



The Indian Journal for Research in Law and Management

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Editor-in-Chief – Dr. Muktai Deb Chavan; Publisher – Alden Vas; ISSN: 2583-9896

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TRANSPARENCY IN LEADERSHIP: BUILDING TRUST AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- *SONUDEEP RATHOD*

I. Introduction

Transparency as a characteristic of modern leadership is no longer a feature that should be present; instead, it is essential for gaining trust and establishing legitimacy. The world is rapidly becoming information-based, and leaders are increasingly expected to be both accountable and trusted. Under such circumstances, leaders are valued for their results as well as the process through which they were achieved, including communication strategies and the transparency of decision-making. It is proven that transparency in management results in higher rates of employee trust, commitment, and perceived effectiveness of leadership. The literature demonstrates that followers who are provided with the rationale for decisions, receive candid and sincere communication from managers, and are allowed to participate actively exhibit increased willingness to contribute extra effort. Transparency does not equate to revealing everything, though; it requires accountability, i.e., being responsible for one's actions and decisions.¹

The current paper analyzes transparency as a way to establish trust and foster accountability. This goal will be accomplished by discussing empirical research and practice-oriented scholarly articles concerning transparency in leadership.²

II. Defining Transparency in Leadership

Leadership transparency is understood as an approach involving openness, honesty, and timeliness in communicating about organizational objectives, decisions, and limitations, along with a readiness to explain how and why these decisions have been made. Unlike mere communication of good

¹ Steven M. Norman, Bruce J. Avolio & Fred Luthans, The Impact of Positivity and Transparency on Trust in Leaders and Their Perceived Effectiveness

² Larry W. Hughes, William L. Gardner & Steven M. Norman, Transparency, Translucence or Opacity? A Field Investigation of the Mediating Role of Positive Emotions in Trustful Leader-Follower Relations

news, such transparency requires the acknowledgment of risks, problems, and negative outcomes, and the creation of forums where subordinates are able to question and criticize decisions without being punished for this. Transparency is one of the main aspects of the positive psychological impact that leaders have, according to Norman, Avolio, and Luthans. This is reflected in the conclusion of the scholars that transparent communication is a strong predictor of trust in and effective performance of leaders. Indeed, while a leader who is both optimistic and communicative enjoys greater trust than an optimist, a positive attitude without transparency appears to be manipulative.³ Authentic and ethical leadership is discussed in terms of transparency concerning values, intentions, and mistakes made.

III. Transparency and Trust

Most people think trust in bosses comes from feeling safe enough to rely on them, knowing they know what they do, say what they mean, and care about their team. Openness feeds each of these pieces clearly; when actions are visible, skills become obvious, promises match results, and intentions reveal themselves through choices that include others' needs.

Open sharing by leaders ties closely to how much people trust them. A number line analysis shows honesty links strongly to confidence in management, standing apart from overall mood or sentiment. When those in charge explain results, choices, and unclear paths ahead, team members often see it as a sign of respect. This kind of openness makes individuals lean toward believing intentions are honest, regardless of outcome. What matters most is clarity during moments of doubt. Lately, research from Jain and Prusty about companies in India shows clear leadership boosts how much workers believe in their bosses. Happens like this - when those in charge talk openly about choices, ask what others think, then respond to it, staff feel more connected. Trust grows. So does the sense they belong. Effort follows, given freely. Not long ago, Marcal and team looked at similar ideas, discovering honesty and fair behavior in leaders lift confidence among teams. Yet here's the twist: all of that depends on whether people already see management as dependable overall.

Most real-world findings fit well with hands-on studies. Experts observe that when leaders share openly, workers are more likely to speak up sooner, challenge ideas without fear, leave errors unhidden - signs pointing straight to trust. Worker feedback gathered through polls and shared in practical guides shows clear links between open leadership and feelings of equity, belonging, comfort being oneself at work. Missing trust? It usually roots in decisions made behind closed

³ Ana Marcal et al., Transparency, Ethical Leadership, and Employee Trust: The Moderating Role of Collective Trust in Management, PESHUM: J. RELIG. & HUM. VALUES (Apr. 20, 2026)

doors or messages left half-told

IV. Transparency and Accountability

Even when things are out in the open, trust doesn't follow unless someone owns up to what happens⁴. Some researchers point out that clear information alone might just become empty display lots of explanation with no real ownership. Instead, being answerable means there has to be a person you can actually question when choices go wrong, and if needed, hold back through some form of outcome. Melo, Martins, and Pereira looked at studies on leadership and found clarity about roles matters deeply - one must know who decided what. When people see how decisions unfold, why they were made, and which rules guided them, it becomes possible to check whether behavior matches promises.⁵

Openness, having to justify choices, and facing consequences form three separate yet connected concepts. What leaders share openly supports clarity plus gives reasons behind actions. Systems like reviews by boards, checks from regulators, or assessments of results bring real weight to those expectations. Such structures turn promises into measurable outcomes through follow-through that matters.

Talk among professionals shows trust grows stronger when openness walks step by step with answerability. According to Trindade, real confidence builds only if those in charge do two things at once - show what they're doing and stand answerable to specific people like board members, investors, workers, or the public. A boss who spills every detail yet ducks blame when things go wrong? That kind of pattern chips away at belief in their integrity. On the flip side, someone ready to take the fall but hiding how decisions unfold behind closed doors - that breeds doubt, pulls others away. Seeing inside helps people tell true ownership apart from empty words, simply because they can check if rules said to matter truly get applied.

V. Mechanisms: How Transparency Builds Trust and Accountability

A. Explaining Decisions and Trade-offs

It often stands out when leaders talk through their choices, going beyond the result to share the thinking behind it. ⁶People tend to go along with tough calls - like staff reductions or spending

⁴ <https://talentsprint.com/blog/ethical-leadership>

⁵ <https://strengthscape.com/transparency-and-ethical-leadership-a-dynamic-duo/>

⁶ Kara Dennison, Why Leadership Transparency Will Define Organizational Success in 2025

limits if those in charge lay out clear logic, admit downsides, and walk through what options were weighed. When trade-offs are laid bare, including who stood to gain or lose, team members can judge whether the process felt fair and smart - even if they do not like where things landed. Fairness in how decisions unfold shapes trust just as much as the results themselves. Because leaders who lay out clear reasons, welcome feedback, and handle comparable situations alike show their choices follow understandable patterns. Rules applied steadily make misuse harder to miss or ignore.

B. Sharing Challenges, Not Just Successes

Openness sets some leaders apart when they speak up about dangers, failures, or unclear outcomes. Studies into real leadership show trust grows stronger when a leader admits mistakes and talks plainly about hard times instead of acting untouchable. When hurdles come - like money issues, new rules, or confusing plans truthful updates help teams adjust thoughts and join solutions with clearer minds.⁷

When things go wrong, some writers say staying quiet might feel safer at first. Yet when people notice what they're told does not match what they see, doubt creeps in. Speaking openly about setbacks changes how others view responsibility. When those in charge name issues as they happen, it opens space for others to weigh in on solutions. Efforts to fix problems gain more meaning if everyone sees both struggle and response

C. Creating Participatory Channels

Openness builds trust most when people can actually reply, not just receive messages. Jain and Prusty found bosses who explain things clearly while also asking staff what they think tend to spark deeper involvement. When workers see their thoughts lead to changes, the process feels shared. Silence after sharing facts often leaves employees feeling used instead of included. Real dialogue turns one-way updates into joint effort. Only listening sometimes makes openness seem like performance, not progress.

Later on, staff start expecting updates once they've given their thoughts. Leaders who reply clearly about what got changed - or didn't - and why, tend to hold more credibility. When people see a response after speaking up, it feels less like theater. Slowly, regular check-ins turn into habit, making oversight something everyone shares rather than dreads. Decisions begin reflecting collective input instead of top-down choices. Trust grows where explanations follow requests.

⁷ <https://www.corporate-culture-institute.com/blog/building-trust-and-transparency-the-cornerstones-of-modern-leadership>

D. Modeling Ethical Consistency

Openness ties closely to ethical leadership - acting fairly and responsibly, even when hard. When leaders claim principles but act differently, what they do becomes clear through choices about who gets hired or promoted. Real commitment shows up in moments of rule enforcement or how people are treated. Actions speak louder than words, especially under pressure. What a leader does daily either supports or breaks their message.

When TalentSprint talks about leading with ethics in a world where everything shows, it points out honesty around principles matters - just as much as actually following them does - for keeping promises clear and growing confidence. What Strengthscape adds comes down to actions matching words: sharing beliefs openly, walking through choices based on those beliefs, letting people look close - all help shape workplaces where workers sense they're seen and handled justly. Marcal and team found proof too - that leaders who are open about their moral stance often gain more faith from staff - but how well that works might hinge on whether trust already runs deep across the group, meaning openness feeds trust even while needing some trust to start with.

VI. Limits and Risks of Transparency

Openness has limits, even though it helps. Not every detail should surface just because sharing feels right. Sensitive info needs protection - think private records, safety concerns, military tactics, corporate plans. Experts warn: total disclosure can backfire without smart boundaries. Laws require certain secrets, especially around individual rights or financial trust roles. Too much raw data confuses people instead of informing them. Clarity sometimes means holding back. Balance shapes responsible communication. Revealing everything might feel honest, yet cause harm indirectly. Filtering matters as much as revealing.⁸

Out in the open, yet still hidden - some groups flood reports with numbers and smooth stories, only to leave out how real choices get made. When people notice gaps on purpose, confidence slips away fast. Not far off, sharing facts means little if nobody answers for them afterward. Excuses pile up when those in charge talk endlessly but shift nothing at all

How people see openness depends on culture plus who holds power. Where hierarchy runs deep, asking tough questions of those in charge often feels out of place - so clarity flows mostly downward, weakening real oversight. On the flip side, places with flat structures push for reasons behind decisions along with a say in them; skipping this risks trust fast. Good leadership means

⁸ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/importance-ethical-leadership-transparent-world-decisiveleadership-rtfbc>

reading the room, honoring traditions yet pushing back when silence protects bad habits.

VII. Practical Implications for Leaders

Openness works better when those in charge explain their thinking, not just their choices. Because decisions make more sense if people know what influenced them - past events, rules applied, real-world boundaries. Meetings now and then help, especially when updates focus on reasons behind actions, not only outcomes. Written notes or group talks serve well, provided they highlight motives alongside moves. What matters is making the unseen parts visible over time

Now here's a truth often ignored: when those in charge talk openly about struggles, even their slipups and doubts, it shifts something. Studies into real leadership show owning up to errors - while fixing them - actually builds belief in a leader's honesty and skill instead of weakening it. When bosses name where they went wrong out loud, then map what comes next, people see clarity isn't just demanded downward - it lives highest too.

Here comes a shift: decision makers need setups where people who care can actually shape choices, not just hear what was decided. Sometimes it looks like advisory groups, organized ways to share thoughts, or shared control over spending and plans - both in government and business settings. What matters most? Follow through. Show clearly when ideas changed results - or say straight out why some were left behind.⁹

Now comes the fourth point: real change happens when openness and responsibility are built into official processes like reviews, rules of behavior, and monitoring setups. Think about it - oversight groups might demand updates from executives that go beyond profits to cover responses to public worries, choices made during moral challenges, plus methods used to release critical details amid emergencies. That shift turns clear sharing into a measure of strong leadership instead of just a nice-to-have talking habit.

Sticking with openness takes patience; it does not deliver results overnight. What builds confidence is steady conduct, shown again and again, particularly when things go wrong. When pressure rises, some leaders stop talking - others speak more. Those who keep lines open, admit what they do not know, update their teams as facts change, often come out trusted more than before. Silence or polished messages tend to do the opposite.

⁹ Linjuan Rita Men, *Evolving Research and Practices in Internal Communication*, in *NEW PERSPECTIVES IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION: CURRENT TRENDS AND ISSUES IN INTERNAL COMMUNICATION*

VIII. Conclusion

Openness in leadership builds trust by showing who decides what and why. When leaders talk clearly about their aims and struggles, people see fairness. Explaining choices helps others follow along without guessing. Real listening to feedback makes teams feel heard. Research shows these actions lift morale and boost confidence in those leading. Trust grows stronger when motives are shared instead of hidden.

Openness works best when clear systems exist to hold decision makers responsible for their actions. When there is no follow through, honesty can turn into empty words on a page. Responsibility without clarity creates doubt, making people question motives behind choices made. Recent studies about real leadership, along with practical observations, agree: being trusted means showing your cards while standing by what you do. What matters most is doing both at once.

Openness matters most when it shapes how people connect, not just how much they know. Where power gets used, clarity builds credibility if done right. Instead of merely putting out facts, real change happens through honest exchanges where voices matter equally. Leaders who routinely explain choices, admit struggles, involve others thoughtfully, and stick to their principles create space for confidence to grow slowly over time. Trust sticks around only when actions match words, especially under pressure