

Trust in Web 3 - Why We Still Need It

Introduction & Premise	1
Initial Trust Building	2
Non-Extractive Trust Dialogue	2
Learning Paths	2
Mission, Signposting, Personal Support	2
Trust Frameworks	3
Example - Liberating Structures	4
Example - Elinor Ostrom	4
Trust in Collaboration	4
Healthy Collaboration	5
Unhealthy Collaboration	5
Public Trust in DAOs	6
Governance	6
Autonomy	6
P2P & DAO Level Trust	7
Trust Results & Management	7
Freedom & Autonomy	7
Shilling, Spamming & Scamming	7
Relationship Brokers	8
Mutual Trust Improves Performance	8
Achieving Consensus in Web 3	8
Public Praise, Private Challenge	9
Full Commitment to Mutual Support	9
Risk of Tyrannical Technocracies	9
Where to Learn More	9
Conclusion	10
Contributors	10

Introduction & Premise

We contend in this article that trust is still needed, even at the brave new frontier of Web 3. And we seek to discuss in more detail trust components that are hard to go without.

We will look at four aspects of trust as we make this journey.

- Initial Trust building
- Trust when working
- Trust in public, in DAOs
- Results from Trust

Initial Trust Building

Whenever we decide to engage with someone, we use a set of criteria that are ours uniquely. Do we believe folk who are offering “easy money”? Are we looking for specific types of people, with specific types of behaviour?

Whenever we decide to join an online community, we have further criteria. Are they in an **interest area** of ours? What will the **commitment** needed be? Do we need to do this for economic reasons? Do we like the **community rules**? Can we see **productive ways forward**, meaning time in the community will be constructive and rewarding?

Are considerate responsive people in communities folk we would like to work with? Are there folk to worry about, folk who take advantage of others?

Non-Extractive Trust Dialogue

Perhaps, like me, your preference is to build constructive working relationships that are win-win in nature. Trying to find a team so as to make a meaningful contribution. Not simply extractive and win-lose in nature, with "me, me, me" as the only beneficiary.

As such, we would look for compassionate, responsive people willing to help whenever needed, given their capacity to do so.

And willing where possible to balance the needs of the group against the needs of every individual.

Learning Paths

In any community, existing members have a choice with new arrivals. They can either hold their hand in person, helping them learn how to get to a point of useful contribution, or they can build learning pathways, signposting, quests, to help new arrivals find their feet faster and contribute in the community sooner.

While handholding is more personal, it is very time consuming, and will detract from productive effort in the community.

A balance is needed, and this balance varies with every new entrant.

Mission, Signposting, Personal Support

The ways in which communities vary in this area are pretty diverse.

Case Study 1 - The Ecology of Systems Thinking

One community I supported in Facebook had no real mission, simply to help foster interest in the core topic, Systems Thinking. This worked well attracting audiences, we grew from 850 to 6,000 in about 29 months, and thereafter, even without hands on support, momentum carried on until today the group is over 13,000.

I was at first very proactive with new members, greeting them and engaging on topics that were felt to be Systems Thinking in their construction. There was no significant signposting.

By the end of my active involvement, the lack of rules and no overt mission meant folk were not geared up to collaborate, even though I was keen to do so with a good many members.

Subsequently the group size also attracted bad actors with extractive tendencies, which is probably inevitable when groups get to certain sizes.

I reached the end of my personal road, not sure what I could do next to make changes.

Trust Frameworks

Through subsequent online engagement, I realised that trust up front often equates to good **leadership**, are supportive leaders helping new folks to join and settle in. To do this it is entirely possible to use a range of available trust frameworks, and I will mention one here in short order.

What I will say just beforehand is something I learned from my Systems Thinking colleagues, although they themselves don't always get this learning.

Quite often, **overt systems can deter some folk** from joining. If we look at Web 3 communities we can see some pretty large communities that had no overt "trust system" at the outset, but whose subsequent democratic rule setting and community consistency still led to rapid and sustainable community growth.

Through separate research, about **supportive / servant leaders**, I also recognise the term **support** as a less hierarchical term for the word leader, which can often become infused with unhelpful controlling properties.

Equally, if systems are more simple, given associated risks of simplifying, it can be they are viewed as “**trustless**”. The true meaning here is we don’t need to trust a human with a fully automated system, because it performs the same way time after time, when called upon in the same way. But often today - December 2022 - trustless automated systems are still not the full deal, not the complete picture, even with AI, and human intervention is still needed at points along the way.

A current example here is OpenAI. There are limitations to what the app can do, but the range of ability can be extended by asking smarter and more specific questions.

Example - Liberating Structures

Liberating Structures is one example of how organisations seek to set up trust frameworks to support productive, smooth day to day functioning.

Case Study 2 - Fearless Culture

Fearless Culture quote ten Liberating Structure practices on their website and are LS consultants.

These practices are:

1. Include and unleash everyone
2. Never start without a clear and common purpose
3. Practice deep respect for people and local solutions
4. Build trust as you go
5. Learn by failing forward
6. Practice self-discovery within every group
7. Amplify freedom and responsibility
8. Emphasize possibilities: believe before you see
9. Invite creative destruction to enable innovation
10. Engage in seriously playful curiosity

Close study will probably note that each of these practices are actually trust inducing, and build up an overall picture and recognition of trust in manifold actions.

More details [here](#), this was a random Google to find practitioners.

Example - Elinor Ostrom

Elinor Ostrom studied organisations for most of her career, seeking the elements that made them function cohesively and coherently.

Trust in Collaboration

So let's now assume we have got past the point of choosing communities, or choosing work colleagues.

Now we decide to engage in some Web 3 contribution, and we are joining a team of others, including folk managing tasks and deliverables.

What does healthy collaboration look like, what does unhealthy collaboration look like, and are there any grey areas?

Healthy Collaboration

What would we ideally hope for in working colleagues?

Maybe we can hope for the following:

- **Supportive**, even if circumstances are difficult and counter-productive?
- **Respectful**, understanding we all know a certain amount, but can't know everything?
- **Compassionate**, understanding we humans are complicated and at times affected by our emotions?

Are colleagues willing to let us set our own **boundaries** as needed, even a bit reluctant to interfere and suggest alternatives? And still understanding when we have to breach our own boundaries?

Are there folk willing to **serve the community**, understanding "We're All Gonna Make It" - WAGMI, by working together? Yet still following the **servant leader model**.

Marshall Rosenberg understood clearly how we can talk with one another more respectfully, building a body of work on the subject and coining the now widely used term **Non Violent Communication**, NVC for short. Is NVC in use in any organisation where we interact?

Grey Area 1 - Challenge

More of a grey area, is **healthy and respectful challenge** of working practices encouraged? Perhaps improvements can be made from a technical perspective, where working practices can be redesigned, or from a personal basis, where it is felt that sub-optimal working relationships are in existence?

More on NVC and Marshall Rosenberg in the Dispute Resolution section later.

Unhealthy Collaboration

We have all seen or experienced extreme unhealthy working conditions where **bullying** is tolerated or even encouraged, or folk are **abusive** to one another. There may be evidence of unchallenged **forcing** or **aggressive** behaviour, or of **manipulation**, one example being **guilt tripping** people into doing work where they may otherwise choose a different priority.

Persistent use of the word “**you**” can be attached to forcing or manipulative behaviour, and is a possible trigger to look out for.

Grey Area 2 - Over Focus & Burnout

Folk can be overly wedded to the work they have on hand, to the point where they forget to impose healthy boundaries, and start to **neglect key areas** of their own life. It could be their **health**, their **family**, their **finances**, and other important areas that still need focus and attention. In extremes this can lead to **burnout**, needing periods of rest and respite. This is still unhealthy working, but a rather more subtle form, which at first may not notice, and can creep up on folk without many noticeable signs.

Grey Area 3 - Group Service Hijacking

Another grey area is where folk are called upon to serve their group, in the John F Kennedy style. “Ask not what your DAO can do for you, ask rather what you can do for your DAO”. That can be fine so long as everyone is doing that, because then work is shared evenly around the team or group. If one person is hijacking sentiment through “**loyalty demands**” to get others to work, and not contributing as much themselves, this can even be subtly clothed in morality language, then that hijacking can and should be identified and stopped, since it is ultimately unhealthy.

Supportive, caring and compassionate leaders will be aware of the risks from extreme working and loyalty demands above, and will act to make sure colleagues adopt healthy and balanced working practices, and are not overcome by overwork.

Public Trust in DAOs

Governance

DAOs (Decentralised Autonomous Organisations) tend to have various ways to ensure trust, usually through a set of voting mechanisms that the community agrees on, and that help steer the DAO from one season to another.

Voting can take place on who the DAO appoints to lead work in a particular season, who authorises payments from the DAO Treasury, and in some cases on contribution made across eg guilds within a DAO.

DAOs seek to have internal consistency, so that decisions made and visible externally can all be questioned and explained wherever needed.

Autonomy

But the overriding sentiment is typically to ensure that decentralised processes hold sway, meaning that accountability works across the entire DAO, and is not vested in one or two decision makers who have undue influence on DAO directions.

For folk in decision making roles, they are typically required to have made sufficient contribution in the DAO such that they have established a reputation, indeed trust, among other DAO members. In addition, they need to uphold DAO planning and objectives during a season, and will be judged on their performance by their peers.

P2P & DAO Level Trust

This is a continuous trust building exercise, where folk are as good as their last piece of work, and need to affirm this on a regular basis to maintain trust with DAO peers.

It is expected that DAOs do their level best to make sure all governance process is as transparent and accessible as possible, to maximise engagement and contribution across the entire DAO.

Trust Results & Management

Freedom & Autonomy

One of the things that have been delivered by Web 3 technologies is, to more or less extent, a freedom and autonomy. This helps folk to be very optimistic that change can be made, that initiatives can grow, and that everyone will join in with an initiative given sufficient positive language.

What is too often neglected is the human need to build trust, build relationships, and to fully explain to folk asking questions what the current situation is and what current plans are to move forward.

Telling folk “there, there, it will all be okay” is lazy and disingenuous on one level, and patronising and deceitful on another.

These are not actions that build trust in Web 3 participants, in fact quite the opposite.

Shilling, Spamming & Scamming

This freedom and technical ability has led too many folk to an unfettered rise in shilling everyone how amazing their project is, for some leading to their poorly thought through spamming by use of the @everyone tag in Discords, and for some who may be desperate or just fed up with a lack of success, the intent to remove digital funds from unwary Web 3 citizens through extractive practice using deceptive and deceitful technology.

If it's too good to be true, then it probably isn't!

This lack of trust in folk shilling, spamming and scamming is something Web 3 can address, but needs to grasp the nettle to do so. It is very possible to award trust badging and community achievement POAPs or NFTs which establish reputation and trust for identified public key holders. Does the community recognise the individual contributor, and is it prepared to endorse them using Web 3 tech?

There's even a systemic problem with this, in that currency exchanges prefer the often overblown pump and dump approach. They get results sooner, and look a better investment. But it's typically only for the short term. Longer term, exchanges are then prone to investment bubbles deflating and bursting. Short termism is a dangerous beast to ride, and typically it is innocent and gullible investors who lose out. By now even Web 2 has heard of FTX.

Relationship Brokers

Even among friends who over time have built a much stronger working relationship, it's very possible that relationships can break down. Often, it tends to be that assumptions that were made and not documented end up becoming a bone of contention, or a running sore.

Gravity wrote previously about [dispute situations](#), with startup founders falling out, where other startup employees face the impossible choice of who to choose in a founder disagreement. Result can be complete stasis in the startup, which of course can be fatal for trading and ultimately survival. A great deal of money is lost this way for investors, who might well believe that an effective mediation service is worth trying to keep their investment on a more even keel.

Contrary to popular belief, most reasonable folks are seeking amicable, just solutions. If one can be found, this can be reaffirming. Trust is not always lost in absolute and unrecoverable terms.

Mutual Trust Improves Performance

It's no secret that teams who trust each other achieve more. So says [Michael Page](#), recruitment consultant.

- high-trust organisations are 2.5 times more likely to be high-performing revenue companies when compared to their low-trust counterparts.
- have a voluntary turnover rate that's half the rate of their industry peers

Achieving Consensus in Web 3

Of course the challenge in Web 3 is there is no hierarchy to push teams to perform, it's all down to individuals to rein in their autonomy and consider whether progress for the community matters more than their own goals and beliefs.

This is a tough call. It often requires individuals to have the ability to attain outstanding calibre. Or, it requires outstanding leadership - in a decentralised setting - such that enough folk will agree to consensus and vote to move forward that way.

Public Praise, Private Challenge

As Michael Page point out in the article link above, folk vary considerably in how well they handle challenge. Some are brave enough to debate in public, others less so, and prefer challenge to take place in private.

We all need to be aware of this, in Web 3, because it will vary substantially from person to person. In each case in Web 3, we have situations where folk can stay and discuss, or pass and exit, on a moment to moment basis, and for myriad reasons.

Full Commitment to Mutual Support

That for sure requires trust in one another, our people skills and our commitment to consistent public behaviour. This is so we can test relationships in the cold light of difficult circumstance, and our ability to rebuild trust as needed. Challenge may have been a little too robust, push has been a little too hard, whether because of how we offered it or how it was received.

We are all human beings at the end of the day, subject to making mistakes, and having moment by moment frailty.

But do we commit to treating each other as human, willing to rebuild and support each other as humans where we may have gone too far and pushed too hard?

Risk of Tyrannical Technocracies

And there's a considerable risk if we don't continue to build in human relationships in the emerging DAO scape of Web 3.

Technology is great but it's not everything. We must also make sure to include humans.

Where to Learn More

Where did I learn about all this? Much recent material came to me through an online group called Gravity, who are affiliated with Token Engineering Commons, also an online group.

Both can be found in Twitter, as I write.

Gravity have a range of materials, some of which can be accessed by clicking here, other materials obtained with a simple Google:

NVC - [Non Violent Communication by Marshall Rosenberg](#), 1960s onwards

Servant Leadership - by Robert K Greenleaf, 1970

Controlling Coercive Behaviour - UK Law, 2015

Gravity's complete working library is available here:

<https://github.com/CommonsBuild/graviton-training/>

Conclusion

Despite huge advances in technology, it's still only a tool to help achieve human goals.

No person is an island. We can all do much more when we work with others, Web 3 , Web 2 wherever.

Above we have explored some of the ways humans interact, seeking to find common cause, and great projects to work on.

Even with the many, many articles written about teamwork and collaboration in just the past hundred years, we still don't work effectively in Web 2. It's a small single figure percentage who are led well enough to be able to do that. In Web 3, it's even more complicated by the random cat herding we see in online organisations.

Underpinning all this hard work must be the need to treat one another with mutual respect, as sentient human beings with fractious and volatile feelings.

It's no coincidence that earning trust is hard, and losing it alarmingly easy.

Contributors

@innov8tor3, @bellcho, @Jeremyandthegospelofchange,@biancagadelha

Chat GPT Version - despite being asked to preserve length. I think it mostly checked through the contents page.

In this article, we argue that trust is still important in the Web 3 world, and we will examine four aspects of trust. Firstly, we look at initial trust building, where we consider the criteria we use to engage with others and communities online. Secondly, we explore non-extractive trust dialogue, which involves building constructive and mutually beneficial working relationships. Thirdly, we discuss learning paths and the importance of balancing personal support with community productivity. Fourthly, we consider the use of trust frameworks and use Liberating Structures as an example. We also examine public trust in DAOs and healthy versus unhealthy collaboration. Finally, we discuss trust results and management and provide information on where to learn more about trust in Web 3