

It's a matter of trust What society thinks and feels about trust

- ⇒ **Methodology** – Opinion Leader Research conducted telephone interviews with 104 opinion leaders between the 23rd and 30th of September 2002
- ⇒ Opinion Leader Research commissioned a telephone poll with 1001 members of the general public on the 9th and 10th of October 2002

- ⇒ Research shows a depletion of trust between authority and the public
- ⇒ People trust personal contact more than they trust contact from anonymous authority
- ⇒ People are transferring trust from traditional business, governmental and institutional authorities to new alternative authorities

Trust: breakdown or a new beginning?

In this year's Reith Lecture Onora O'Neill said 'It isn't only rulers and governments who prize and need trust. Each of us and every profession and every institution needs trust.'

At present, trust is a key issue that affects a number of important societal and commercial organisations. In the wake of the collapse of US energy company Enron, the financial reporting of a number of businesses has been placed under scrutiny due to alleged impropriety. As a consequence the US government has arrested a number of high profile CEOs to slow the decline of public trust in big business. On these shores, the exam board scandal, ongoing abuse allegations against the leaders of the Catholic church, match and horse race fixing, health service errors and public transport accidents such as Potters Bar, are part of an exhaustive list of events that suggest authority can no longer be trusted.



In our opinion leader survey

- 94% believe trust entails "telling the truth at all times and being straightforward about the limitations in that truth"
- 86% believe "we no longer presume a figure is trustworthy, they have to demonstrate it"
- 85% agree that "we don't trust less, we trust differently and that we are more likely to trust people we have a direct relationship with"

The research undertaken by Opinion Leader Research points to a shift in trust from authority to people. In the past those in authority assumed that they could receive trust automatically. Nowadays, they can no longer make this assumption. Trust has to be earned by every individual commercial organisation and public institution.

A lack of trust: who's to blame?

'Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible. He is a kind of confidence man, preying on people's vanity or loneliness, gaining their trust and betraying them without remorse' – Janet Malcolm, American journalist

The Reith Lectures briefly touched upon mass media and its affect on trust. Mass media has been described as a key agent in the erosion of trust within the public.

But in our opinion leader survey

- 73% claim "society needs more independent media coverage"

There is a desire for more information, not less. There is also a need for diverse perspectives in the reporting of issues. Organisations may be affected by this trend, because this suggests that there may be a breakdown in communication between organisations and the public. We believe that effective communication will help organisations bridge the lack of trust.

Trust in business

Business needs to be transparent to rebuild a trustworthy relationship with the public. Opinion leaders believe that corporate and social responsibility are key methods for organisations to rebuild trust. The Financial Times runs an annual survey in which they list the most ethical companies and this survey engenders a sense of trust amongst stakeholders. A survey conducted for Business In the Community (BITC) found that 94% of people wanted companies to adopt more socially aware reporting. This type of reporting is getting increasingly popular and demonstrates transparency.

However, this type of worthy practice ranks low on our opinion leader survey.

- 91% of opinion leaders state "reliable products and services" are the most important qualities for a company to be considered trustworthy

But there are other elements that rank highly.

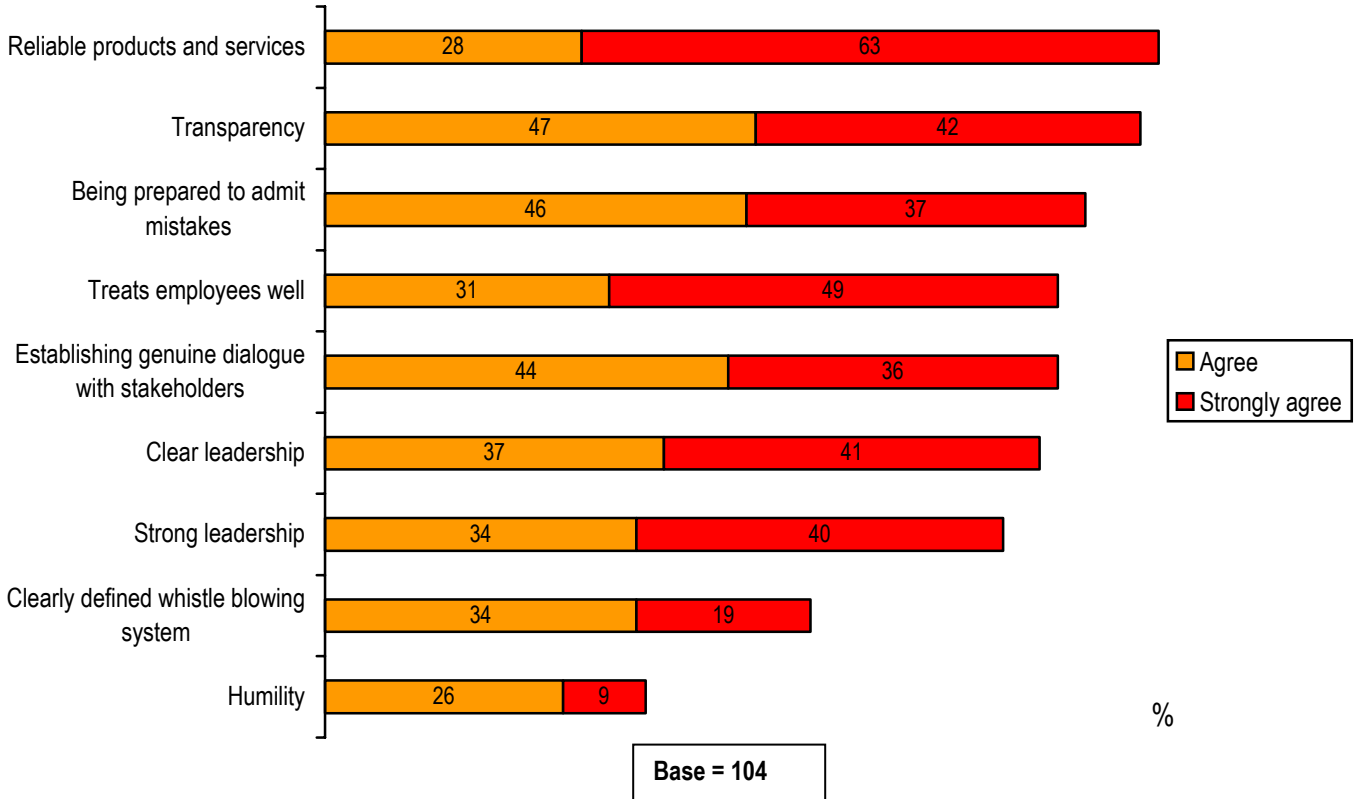
- ⇒ 89% believe that a trustworthy company should "treat its employees well"
- ⇒ 83% think that a trustworthy company should "be prepared to admit its mistakes"

⇒ and 80% think that a trustworthy company “establishes genuine dialogue with stakeholders”

Our opinion leader survey suggests that people want business to become much more human. They want business to behave like trusted friends.

The elements of a trustworthy company

[The following table shows in % the company values respected by opinion leaders]



Regulators and their role

The last two decades have seen a global increase in privatisation. Companies who were once state controlled monopolies have moved into private hands. As a consequence, regulation has become an important governmental tool in the policing of business.

‘The retreat of public sector ownership has coincided with the expansion of a new form of public – sector activity – regulation.’¹

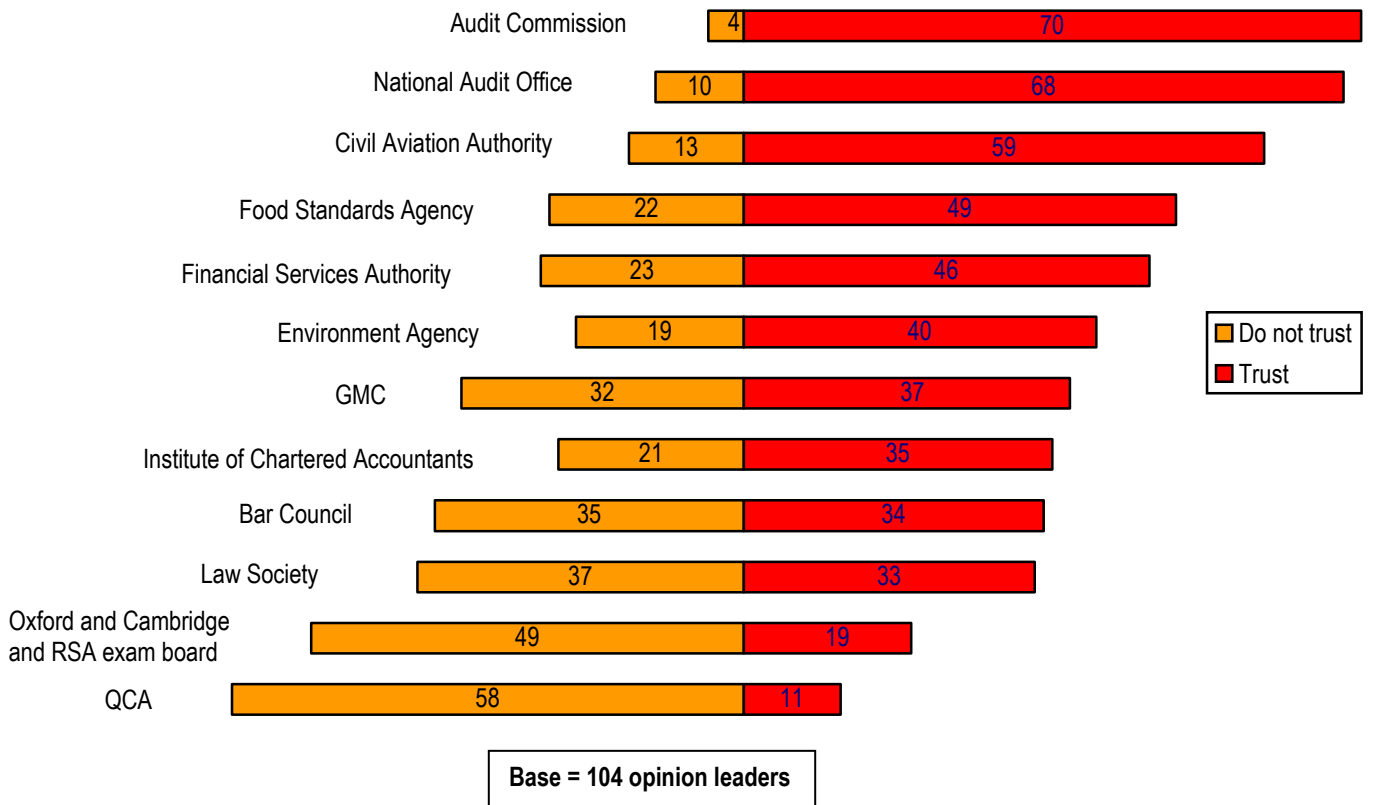
¹ Mayer, Colin, *Dance of business and government changes the tempo*, Financial Times, 28th August 2002

Of opinion leaders surveyed:

- 97% believe “effective regulators need to be independent of government”
- 85% think “there is insufficient effort to communicate the role of regulators and to build understanding of their role”
- whilst 73% think that, to ensure that independent regulators are truly independent, they should receive better funding and support

We feel that regulators need to be more effective at communicating what they do.

Regulators: who wins the trust league?



Regulatory bodies need to adopt a show and tell policy. They need to show who they are and to tell what they do. Doing this provides opportunities for regulatory bodies to build strong relationships with the public. They need to demonstrate their independence and transform themselves from faceless into identifiable organisations.

Spin city



Spin has been a constant part of political and business communication for many centuries. However recent focus on spin has intensified during New Labour government. Spin has contributed to a perception that the truth is or can be manipulated. This has contributed to a displacement of trust from figures of conventional authority to new alternative, and often more informal individuals or organisations.

If a by-product of spin is to distance people from authority, then it is part of many devices that ensure authority figures are inaccessible. Other mechanisms employed by commercial business and institutions prevent people from creating honest dialogue with authority figures.

Automation is one such device that prevents accountability, clear communication and a sense of approachability. A common complaint is the inability to get hold of the person you want - the 'invisible' bank manager who you have to talk to via a call centre, the Council leader who is unobtainable and in the case of spin, the 'truth' that is unavailable.

- 86% of opinion leaders believe "politicians gain trust by being open and transparent"
- In sensitive times 62% don't "trust government to act in my best interest"
- 75% disagree that today's "politicians are more trustworthy now than they were ten years ago"

If we cast our minds back to the political climate a decade ago, for example, when the Conservative governments Back to Basics campaign was marred by allegations of sleaze, we can get a sense of the scale of the damage to trust between the public and politics.

Communication between authority and the public is under strain. Amongst opinion leaders there is a general disbelief about information presented by government authority. If we look at issues such as MMR, 56% of our survey trust the head of the GMC to give the facts. Whilst only 16% trust Alan Milburn to present the facts.





In both our opinion leader and general public survey we looked at an additional three issues. These were Foot and Mouth, GMO and stem cell research. These figures showed a similar mistrust between government authority and the public.

Trust has therefore migrated to these perceived voices of independence.





MMR

	Opinion Leaders	General Public
	56%	18%
	16%	11%
	5%	34%
 Alternative medicine	7%	10%

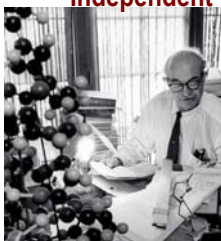




GMOs

	Opinion Leaders	General Public
	50%	33%
	24%	30%
	14%	14%
	4%	1%

Foot and Mouth

	Opinion Leaders	General Public
	54%	30%
	17%	38%
	6%	5%
 Animal Rights Groups	6%	15%

Stem Cell Research

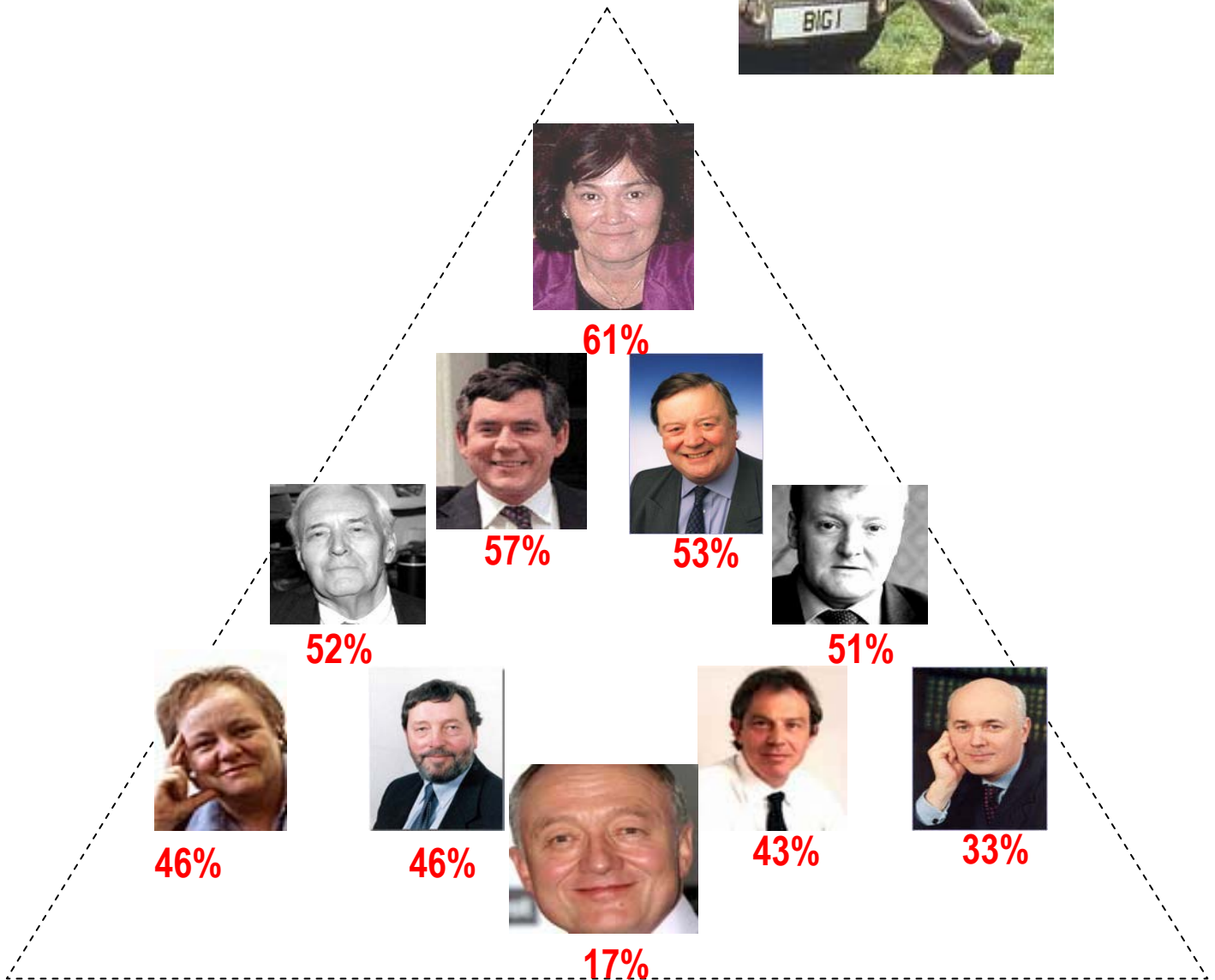
	Opinion Leaders	General Public
 Independent	69%	62%
 	17%	13%
	5%	4%
 Religious Groups	2%	3%

Base = 104 opinion leaders, 1001 general public

Do we trust any politicians?

“Love all, trust a few” – William Shakespeare

The stereotype of politicians as untrustworthy is a potent one. Politicians have used a number of PR measures to engender a degree of trust between themselves and the public. Often considered slippery and deceitful, our opinion leader survey found a few politicians who buck this stereotype.

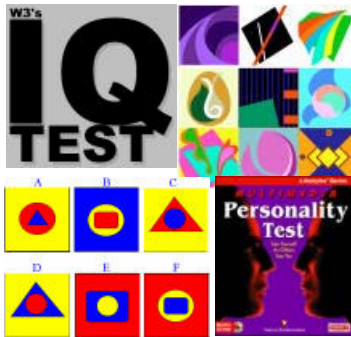


Clearly, political leaders must demonstrate more transparency and honesty if they are to be considered trustworthy. One way of achieving this is to publish milestones and report progress against these. These allow the public to see the achievements whilst fostering a sense of trust.

Alternative authority

People are voting less and ignoring the traditional political process. Using the election techniques of reality TV shows like Popstars, new mechanisms are being developed to encourage people, young and old, to engage with the political process. In America a reality TV programme has been created to find a candidate to be the next US president.

We asked both the public and opinion leaders which media friendly selection process would be an effective way of finding a political leader. Whilst opinion leaders were generally reserved about these methods the public were more open:



Over a quarter (28%) of the public believe IQ tests and personality tests are an effective way of selecting a leader

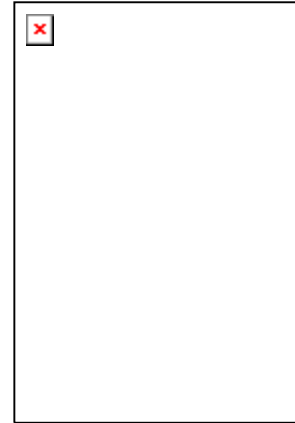
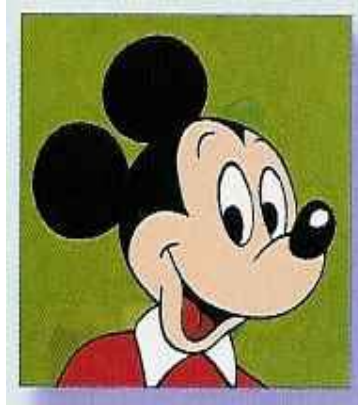


And nearly a third (31%) of the public believe a political job trial is an effective way to select a leader



39% of the public thought that lie detector tests would be a good way to get effective political leadership

In America, the Washington mayoral primary alongside traditional voting methods, used a new electoral process. Voters were asked to write in and state who they think should be mayor. This allowed voters the chance to choose whomever they trust to run their constituency. Although the existing mayor, Anthony A. Williams won, there were a number of strange potential mayors nominated.



Jesus, Mickey Mouse and Malcolm X are amongst a number of proposed mayoral candidates – highlighting the discontent with conventional choices

Our survey shows that trust has shifted rather than disappeared. It also illustrates that trust between the public and all sorts of organisations is undergoing a process of change. The public are constructing new authority figures to trust. Business, regulatory bodies and politicians need to find new ways to build effective relationships with the public. These organisations need to find relevant methods to influence public opinion. Otherwise, they may find that the influence comes from elsewhere.

About Opinion Leader Research

Opinion Leader Research specialises in consultation and research and has an established reputation for developing innovative research solutions for a global market.

Opinion Leader Research is renowned for its work with opinion leaders drawn from different spheres of influence and manages the Opinion Leader Network – a panel of several hundred key opinion leaders who agree to participate in our projects on a regular basis. We also run a monthly Opinion Leader Omnibus.

Opinion Leader Research is the pioneering force behind the development of a range of new approaches to public consultation and is the acknowledged leader in this field. To date, we have successfully completed numerous Citizens' Juries and Citizens' Forums.

Opinion Leader Research is known for its expertise in policy development and evaluation, working closely with a number of government departments and think tanks to inform the development of effective policy solutions and communications strengths.

For more information on Opinion Leader Briefings, the Opinion Leader Network or any of our other work, please contact Viki Cooke or Deborah Mattinson on +44 (0)20 7861 3080 or by e-mail on vcooke@opinionleader.co.uk. Further information can also be found at www.opinionleader.co.uk