — particularly for introspective types — working in a hybrid model can present added wrinkles because connections and interactions may be easier to miss.

For context, operating in a hybrid model at Walter P Moore means combining working in the office and working remotely. It requires intelligent location choices each day that will provide the best working environment and situation. Going to be on virtual calls all day? Then working remote likely makes the most sense. Will you be collaborating on a multidisciplinary project, or are you onboarding a new employee? If so, then working in the office might be the best choice.

Trust is key to success in a hybrid environment. One of the concepts we deploy in learning and training is the Trust Equation.[1] This equation considers:

- Credibility (technical knowledge and competence).

- Reliability (do what you say you are doing to do).

- Intimacy (building a safe and authentic relationship).

- Self-orientation (the person's focus — self-oriented or putting the other party first).

All these aspects factor into assessing trust levels. For engineers, the attributes of credibility and reliability are usually relatively simple. But for technical professionals, characteristics such as intimacy and self-orientation — with their more emotional/relational content — are more personal in nature and require greater focus in a hybrid work environment.

Why is trust so important? According to Gallup's 2023 "State of the Global Workplace" report, employees who strongly agree that they trust the leadership of their organization are 7.7 times as likely to feel connected to their organization's culture and 58% less likely to be actively looking for another job. Equally important, if not more so, trust is a foundational element in our client relationships.

## Trust Considerations

Here are some considerations to ensure that strong connections and trusted advisor relationships are being built both inside and outside your organization.



*Diagram courtesy HKS*

### Soft Skills Training

Invest in soft skills training at all levels in your organization. In my organization, it starts from the top in our vision, which specifically mentions learning. Have a budget targeted to provide training on things such as communication skills, supervisory skills, leadership development, self-awareness, trust, etc. As an example, we target providing 20 hours of training per employee per year. Make it visible — I include progress on this goal to our board of directors.

### Trust, But Verify

Long a personal mantra, it's increasingly apropos in a hybrid environment. Trust your employees until they give you a reason not to. However, be thoughtful about how much "rope" you give them. Don't just assume everything is going smoothly and the outputs will meet your expectations. If the employee is new or working on a task that is new for them, check in often on their progress, help eliminate roadblocks and provide clarity to earn — and teach — trust. If it's a task they have proven proficiency in, it shouldn't require as much oversight.

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[1] *The Trust Equation is a concept introduced by David Maister in his book, "The Trusted Advisor."*

**Manager Training**

Gallup's 2023 report also showed that 57% of managers are not given training on how to work and manage more effectively in a hybrid work environment. Many managers went from predominantly supervising everyone in the office to overseeing a staff that became fully remote during the pandemic to current blended approaches. These new modes require managers to be purposeful in how they manage and connect with their employees. Strong connections and relationships are now less likely to happen organically. To overcome these new hurdles, give managers the tools, resources and encouragement they need to be successful in hybrid work environments.

**Be Aware of Proximity Bias**

This is a danger managers need to be aware of. Don't assume the person you may interact with more in person has greater skills than the person who works more days remotely. Measure the competency and performance of both types equally, objectively, situationally and fairly.

**Building Connection**

Zoom fatigue is real. While videoconferencing can be a great vehicle for meetings, it should also not completely replace certain in-person interactions and collaborations. Make it a point to hold some team meetings in person, do some team building activities, get to know one another and have fun! This is especially true for new hires. You want them to build strong connections with their team, their supervisors and the overall company culture. This will not happen by osmosis, and managers should have a purposeful plan on how to ensure that these relationship-building opportunities happen.

> **"**
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> Employees who strongly agree that they trust the leadership of their organization are **7.7** times as likely to feel connected to their organization's culture and **58%** less likely to be actively looking for another job.
>
> - Gallup's 2023 "State of the Global Workplace" Report
>
> **"**

**Explicit Goals/Measurement & Accountability**

When you are not working side-by-side every day, it becomes even more important to have explicit goals that are fully understood by all. What does success look like? How will their performance be measured? The next key is to have consistent check-ins to measure progress and give feedback. Hold employees accountable in both directions. And, as a supervisor, give your team "permission" to hold you accountable. Are they getting enough of your time/attention? If not, encourage them to raise their hands.

**Career Paths**

Some engineers do not thrive on the client interaction/relationship-building part of their career. They would prefer to spend more time as technical gurus on the analytical side and thus remain valuable parts of the team. We reflect this in our career paths. Some paths include client relationships and others are more purely technical. Encourage people to focus on using their strengths.

## The Trust Imperative

In today's competitive marketplace, cultivating and maintaining trust is imperative in attracting and retaining employees as well as in winning and executing work. How you aim to build trust in all aspects of your business should be an integral part of your business-, client- and employee-engagement plans.

Ask yourself how you're doing at focusing on the intimacy and self-orientation pieces of the trust equation. It may not be your natural tendency, but if you can build the aspirational plan, work the plan and measure your progress — for yourself, your teams and your organization — you'll be miles ahead.

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TRUST AT SCALE

PRAGMATIC DESIGN

Q4: RELATIONAL TRUST

# Trust at Scale

**Bob Fisher**

**Principal with DI Advisory**

## Building the Right Relationship with the Market

Some concepts are so essential to being human, so deeply engrained in our daily lives, they become invisible. We use these ideas frequently, yet unconsciously, and we rarely question what we know about them. Two prime examples are trust and relationship.

The American Psychological Association (APA) says that trust is "confidence that a person or group of people has in the reliability of another person or group; specifically, it is the degree to which each party feels that they can depend on the other party to do what they say they will do." They also describe trust as a primary component in mature relationships.

It is natural to think about trust and relationships in a personal context. From childhood, we learned to understand how to establish and manage our connections with others. We gained understanding through trial and error in our interactions with family, friends, classmates, teachers, coaches and others. Along the way, we evaluated people and situations based on our sense of trust. We also learned the importance of being trustworthy and how to let others earn our trust. These experiences shaped our intuition. In most cases, the intuitive, person-to-person approach serves us well.

However, in positions of leadership, we need to think about trust and relationships on larger scales. Not only must we create a culture in our firms that fosters trust bonds among members, we should also consider how trust and relationships can be built between our firms and the market.

Few would disagree that the ideas of trust and relationship are important in marketing and business development. Obviously, people will not do business with organizations they mistrust, just as they avoid dealing with individuals they find untrustworthy. Yet, the question remains: How do firms go about establishing relational trust with their target markets?

In many cases, firms use an approach based on the intuitive, person-to-person model. They strive to serve their clients honestly and effectively, thinking this alone will help build trust. The goal is to make clients happy and, in doing so, earn a good reputation.

That's not wrong, but it's only part of what needs to be done. To build relational trust with a market, we need to begin by thinking at the right scale.

## Individual vs. Group Trust

When a firm aims to establish trust in the market, it's essentially working to shape the collective opinions about itself among a multitude of individuals.

But trust in large group settings, like firms and their markets, differs from trust between individuals. These group dynamics are more intricate and less personal. The timeframes and responsibilities involved, along with the levels of risk, uncertainty and accountability, are notably different.

**Timeframe**

It's difficult for firms to become fast friends with the market. Creating trust at the collective level requires the word to spread and build gradually.

> Not only must we create a culture in our firms that fosters trust bonds among members, we should also consider how trust and relationships can be built between the firm and the market.

### Responsibilities

Firm reputation is shaped by the actions and attitudes of almost everyone within it. Whether they are involved in business development, design, technical roles, support functions or any other capacity, both leaders and employees create impressions on others. The way they interact with clients, delivery partners, vendors, peer firms and others collectively molds the reputation of the firm.

### Risk and Uncertainty

An organization's reputation is not merely in the hands of its leaders and employees. It exists within a broader ecosystem, and it can be influenced by external events or the actions of others. Perceptions — even incorrect ones — are reality.

### Accountability

Holding an individual accountable is relatively straightforward. When dealing with an organization, accountability becomes more complex. It involves multiple stakeholders, hierarchical structures and shared responsibility.

## Creating Collective Belief

A small but powerful subset of the collective beliefs about a firm is formed through the direct experiences of those who have personally interacted with it. These individuals often share their opinions, whether positive or negative, with others who may pass along a version of what they've heard.

Word-of-mouth and other forms of testimonials, shared in person or online, can contribute to what psychologists refer to as "social proof" or "informational social influence." The concept describes how individuals, when uncertain, tend to rely on others to shape their opinions.  A similar principle likely applies

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> In short, stories about a firm are more powerful when told by someone who doesn't work there.
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to media relations. When a news or industry media outlet features a firm in a positive story, it carries an implicit third-party endorsement, which provides credibility. In short, stories about a firm are more powerful when told by someone who doesn't work there.[1]

In my work with firms, I've noticed few of them intentionally prioritize social proof. Most don't consciously work on fostering word-of-mouth referrals or consistently gathering testimonials. Few invest properly in media relations (which could be the subject of its own article).

A firm cannot always have someone else speak on its behalf. It needs to be able to share its own story to shape how people see it. Building trust in your firm through marketing is a challenge because potential buyers tend to be skeptical. Telling them you're trustworthy doesn't work. Instead, demonstrate it. One effective way is to tell stories about the success you helped others achieve — in terms that matter most to your audience.

Another way is to show them.

[1] Naveen Amblee & Tung Bui , "Harnessing the Influence of Social Proof in Online Shopping: The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth on Sales of Digital Microproducts," International Journal of Electronic Commerce, 16, vol. 2 (2011): 91-114, DOI: 10.2753/JEC1086-4415160205.

## Trust in Business

For the past 23 years, global public relations firm Edelman has published a survey-based study called the Trust Barometer. This year, it asked 32,000+ respondents in 28 countries about trust in various institutions, such as government, NGOs, business and the media.

Of the institutions measured, respondents felt that business was the most trustworthy. In 26 countries, respondents reported a 12% difference in their trust of business over government. Respondents in 23 countries felt that business was the only institution that was both trustworthy and competent.[3]

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[3] *APA Dictionary of Psychology. (n.d.).* https://dictionary.apa.org/trust

### Inside-Out

Those who work in professional service firms play the most important role in shaping their brands. While the quality of the work is significant, if the design and construction process becomes too challenging for clients, they may not choose the firm again. The way the firm markets itself also matters, but only if it accurately reflects the actual client experience as discussed below. Employees play a crucial role because their actions and attitudes shape the brand experience.

The process of winning, designing and delivering projects involves many client interactions. No manual can provide all the answers for every situation employees encounter. They must rely on good judgment in their interactions and truly understand and embody the values and principles of the firm they work for.

Culture can be seen as the set of unwritten (and unspoken) rules that govern the behavior of people in the organization. They learn it by inference. People say and do what they sense is right based on the context they observe, and they follow the tone and example set by leaders.

Establishing trust with the market starts with the firm's culture. Acting in a trustworthy manner, which means consistently doing what you say you will do, should be a fundamental value within the firm. Leaders must actively endorse and demonstrate this value. They should also ensure that everyone in the firm adheres to the same standard and is held accountable for it.

### The Integrity Gap

As the APA definition shows, trust is about dependability relative to expectations. The way a firm presents itself through its marketing communications is like making a promise. If the market gets less than what it was led to expect, an "integrity gap"

opens. This gap can harm firms because the market is likely to draw one of two negative conclusions: Either the firm lacked the competence to fulfill its promises, or it was dishonest. Neither of those perceptions is the basis for a desirable reputation.

The integrity gap usually isn't something people create on purpose. It often happens when a firm tries too hard to stand out by making big promises, akin to inflating a resume. Or it can occur when the firm portrays itself as it dreams of being, even if it's not quite there yet. Honesty keeps the gap closed.

## Trust's Power and Fragility

As shown in a well-known study led by Dr. John Gottman and Robert Levenson, a stable relationship typically needs a ratio of about five positive interactions for every one negative interaction to thrive. In simpler terms, for every negative interaction, there should be at least five positive ones.[2]

Developing trust with the market takes time. It must be cultivated through intentional, consistent effort. It results from a series of promises made and kept — including promises made through the firm's communication with the market.

Challenges to trust are bound to happen in regular client relationships. It's wise to get ready for them by building a strong foundation of goodwill through honest words and actions that prioritize everyone's best interests. When a mistake occurs, it doesn't have to be a catastrophe. Effective recovery from such situations can boost trust in the long run because it offers a chance to demonstrate the firm's true character and, having overcome the hurdle together, can actually strengthen the mutual bond between firm and client.

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[2] *Kyle Benson, "The Magic Relationship Ratio, According to Science," The Gottman Institute,* https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-magic-relationship-ratio-according-science/. *Accessed October 5, 2023.*

# OBSERVATIONS

> Never above you. Never below you. Always beside you.

*- Walter Winchell*

> Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships.

*- Stephen Covey*

> The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.

*- Ernest Hemingway*

> In relationships, everyone makes mistakes. If you are forgiven for yours, don't take it for granted.

*- Carlos Wallace*

> Real relationships are the product of time spent, which is why so many of us have so few of them.

*- Craig D. Lounsbrough*

> When trust is broken, it does not need to be the end of a relationship. Much can be learned from staying in a relationship and learning from the conflict situation.

*- Dr. Margaret Paul*

> Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future.

*- Paul Boose*

> Assumptions are the termites of relationships.

*- Henry Winkler*

> Greetings, I am pleased to see that we are different. May we together become greater than the sum of both of us.

*- Leonard Nimoy*

# A growing portfolio...

More materials, shapes, forms and capabilities for healthy spaces

Arktura

Turf Design

Móz Designs

MetalWorks™ Linear – Synchro
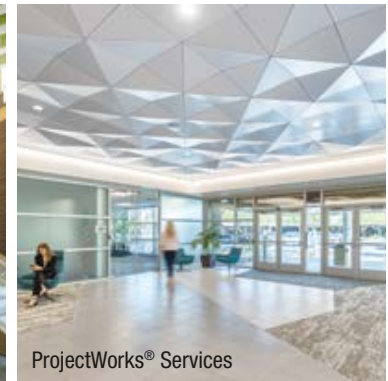
Wall Reveals

SimpleSoffit™ Framing system

DESIGN OPTIONS

Tectum® Create! panels

You Inspire™ Solutions Center

ProjectWorks® Services
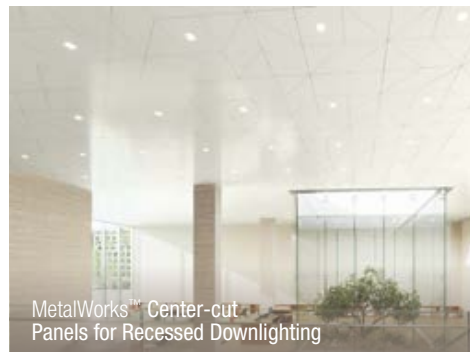
MetalWorks™ Center-cut
Panels for Recessed Downlighting

Armstrong Living Lab

DETAILS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

INTEGRATED LIGHTING

NEW OPTIONS FOR HEALTHY SPACES

Armstrong®
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