

DeepDive: Trust, Betrayal, Forgiveness— Repair or Resignation?

Where does betrayal and hurt come from and how do we deal with it?



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OrgIQ Manifest: Passion for People builds Systems for Success

OrgIQ—Organizational Intelligence (Quotient)—is a framework that redefines how we see organizations. At its heart lies a simple but profound shift: to think from the perspective of the individual. Every person experiences their own reality, shaped by their network of relationships. Each perspective is unique. There is no single right or wrong.

An organization is the superposition of all these *Networks*. This is complexity. We can never fully model or control it—but we can give it direction and purpose. Intelligent organizations embrace this complexity rather than ignore or oversimplify it.

When we focus on human complexity, the range of possible solutions expands dramatically. Business practices and structures can be brought into harmony with the natural dynamics of human relationships, psychology, and social interaction.

Our manifesto is rooted in lived experience. We have seen the transformative power of genuine connection, individuality, and purpose-driven leadership. OrgIQ helps create environments where empathy, understanding, and mutual respect thrive—where people feel seen, heard, and valued. This sense of emotional safety is the foundation on which individuals and groups reach their full potential.

We believe in value over control. Control breaks perspective, creates overhead, and breeds mistrust. Relationships and trust, on the other hand, unleash extraordinary productivity and fulfillment. Purpose is not measured by words, but by results.

Join us in redefining organizational excellence. Let's build intelligent systems, embrace complexity, and make space for purpose and joy. **Welcome to OrgIQ—where the true potential of your people becomes the strength of your organization.**

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Seeing Betrayal

Superheroes of Betrayal

Let's start with a few stories—ones that happen every day in one form or another.

"We have the team leader who goes on parental leave and asks a trusted colleague to look after her team. When she returns, her trust has been betrayed. The sense of unity and dedication she had built is gone, and her colleague has used the time to climb a step higher on the career ladder."

"We have the date who showers the woman of his dreams with compliments, kindness, and charm. But the moment it becomes clear there won't be sex, the tone flips—and suddenly there's only contempt and insult."

"We have the coworker who falls a little in love with a colleague. But when he doesn't move forward at her pace, she feels rejected and suddenly becomes a #metoo—even though she's really a #me-not-too."

"We have the teenager who finally finds someone who really sees them. When the parents find out, of course they only see abuse and start making drama. That drama may not be true acceptance, but it's still more attention than the teen has ever received. For that, any of us would betray anything. (The same story happens between bosses and employees—where loyalty to colleagues is sacrificed.)"

"We have the friendship that has lasted for years—until it's thrown away for a 'relationship.' And suddenly you realize you were just a placeholder."

"We have the parents with three children who—unconsciously, of course—keep them dependent and incapable of standing on their own. Then the youngest son finds a friend who helps him grow in self-worth and independence. At first, everyone is happy about it. But as the parents' power fades, a different face begins to show."

"We have the new and insecure team leader who cares more about their own career than the actual work. And there's the relaxed, creative team member whom everyone naturally follows. Power games soon begin, until this potential 'threat' is gone. Where fear and insecurity live, envy is never far behind. Power creates the mindset that 'no one is allowed to be better than me.'"

"We have the student everyone admires—or fears?—who still chooses the classic victims for her bullying. No one quite understands why someone held in such high regard would need to put others down."

"We have the employees who have mentally checked out—smiling politely in team meetings, yet braking or even sabotaging things at every opportunity."

These are stories from real life, and you can surely add your own. But what matters most is to understand *where these behaviors come from*—and what a healthy range of responses might look like.

Trust or Betrayal in the Small Moments

Let's start with a bit of theory. The best research on trust and betrayal comes from **John and Julie Gottman**, two renowned relationship researchers known for decades of work on emotional connection and communication. What they discovered is that trust—and betrayal—most often happen in the *small moments*.

Even though we won't need it until later, it's worth mentioning Brené Brown's work here. She, too, has researched trust—from a different perspective—and helped bring the topic back into public awareness through her TED Talks.

What's especially interesting is her definition of what trust actually is—the building blocks it's made of. In English, she sums it up with the acronym BRAVING: Boundaries—knowing and respecting limits. Reliability—being consistent and dependable in what we do. Accountability—taking responsibility for our mistakes, and allowing others to do the same. Vault—keeping confidences and not sharing what isn't ours to share. Integrity—choosing courage over comfort, living our values rather than just naming them. Non-Judgment—the ability to listen without judging. Generosity—assuming the best intentions in others.

These are the *"bids for connection."* A bid is any attempt by one person to reach out to another—to seek attention, affirmation, affection, or any other form of positive connection. Although the Gottmans' studies focused on romantic relationships, these concepts are universal. They apply just as much to families, friendships, and teams.

Whenever we humans meet and interact, there's a subtle exchange taking place. Most of it happens beneath our awareness, but our subconscious—and our **limbic system** (let's just call it *our Limbi* from here on)—definitely picks it up. The Limbi is the part of us that handles emotions and decisions.

All these tiny signals add up and become what we call our *gut feeling*.



Figure 1: Someone is making an offer here.

An interaction basically works like this: one person initiates contact and makes a *“bid for connection.”* That bid can take many forms—a simple *“Hi,”* a sigh, or a comment like *“Ugh, I slept terribly last night.”* It might also be a friendly greeting, a nod, or a smile.

Now it's the other person's turn. I can choose to genuinely accept this *bid for connection*. When I do, a brief moment of connection arises—and trust begins to grow.

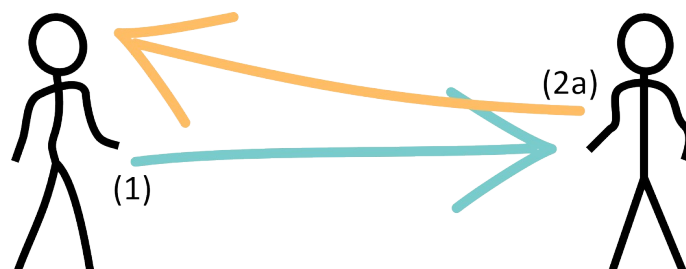


Figure 2: If the offer is sincerely accepted, there will be an connection.

I can also reject the *bid for connection* in many different ways. It might be complete ignoring, a minimal reaction, or a response that only stays on the surface—where only the mask or the role answers. All of these are forms of rejected connection—and therefore, a kind of betrayal.

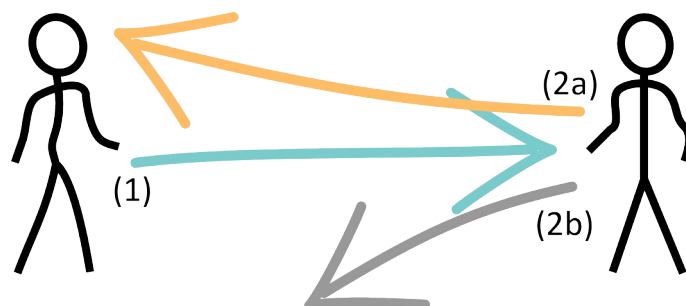


Figure 3: Alternatively, I can ignore or reject the offer. That is betrayal.

The word *betrayal* sounds harsh—but it's exactly what our Limbi feels. And it makes sense. Our Limbi is our social center. We humans are social beings; we depend on one another.

Of course, Limbi wasn't designed for big cities or large corporations, but for the small pack—the family. In small groups, everyone needs to stick together. That's why we constantly seek connection and check whether our bonds are still intact.

In a healthy social environment, *bids for connection* are answered positively about 99% of the time. I greet you every time I see you, I smile at you every time, we might hug ten times a day.

That's also why hugs are so meaningful—they are the clearest sign of mutual connection. Virginia Satir once wrote that we need four hugs a day to survive (emotionally), eight to maintain our current state, and twelve or more to grow and heal.

The Limits of Our Limbi

When we look at the world today, we mostly live in a state of separation and boundary. Robin Dunbar has done extensive research on the number of social connections humans can realistically maintain. In the 1990s, he estimated that we can hold about **150 social contacts** over a lifetime—on average.

His definition of a “contact”: *people you'd be happy to spend time with if you happened to meet them by chance.*

In 2018, he refined that number, adding that at any given time we typically have **five close relationships** and **around ten looser ones**. To translate that into time: when we meet the close ones, an hour can pass easily in conversation; with the looser ones, it's more like ten to twenty minutes. We spend roughly **40% of our social time** with our close circle, and about **20%** with the looser one. That's what the data says.

Now, imagine this: on my short walk to the train station in the morning, I already pass more than **200 people**. I don't know any of them—which means my Limbi doesn't know what to do. Limbi was designed for a *pack*—to meet the same 20 or 40 people every day.

Once I get to work, I encounter even more people. Some familiar faces, yes, but mostly strangers. And my Limbi is overwhelmed—in constant alert mode. So I shut down and start to ignore.

But in social systems, **ignoring is the worst thing that can happen**.

We have two internal programs that interfere with each other: On the one hand, strangers aren't *safe*, because I don't know them. On the other hand, every encounter where I don't build connection is also risky—because rejection means *I'm not safe*.

So whichever way I turn, I'm *not safe*. And when I'm not safe, my system believes I'm in danger—which floods me with cortisol.

Limbi in Panic and Our Fear Patterns

From this perspective, it becomes clear why we humans react the way we do. Most of the time, we're in **fight, flight, freeze, or fawn mode**. (We'll look at these more closely later.)

We ignore people, feel immediately threatened or invaded, or try to please and seek attention. That means: about **97% of all social interactions**—in families, among relatives, at school, at work—are driven by fear patterns.

Social fears are built on one simple principle: our Limbi thinks, *“Oh, a new pack ... if they don't accept you, you'll die.”* So we've built a society—not on purpose, of course—that makes life incredibly hard for our Limbi.

And when we also experience that our “packs” aren't stable, there's no place where we can truly be ourselves. No safe space, no real home. Packs can be short-term partnerships, changing jobs, or high turnover in teams. For Limbi, every change means: *“Your old pack didn't want you anymore. You're wrong. You're in danger.”*

And just because it happens again and again doesn't make it any less painful. Getting used to it mostly means **forgetting what “right” would feel like**.

If I slapped you in the face every day, you'd eventually get used to it. You'd come to expect it, and one day your neocortex would tell you, *“That's just how it is. You deserved it.”* But it would never be right. It would never be good for you.

We've gotten used to so many things that aren't good for us, so it's no wonder we've become so lonely and cold. We hardly even notice it anymore, because we can't remember what it was like to live differently. It's like being in a prison cell for so long that you start to believe it's the whole world.

And because Limbi struggles so much with all this, the **neocortex** gradually takes over more and more of its tasks. We become polite and pleasant, play our roles—and drift even further away from what *real connection* could be, even in the few situations where it would still be possible.

Most partnerships and families no longer have true encounters—only **role play**. We act out the scripts we've learned everywhere. And if we listen closely to our language, we'll realize we were *raised to perform roles*.

But for our Limbi, this constant role-playing always feels like **betrayal**—a double one, in fact: We betray ourselves when we act out roles, and we're betrayed when others only meet our roles instead of us.

And so, we grow lonelier and lonelier.

This is the **sum of all the small betrayals**.

A Short Detour: Too Much in Our Heads?

Why do we even need to talk about things like this? Aren't we just over-intellectualizing something completely ordinary? As someone recently said in a conversation: *"There's good sex and bad sex. And the good one we call love. That's it. Simple."*

But sex has nothing to do with love or intimacy. Equating the two goes against our social nature. And the fact that, for so many people, it still feels true shows how much we've lost our ability to relate. We're losing what truly makes us human—our greatest success formula.

It's like a child running across a meadow, waving its arms and shouting, *"I'm flying! I'm flying!"* And the child really *feels* it—I don't doubt that for a second.

But the eagle, circling five hundred meters above the ground, smiles to itself and thinks, *"No, that's not flying."* And yet we are all meant to fly—for real.

Ignorance is the professionalization of resignation. In ignorance, I'm so deep in denial that I actually believe my hopping and arm-flapping is flying. I've sunk so far into resignation that I no longer believe real flying even exists. So I need beliefs that make the world simple for me—that reassure me everything's fine, that I don't need to change, and that I'm not missing out on anything. And that's the real tragedy—because it means I miss out on *real* flying.

The first stage of resignation is still knowing that real flying exists—but no longer believing that I could ever learn or experience it myself. Ignorance is the next stage: the denial itself. I don't even want to face the topic anymore.

Betrayal as a Pattern of Compensation

The great betrayal usually grows out of resignation. When I can't have what's real, I start looking for a substitute—a compensation. Not having real life—love, closeness, trust, connection—creates inner despair, inner pain. And that pain needs to be numbed.

That's the principle of addiction. And addiction can take many forms. I might use substances so I don't have to feel—or so that I can *feel as if* everything is fine. I distract myself constantly. I stay emotionally on the run. I repress it. Or I replace what's missing with something that merely looks the same.

Our emotional regulation happens externally. And here we can see how the *small betrayals* become the foundation for the *big ones*. So we've been warned. We can know what's coming—and what we're capable of.

Now, let's look at the social level. At its core, **feudalism** is built on fear and dependency. From Limbi's point of view, it's a world of betrayal. And the same is true for all systems that followed—for anything built on a **chain of command**.

True leadership, on the other hand, means that I move first, and others choose to follow. We share a vision—and that vision holds us together. That's our human superpower. We are a pack, a tribe. We gather around a worldview or a shared belief. That sense of belonging feels good. And so do responsibility and care for one another. Leadership *is* trust—it builds on trust and creates trust.

But when I step forward with my vision and look to see whether there will be people who share it and choose to follow me, that's a moment of vulnerability. Because they might reject my vision. And then I have no pack—I stand alone. That is our deepest existential fear. Without a pack, we cannot survive.

There's also a difference between **sperm carriers** and **egg carriers**. Egg carriers are even more dependent on protection and community. And no matter how much our living conditions have changed—or how much our neocortex knows and reasons logically—our ancient programs, **Limbi** and **Gecko**, are still running. And they shape a large part of our behavior.

These primal programs are also responsible for many of our misunderstandings. If we could understand and accept them, we would probably be doing much better.

A good vision answers the question: *"What is good for the system?"* And it does so clearly enough that others want to join in.

But if I exercise power and create a structure where people obey me out of fear, then I can even have a vision shaped by *"What's good for me?"*—and others will still have to go along.

Through power, I avoid the moment of vulnerability. I can be sure that people will “follow” me—but I can never know whether they truly follow me, or whether they’re simply afraid.

And that means neither I nor the group ever get that real *pack feeling*. No one feels at home, and no one feels safe.

From the outside, it might look like a happy pack—but the core is missing. Everyone senses it, and we can even see it in brain chemistry: instead of serotonin and oxytocin, we find mostly **cortisol**. And with cortisol, we see **cortisol behavior**: the basic patterns of **fight, flight, freeze, and fawn**. (Just a little more patience—we’ll look at those four in a moment.)

So, we are a **fake pack**. And for some, that might seem good enough. Because if we’ve never known anything else, we eventually start to believe: “*This is normal. We’re a pack—that’s just how the world works.*”

That’s when we’ve reached **ignorance**.

And ignorance means I only look at myself: How am I doing? What do *I* need? What can others do for *me* so that I feel good? How can I use others to meet my own needs?

Because if we’re already against each other, then at least I might as well get something out of it.

But that runs completely against our social programming. That’s why it’s actually not that easy to become truly selfish—even though today, about 97% of people live in that mindset.

So let’s take a look at the **journey into egoism**.

Egoism and Fear Patterns

Egoism is, above all, a **protection program**. When I don’t have a pack, my *safe space* becomes smaller. That space might just be *me*—or, at worst, only my *inner pain*.

And the more I live inside that pain, the more I start to use others. Instead of relationship, I’m left with *use*, because I no longer have a functioning program for real relationship.

To be honest: if we’re not social, then our only safe space is our pain.

And the reason comes down to **self-trust**. We often use that word differently, but at its core, it means the trust-relationship we have with ourselves. And it follows the same principles as any other trust relationship: keeping our values and promises—especially in difficult moments (the *melting points*)—and doing so consistently.

When I experience that I keep my promises, both to myself and to others—again and again, even when it’s hard—then I start to trust myself.

But when I realize that someone else inside me—my depression, my addiction, my fear, my narcissism—is deciding what I do, then I don’t trust myself anymore.

And positive self-deception doesn’t help either.

Self-worth simply means knowing and feeling that I am valuable *anyway*. Success or failure do not define my worth. When I have that security, I become open to healing.

But self-trust has to be **earned**. Through my actions. The more control I regain over my life, the more I can trust myself again. I become self-directed—no longer ruled by my pain.

And to gain energy—as a substitute for real belonging—we can distinguish **four strategies**. They are all about *attention*, because when I’m not truly seen, attention and validation become my compensations.

- ▶ “**I want to have!**” “**I want to achieve!**” Then others will admire me—and that makes me valuable. Here, performance or possession become my *proof loop*—the evidence that I’m useful, and therefore worthy.
- ▶ **I devalue others**. When I realize that, despite success or possessions—or because I never reached them—I still don’t *feel* my own worth, I need a *relative value shift*. Since I can’t raise my own worth, I lower someone else’s. And those I perceive as most valuable—the ones who make me look small—are the ones I have to put down the hardest.

- ▶ **I live off victim energy.** If the first two strategies don't fit me, I move into the victim lane. Pity—and self-pity—are powerful energy sources to protect my pain. So I start to create drama in my life and then seek pity for it. We receive plenty of attention—and even validation—this way.
- ▶ **I devalue myself, even to the point of self-harm.** This is pure resignation—*pain made visible*. I genuinely want to stop existing. I no longer compensate—I drown one pain with another. Sometimes I even do this through other people: I let them hurt me so that I don't have to do it myself.

I know this doesn't sound pleasant. These are things we'd rather not know—and that's exactly why we usually ignore them. But since, right here and now, I'm your personal trainer for deep soft skills, I'm also going to introduce you to the uncomfortable exercises.

Because as unpleasant as they are, that's exactly where our growth happens. We need to develop our ability to recognize and understand this behavior—in ourselves and in others. Understanding is a wonderful alternative to judging or ignoring.

And the most important part is this: when we can see and understand the inner pain of these people, we realize that no matter how much they hurt us, what's happening inside them is far worse.

But back to the ego. For all ego-based strategies, I need *others*. I use people. And every form of *using* is **betrayal**. Because manipulation is not a real encounter.

I act *as if* I'm meeting you, but really I'm lulling you into safety so that I can meet my own needs. As long as you're useful to me, everything is fine—you can stay in the illusion that there's a real relationship. But once you stop being useful—for example, when you stop *fawning*—I throw you away.

And that's the moment when we *feel* the betrayal. But in truth, it was there all along—we just didn't see it.

Yet fawning itself is also a form of betrayal—even if it's unconscious. Unconscious simply means I'm still trapped in **ignorance**—in the denial of my despair and resignation.

That's why falling in love is such a perfect example of this principle. When we fall in love, we find someone we perceive as *valuable*. And we want to share in that value—to raise our own. So we try—mostly unconsciously—to manipulate that person into liking us back, hoping they'll give us some of their value. (Validation through attention: *A is valuable and gives B attention—therefore, B must also be valuable.*)

Ever noticed how people change when they're in love? How they act when the other person is around? It's a complete 180° turn—a totally different version of themselves. That's a core **fear pattern**.

- ▶ **Fight:** I see a threat—and I fight it.
- ▶ **Flight:** I see a threat—and I run away.
- ▶ **Freeze:** I see a threat—and I play dead. The background here is that many predators react only to movement.
 - ▷ This “playing dead” is one aspect of being in love: you can't get a word out, your mind goes blank, your stomach turns.
- ▶ **Fawn:** I see danger—and I submit or befriend it. I try to convince you that I'm harmless.
 - ▷ This is the *core of being in love*. I present an alternative version of myself—one I assume you'll like and accept.
 - ▷ **Fawn** stands out a bit from the others because it's a *second-level strategy*. **Fight**, **Flight**, and **Freeze** are programs in the *brainstem* (the reptilian brain—or, as we call it in OrgIQ, the **Gecko**¹). **Fawn**, however, runs in the **neocortex**. It's a role we play, emerging from one of the other three states—often socially accepted, even rewarded.

There's very little talk about **Fawn**, even though it's probably the most common pattern in organizations. It's also quite easy to recognize.

If you give someone a compliment or offer praise and they respond with, “*Careful, I might slip on the slime trail,*” then you know you're dealing with someone from the **Fawn world**—a *cortisol person*.

1 https://orgiq.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/OrgIQ_GeckoCheatSheet_Release_EN.pdf

We always speak from our world and about our world—and by doing so, we reveal whether we believe more in **betrayal** or in **trust**. If I accuse you of leaving a slime trail, I've just revealed how I think and act myself. What we say always gives us away.

And since we're on that example, one question remains: Why do the people we fall in love with trigger fear?

We already know the answer—it's the **fear of rejection**. We've found someone whose *value* we want, someone who shares our worldview and could therefore be part of our *pack*. An ancient program starts running.

Our pack means safety—and for safety, we'll do anything. Attraction, then, is *pack-seeking*. But since I have no position of power there, I depend on the other person's decision.

So I have a choice: **manipulation**—or, if possible, **power**. A genuine encounter would mean **vulnerability**, but in a state of pain, that's not an option.

And here we're back with the ancient programs again. They also explain the **deep-rooted fear many women experience**: because a man can, at least in principle, say, *"I'll just take you into my pack because I'm stronger. You're my prey."*

That's why women are often drawn to the *bigger, stronger* types—they can offer protection from other men. It's the desire to determine one's own fate—or at least to choose one's own suffering.

And yet, that means they're still not free, because they depend on someone else for safety. But when we truly understand and accept the concept of the *pack*, we also realize that **none of us are free—and that this is completely okay**.

Trust as an Alternative

Now here comes the brain-twister: When I live within a worldview based on trust and relationship, I don't fall in love. I'm genuinely interested in what's best for the system—and I trust that if I truly aim for the best of the system, we'll build a strong pack.

I don't come from fear—I come from trust. From love. And in this context, the best definition of love is: "What's best for the system."

Because I can trust, I don't need a thousand roles, masks, or facades. I don't have to constantly protect myself from the very people who should be my pack. I can simply be myself—and that allows me to bring all my energy into play.

That's why systems built on trust are far more productive. Their only limitation is that they drive forward only what truly serves the community—the system itself.

When I do good, I can do it with love and trust. When I do harm, I need power and fear. (Charlie Chaplin said the same thing, just in different words.)

So when I only pursue my ego and want to benefit myself, I automatically fall into manipulation (betrayal) and power structures. We all know and feel this—but many of us have either resigned or already reached ignorance.

Familiarity Builds Trust

Familiarity is often the first step in building trust. Think of the first time you were in a new city. At first, it was difficult to find your way around public transport—too many directions, trains, and colors. But with each ride, you learned which trains to take and which stops were yours. This gradual increase in comfort and predictability mirrors how trust grows through familiarity in professional relationships.

When we meet new colleagues or business partners, the process is similar. The first interactions are cautious, as both sides assess reliability and competence. Over time, as we experience consistent and coherent behavior, trust develops naturally. A study by the American Psychological Association shows that repeated positive interactions within teams significantly increase mutual trust, leading to better collaboration and productivity.

Our Limbi is excellent at collecting data, recognizing patterns, and identifying outliers. And we can already anticipate one thing: trust is based on the experienced minimum, not the average—because that's what we can reliably expect, and no more.

Understanding Betrayal

Now we've met betrayal in the small and large moments. We've seen the mechanism behind it: our existential fear of losing the pack, loneliness, the ego, and the strategies to simulate a pack by playing roles. And if everyone joins the lie, does it become true?

Unfortunately—or fortunately—no. That's why we can learn and return to a simpler, more honest, and happier life. Why build a complicated system of pretense when being real can be so rewarding?

The Pattern of Betrayal

Let's look at the basic pattern behind the superheroes of betrayal. If we revisit the stories from the beginning, we'll see a common thread that should no longer surprise us: the story is, "I want to use you, and when you're no longer useful, you'll be discarded."

Using can take many forms—perhaps I want something practical from you, or I want only your attention or dependence. For the mechanism, the exact object of use doesn't matter. Discarding can wear many faces. Right now, ghosting—a form of ignoring—is a popular version.

There are subtler forms that lead to the same result. And, of course, I can discredit the other person, either to make them useless to others or out of revenge because they weren't useful enough.

Prerequisites

Once we know the basic pattern, we can look for prerequisites. What do we need in order to commit or participate in betrayal? (In square brackets I note who must meet the prerequisite for betrayal to work.)

- ▶ If I'm capable of betrayal, it means I'm living in inner pain. My pain is the only safe space I know. I have no real relationship in my life—everything is role-play. And most likely, I'm not even aware of it. [Perpetrator]
- ▶ Our understanding of trust is very limited—more Neocortex than Limbi. We "trust" even when there's no reason to. It's a conditioned behavior. There's a big difference between trust ("I know who you are"), the willingness to trust ("I'm ready to get to know you and give you as much trust as you earn"), and naivety ("I don't know you—or even know you're untrustworthy—but I'm a people-pleaser, so I pretend I can trust you"). [Victim]

In many contexts, giving trust in advance can be a good idea—but only when there are clear values that are actually lived. Then a "come join our pack, and we assume you'll honor our values" is a solid invitation. Still, the risk must be calculated. This has nothing to do with personal trust in close relationships.

A trust advance can also have a positive heliotropic effect: when someone believes in us, it can inspire us to live up to that image. That's a beautiful thing—but still not the same as real trust in a relationship context.

BUT when we're dealing with highly manipulative people, it can backfire—so we should only do it as a calculated risk.

AND a rotten apple can spoil the whole basket—so trust advances without accountability and transparency are a bad idea. For instance, if I'm in an organization where people talk about others instead of with them, I can never really know where I stand. That's a sure sign the system is already rotten.

- ▶ As a result, our interactions become more about "use" than real "relationship." Since Limbi is on hold, everything runs through the Neocortex. [Perpetrator]
- ▶ I see the world through the lens of "What's useful for me?" This creates false assumptions. [Victim/Perpetrator]
- ▶ Betrayal leads to dis-illusionment—literally, the end of an illusion. That's the pain behind betrayal: our assumptions about the other person turn out to be wrong. We've deceived ourselves—or allowed ourselves to be deceived. [Victim]

In all these examples, we're looking at two people whose stories aren't synchronized. They're living in different realities. At the core of it all lies a lack of openness. Where there is openness, there can be no betrayal.

That's the idea behind Wonder Woman: if everyone told the truth—if we were truly open—all problems would resolve themselves. We would have peace.

William M. Marston (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Moulton_Marston) devoted his research to this very idea. Besides inventing the lie detector, he laid the groundwork for the DISC personality model. His work focused on understanding which people perceive their environment as hostile or friendly—and which behavioral patterns reflect that.

We've already seen that betrayal belongs to the hostile world, while trust belongs to the friendly one. It's like real gold and play money: if I know real gold exists, I'll take it and be satisfied. But if I don't believe real gold exists, I'll do anything for a handful of play money. This shows that people who live in fear and hostility aren't evil—they're simply lost or misled.

To be open, however, I need a safe space—one built on connection at the level of Limbi. I can only be open where I'm not in flight or defense mode.

And where that leads is already becoming clear: the great betrayal grows out of the small betrayals we've experienced. The more betrayal we've absorbed—the more rejection we've felt—the more we simply pass our pain on.

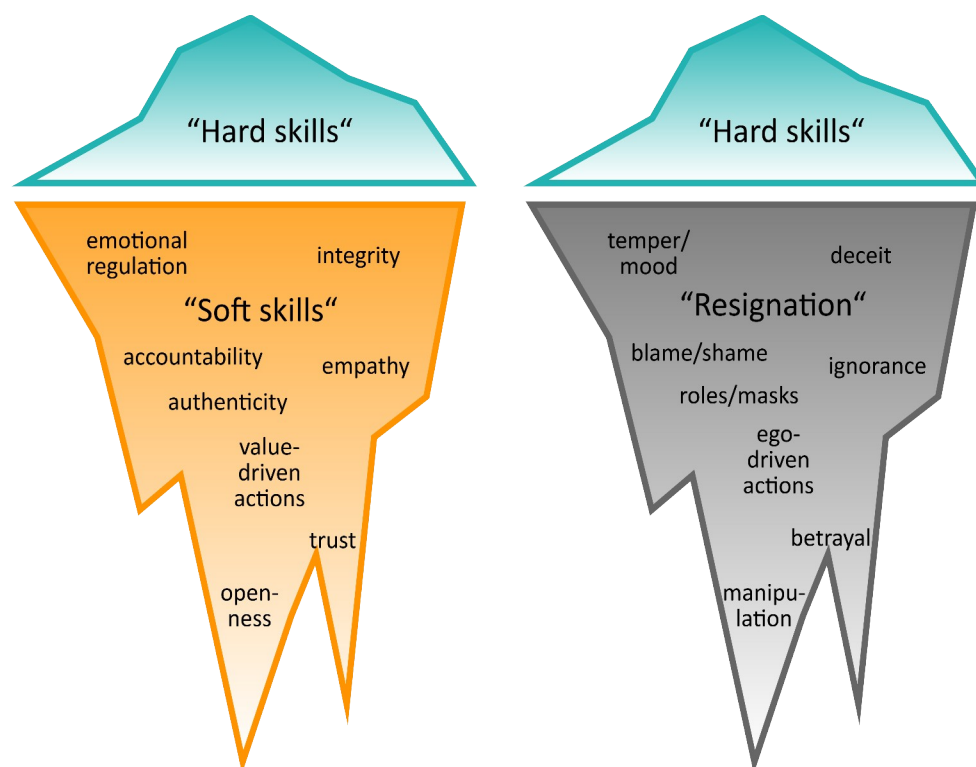


Figure 4: Our inner life looks different depending on our world view.

That's why it's so important to see the root causes of betrayal. Betrayal is a **fear pattern**. I'm gray inside. My inner pain is always greater than the pain I inflict on others. Let's look at a few of the opening examples:

- ▶ "If I make a career, then I am somebody. Then I have meaning." Another person is sacrificed to that belief.
- ▶ "If I get sex, I'm valuable." When that doesn't happen, I must devalue the other—put them beneath me and make clear they're "too ugly" for me to ever find attractive. Our brain always has to tell itself a coherent story.
- ▶ "If he doesn't want me, then he gets nothing." Perceived rejection runs deep—even when it's a constructed rejection. Rejection (from the pack) is a huge danger. It's wired even deeper in egg carriers. It can feel existential. So I'm ready to strike back with existential force.

"The decision to manipulate someone, whether it is subconscious or conscious is a decision to gain power over them. When power disparity is unilaterally forced like this, it means you are not seeing your partner as an ally in life and an ally regarding

the bringing about of what you want and need (trust). You are seeing them as an enemy in life and an oppositional force to the bringing about what you want and need. The opposite of a working relationship.” (Teal Swan)

“Girls face negative consequences for going directly for what they want and need, as well as for the list of character traits that enable a person to do so. This makes it very hard for a girl to take ownership over her life. So, a girl very quickly has to find a way to get control over her life and get what she wants and needs, but without going directly for it and without displaying any of the character traits that would be considered undesirable. And the way they do this, is by manipulating.” (Teal Swan)

What this means in plain language is this: Girls are often favored because they’re seen as *easy to handle*—compliant, well-behaved, fitting neatly into the mold. They’re expected to conform. And especially when it comes to sexuality, they are still being *restricted*—that’s what sexualization really is.

Often, this control comes **from other women**. They’re not allowed to simply do or choose what they want. If something brings them joy—especially something that also brings men joy—then it’s seen as *bad*.

The story implanted in their minds is that their value lies only in their *sexual function*. That’s why they’re taught never to “give it away freely,” but always in exchange for something they want. Yet this exchange goes **against our nature**.

We are wired to bring joy to one another—that’s what **connection** is. And sexuality should never be separated from one’s worth as a human being.

The *abuse story* leads directly into **victimhood**, instead of pride in oneself, one’s worth, and one’s own choices. And once I put on the *abuse lens*, I start seeing abuse everywhere. When it becomes part of my worldview, I replay the *abuse loop* again and again. That’s why we must avoid this perspective at all costs.

When we understand these deeper patterns, it becomes clear why giving up control feels impossible for people shaped by them. Openness doesn’t exist—and that makes us sick.

We urgently need to stop living by these molds, and start questioning ourselves instead of telling others what they should do or like.

- ▶ “Even if I lose my compass and get pushed into sexualization, at least I finally get some attention.” This can become a manipulative mechanism: I create drama to get attention. And I can always produce bigger drama more easily than I can create something equally intense and positive. There’s no positive counterpart to a murder—if it’s intense, it’s pain. All intense compensations (addictions) trace back to pain.
- ▶ The remaining examples work the same way. You can start practicing with them now.

This is an extremely important and difficult point. The pain we pass on is the pain we received. The world of pain says: “*I want you to feel what I feel.*” That’s why the facade collapses so quickly when things don’t go my way.

Addicts are also betrayers. They betray themselves, their plans, and everyone around them. Under the pressure of addiction they’ll sell their grandmother for a fix. This applies to any form of addiction or external emotional regulation. That’s why betrayal is so present in hierarchical companies and sexualized encounters—those systems are addiction-based, bring a hostile structure, and make trust very hard.

It closes the loop: because we’re all in deficit, we look for compensation. Instead of moving toward the solution (connection to people), we no longer trust ourselves or others. We try to play it safe. The only safety we still know is our pain. We feed it. We sacrifice everything to it.

As It Should Be: Safety!

Timothy R. Clark says that *psychological safety*—the belief that you won’t be punished or humiliated for expressing ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes—is the foundation for building trust. Clark distinguishes four stages of psychological safety: feeling safe to **be yourself**, safe to **learn**, safe to **contribute**, and safe to **challenge the status quo**.

The Four Levels of Psychological Safety (as stages of trust—or Safe Space)

The different types (or levels) of **psychological safety** are, in essence, stages of **trust**—or levels of *safe space*. We can think of them as trust in the *system*. That’s why we map them to **Brené Brown’s definition of trust**, to see what kind of trust is needed at each level.

Level 1: Inclusion Safety (*I'm allowed to belong, just as I am*)

Trust / Feeling safe: I can be myself. No masks, roles, or facades are required. I can show who I am. This allows me to be at peace with myself—there's no reason to fight, flee, freeze, or fawn.

When employees feel that their personal and professional boundaries are respected, they feel more comfortable and secure—building a fundamental level of trust.

Trust: **Boundaries**—knowing and respecting limits; **Respect**—honoring differences; **Integrity**—doing what's right, even when it's uncomfortable

Deep Soft Skills: **Empathy**—truly seeing and understanding others; **Authenticity**—showing yourself without a mask; **Creating belonging**—making spaces where diversity feels natural

👉 **Precondition:** People feel that their worth is not tied to performance.

👉 **Result:** Basic trust in the system—the sense that “I am allowed to be.”

Level 2: Learner Safety (*I'm allowed to ask, learn, and make mistakes*)

Trust / Feeling safe to learn: This means I'm also safe to fail—and to not know something. That's especially important in new areas or during crises. We play and explore—what in our life cycle we call *exploration*.

This is also the most crucial kind of safety for leaders. As McCormack says, every leader should say one of the following at least once a day: “I messed up.”, “I don't know.”, “Please help me.”

This phase aligns with **Brown's reliability**. A learning culture must consistently support people in developing new skills and ensure they can rely on their team and leaders to support their growth.

Trust: **Reliability**—people won't be shamed for mistakes; **Non-judgment**—mistakes are seen as learning opportunities

Deep Soft Skills: **Error-friendliness**—dealing with mistakes without blame; **Courage to be vulnerable**—asking questions, even if it might look “stupid”; **Curiosity**—the drive to explore and discover

👉 **Precondition:** Structures and culture that accept mistakes as learning steps.

👉 **Result:** Trust that learning is safe.

Level 3: Contributor Safety (*I'm allowed to contribute and express my ideas*)

Trust / Feeling safe to contribute: We are all equal and focused on the best solution—therefore, everyone can speak. (Or, as Jeff Bezos once advised: “Seniority speaks last.”)

Employees must feel that their contributions are valued and that everyone is held accountable for their actions. This mutual accountability builds trust and encourages more meaningful and courageous contributions.

Trust: **Accountability**—taking and sharing responsibility; **Boundaries**—clear roles and limits so contributions aren't misused

Deep Soft Skills: **Collaboration**—working together as equals; **Clarity & transparency**—contributions are visible and have impact; **Self-efficacy**—confidence in one's ability to make a difference

👉 **Precondition:** A fair stage where everyone is heard.

👉 **Result:** People experience self-efficacy → strengthening system trust.

Level 4: Challenger Safety (*I'm allowed to question and challenge the status quo*)

Trust / Feeling safe to challenge: This is the most demanding level—and one that has cost many people their jobs. It means questioning the product, process, structure, or culture—and that requires integrity.

Employees must trust that they can voice dissenting opinions or challenge existing practices without fear of negative consequences. Only then can **innovation** truly thrive.

Trust: **Courage**—daring to speak up even against resistance; **Integrity**—holding values even when it's uncomfortable; **Generosity**—assuming good intent behind criticism

Deep Soft Skills: **Courage for truth**—naming what's uncomfortable; **Systemic thinking**—framing criticism within the bigger picture; **Resilience**—handling setbacks or pushback; **Creativity**—proposing new paths instead of just pointing out problems

👉 **Precondition:** A mature system where criticism doesn't threaten belonging.

👉 **Result:** The organization becomes learning, innovative, and resilient.

In professional settings, each stage builds upon the previous one, creating a comprehensive framework for understanding and nurturing trust. For example, a new employee must first feel safe simply being themselves within the team. Once this foundation of trust is established, they can feel secure enough to learn new skills—and eventually to contribute ideas and challenge existing processes.

That's exactly the problem we see everywhere—in families and in relationships. We want the other person to open up, but when what they show doesn't match our expectations, we say, *"That's wrong."*

We judge—and we judge for the wrong reason. In doing so, we crush the fragile seedling of trust before it ever has a chance to grow.

When someone truly reveals themselves, deep inner pain or even self-destructive patterns may surface. At the right moment, we can gently mirror that back in a helpful way—but first, we must simply **see, listen, understand, and accept**.

If a person shows their authentic identity, it might just happen that it doesn't fit *me personally*. It's not my preference. Then we must learn—or acknowledge—that there may be **incompatibility**. That's especially difficult with children. And equally difficult within teams.

The same applies between genders. In those moments, we often fall back on **predictability**. Knowing how someone will behave can feel like familiarity—but it's not yet **trust**, because no real openness has taken place.

A practical example of this can be found in a tech startup where innovation is key. The CEO, having recognized the importance of **psychological safety**, introduces regular *"fail-forward"* sessions. In these meetings, team members can openly discuss what didn't work—without fear of negative consequences.

This practice not only fosters learning from mistakes but also deepens trust among team members and toward the organization as a whole.

Such an environment enhances both individual and team performance and contributes to the overall health of the company. Employees working in psychologically safe environments are more engaged, more innovative, and more likely to stay with their employer.

Response

"Between stimulus and response lies our freedom"
(Viktor Frankl and/or Stephen Covey)

Betrayal is the stimulus—but what is our response? The focus of this Deep Dive is indeed *betrayal*, but let's take a brief look at how we deal with it.

When we experience betrayal, we can respond in three ways:

- ▶ **"Trust is bad."** In this mindset, I criticize myself for the very principle of trust. The consequence is resignation, accompanied by thoughts like *"I have to toughen up even more."* It's a form of further dehumanization—**victim thinking** in a world perceived as hostile.
 - ▷ Resignation means saying, *"No one deserves my trust anymore."* My *trust advance* becomes zero, and so does my willingness to get to know people and build trust. My beliefs sound like, *"I know people,"* or *"They're all the same."*
 - ▷ The real lesson, however, would be to recognize that I'm still a **newbie** when it comes to trust—that I trusted someone who didn't deserve it, and either didn't notice or didn't want to.
 - ▷ Or perhaps I'm part of a **hostile system**. Then these collisions will keep happening, because power structures exist. That's why **OrgIQ** emphasizes the *Value Watchers*: because power and trust cannot coexist.
 - ▷ In any case, this reaction creates a *rotten-apple effect*—one bad experience infects the rest.
- ▶ **"Manipulation is bad."** This is a major step toward **maturity**. With this thought, I step out of the victim–perpetrator dynamic and focus on the specific behavior.
 - ▷ This is the move toward **accountability**. I see responsibility for the behavior (since betrayal is usually a **breach of values**) as lying with the perpetrator. I recognize the behavior as harmful, but I don't make a statement about the person. In other words, **I can separate person and action**.
- ▶ **"I see your pain."** This is the next level of maturity. Even if it sounds almost spiritual, it's actually a sober, holistic view of the human being. I no longer focus on fragments of the iceberg—I see the whole. And from that perspective, I can also see and name the cause.

Forgiveness

Only in this final state am I truly able to forgive. **Forgiveness** means that I acknowledge the betrayal and the disappointment—but remain willing to get to know the other person *again*.

An important insight: Betrayal shows that my model of the other person was inaccurate. There was something I didn't see—or didn't want to see.

Many people wish for forgiveness to mean *"let's just go back to how things were."* But that's impossible. Trust has been broken—however deeply. Betrayal lowers the foundation. With forgiveness², I start again *from that lower level*. Without forgiveness, it's over.

And if we truly place the human being at the center, then we must build organizations honestly and sincerely around these very principles.

² The term also has different connotations. We use it consciously as part of the relationship. We can also see it as part of the reaction, in the sense of "I will no longer carry your betrayal with me". Forgiveness is the social ability to put relationships before perfection. In other words, the ability to release the negative emotional attachment to a betrayal without denying what happened—in order to make relationships and cooperation possible again.

The Dynamics of Trust and Forgiveness

Trust is not a static state. It emerges, grows, can be shaken—and renewed again and again. A central key to this process is **forgiveness**. Forgiveness doesn't simply reset a relationship; it makes *development* possible—allowing us to move forward from mistakes instead of getting stuck in them.

Especially in professional settings, forgiveness means consciously moving past misunderstandings and setbacks without permanently burdening the relationship. This is particularly important in organizations that want to foster **innovation and courage**. Because whoever dares to try something new also risks failure.

Take this example: A software team develops a new feature, but the client is disappointed. Instead of searching for someone to blame, the team lead asks, *"What can we learn from this?"* That attitude creates psychological safety. It signals: *Mistakes are allowed—as long as we grow from them.* This strengthens trust and encourages the team to keep thinking boldly and trying new things.

In this way, **forgiveness becomes a tool that deepens trust**. When people know that missteps won't be met with harsh judgment, they bring more energy and commitment to their work.

Trust also depends on the understanding that relationships are constantly changing. Every interaction can strengthen or weaken them. Good leadership therefore means staying attentive—noticing tension early, addressing it, and opening paths to move forward together.

Here, forgiveness doesn't mean *forgetting*—it means clarifying constructively and reconnecting consciously.

In the end, we can see: trust spans everything—from its creation, to its daily care, to its restoration after it's been shaken. Those who intentionally cultivate **psychological safety and forgiveness** build organizations where collaboration not only functions, but becomes *alive and resilient*.

Repair

A simple *"I'm sorry"* can be a real step toward repair. But it's like crashing your car into a wall—saying *"I'm sorry"* won't restore it to its original condition. It's the same with another person, or with a relationship.

Just because the damage isn't visible doesn't mean it's gone. Ignoring it is dangerous, because the outer appearance can quickly drift away from the inner reality. And when that happens, we grow grey inside—frustrated, blocked, and resigned.

Forgiveness, then, is merely the declaration of a *willingness* to repair. After that, the relationship needs to go into the workshop—and how long it takes depends on how deep the damage runs.

In personal relationships, we often face the reality that some connections are so damaged that repairing them would cost far more than building a new one with someone else.

In a *friendly world*—one that's based on relationships—we're willing to invest that effort. But if I live in a *hostile world*, where my pain sits at the center, I won't. I'll say *"I'm sorry"* and assume that everything's fine again. Or I'll hope that time will heal it—at least if the other person keeps in touch.

In that (hostile) worldview, the outer layer is enough for me. As long as the facade looks okay, I'm satisfied—because I've never known real connection.

In the context of **organizations**, we don't have the option of cutting contact—unless one side, usually the *offending side*, holds the power to do so, as in the case of a termination.

That's why repair in organizations is even more important—and should be a significant part of team work. Because in teams and *solutions*, we will inevitably hurt each other—and even more so at the **interfaces** between solutions or organizational units.

In that sense, *hurt* is part of the getting-to-know process—if we want to meet each other authentically and truthfully.

Within that framework, **forgiveness** and **repair** become powerful *tools for growth*. That's how character develops, and how personal growth happens—not through avoiding friction, but by getting to know and healing each other's pain points.

For that, I need a **safe space**—ideally at *level 2 or higher*.

What do we do when trust keeps being broken—again and again—in the same place?

The first question is: **Why do I keep giving trust in the same situation?** Is it really trust—or do I simply have no choice?

And what about a **chronic liar or thief**?

The answer lies—again—in the *Response* chapter. Behavior is information. It tells us something about a person's worldview.

Just as we discussed with inner pain: your job is not to fix it, but to *see* it, to *recognize* that it has to do with that person's inner world—not with you.

And of course, these people are not yet capable of building real relationships. They don't trust themselves, they don't trust the system, and therefore, they can't trust others.

Trust As a Picture Story

Let's recall that trust consists of **Boundaries, Reliability, Accountability, Vault, Integrity, Non-Judgment, and Generosity**. This means that, in theory, we would need to track seven separate curves—one for each quality—and always take the *minimum* value as the actual trust level. However, that would be extremely confusing, so we'll represent it with a single curve for all seven traits combined.

Here, **trust** is the measure of *coherence* we attribute to another person—across those seven dimensions. The *minimum* of these values determines the current trust level shown.

As trust develops, it does so along *experienced reality*. That's what **Limbi** does: Limbi constantly checks whether words and actions are aligned—coherence over time.

Now we'll try to visualize that. And of course, it's always a challenge to represent something invisible and deep with simple curves—but let's give it a try.

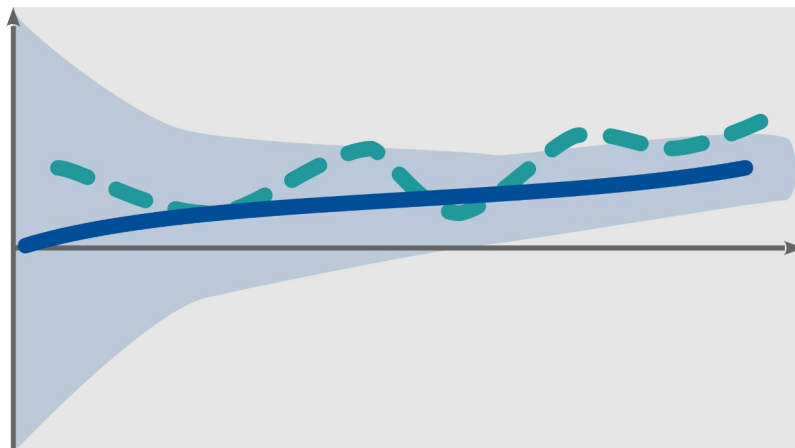


Figure 5: We see the inner state of a person: the blue area is the corridor of trust. In other words, the space of possibility. The blue line is the current level of trust. The turquoise line shows the perception of the other person (words and actions). In other words, the actual reference to trust.

To understand the illustration: we start with a **wide corridor of trust** (the light blue area). Things could go wonderfully—or terribly wrong. There's potential for deep trust or deep betrayal; we're completely open at this stage.

If we're *healthy*, we begin from a neutral point, but with a **positive basic assumption**. We observe how the person behaves (the **turquoise dashed line**), and our **trust level** (the **blue line**) adjusts accordingly.

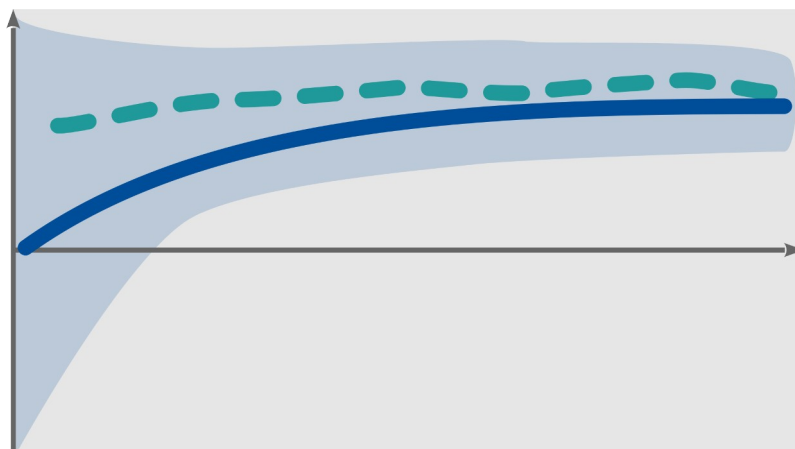


Figure 6: That is our wishful thinking, which never exists. Perfect people and we simply trust them completely.

Above this would be the absolute ideal—a perfect person and perfect trust. Everything is good. It's a bit like Disney: *"And they lived happily ever after."* A machine might manage that—but with humans, things are far more complex.

In the next example below, we start with our open attitude but encounter **drama**, which leads to “**negative trust**”—in other words, *justified mistrust*. That doesn’t mean the person is bad, but rather **hurt**—someone who constantly creates drama.

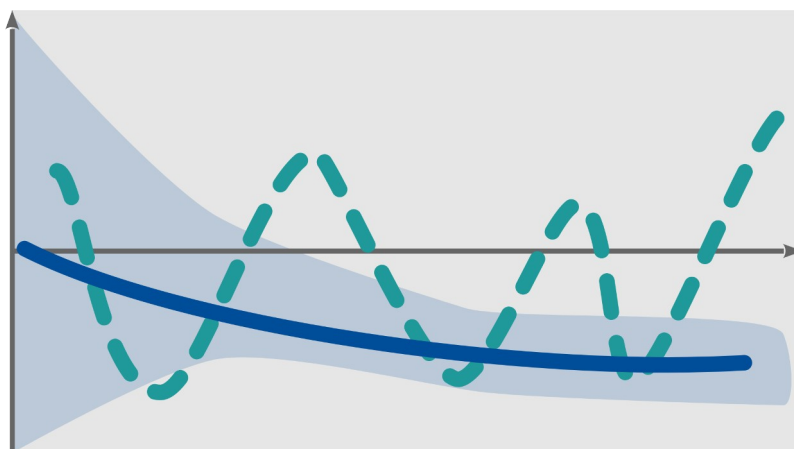


Figure 7: The sawtooth curve is typical for people who need drama. Emotions need to be in constant motion so that they feel, i.e. are alive.

This may look negative, but it’s completely okay. And if we feel disappointed, it’s usually because we were being selective—because we didn’t want to see or acknowledge certain things.

We can’t have a real relationship with these people, because **they are not yet capable of relationship**. It’s simply not part of their current program or experience. They need intense *feeling*—that’s why there’s drama: hope and disappointment. This is the basic pattern of **co-dependent children** (once they’ve grown up). Later in life, they’ll seek out people who generate drama. Not because they love it—quite the opposite—they hate it. But drama, the constant shift between hope and disappointment, is the familiar program.

So what can we do? **Love is the key**. Love (the red dotted line) represents our attitude toward the person’s **value and potential**. We can absolutely mistrust them (because we see reality)—but *especially then* still believe in their capacity to grow and unfold.

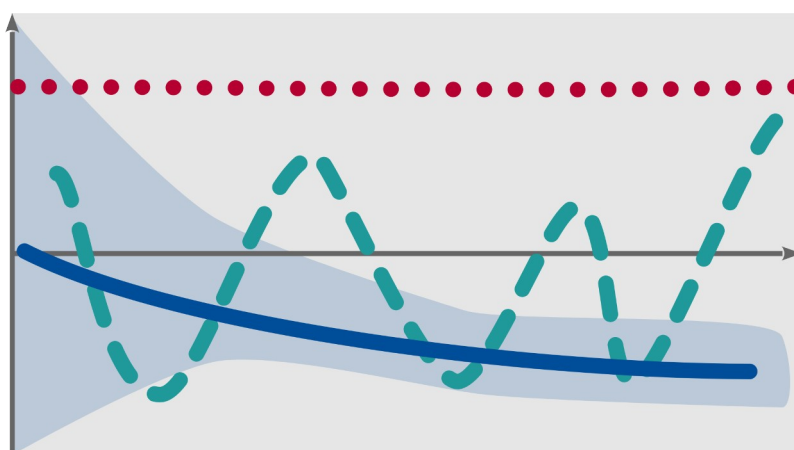


Figure 8: Love is completely independent of behavior because it only sees identity or potential. It sees the possibility of development. That’s why love also has hope and faith, but we have to separate it completely from relationship. Here we can love, but there is no relationship.

If it’s not **real love**—meaning the unconditional interest in the other person’s growth and healing—it can easily slip into dysfunction.

That’s why the example of **co-dependence** fits so well. As shown in the next image, alongside the trust level in Limbi, there’s another (gray dashed) line. That line represents our **behavior**—or more precisely, how we *wish* trust would be. We create a kind of *imagined trust*, which then causes **incoherence within ourselves**. This *pseudo-trust* is our **hopeless hope**—and often part of depression.

In co-dependence, I suppress the lack of trust (perhaps because I've never truly trusted anyone) and force myself to behave *as if* this person's potential were already realized. We confuse **love** with **relationship**.

In love, I may have no trust—but I remain **present**, fully aware that it is **not a relationship**.

We see this most clearly in **dysfunctional romantic relationships**. There, the “felt trust” or *romantic trust* (the gray line) clings to the *highs* and the “look, we had good times too” narrative. That sentence is typical of dysfunctional, abusive relationships. And we're not talking about victims and perpetrators here—it's a **transactional arrangement**.

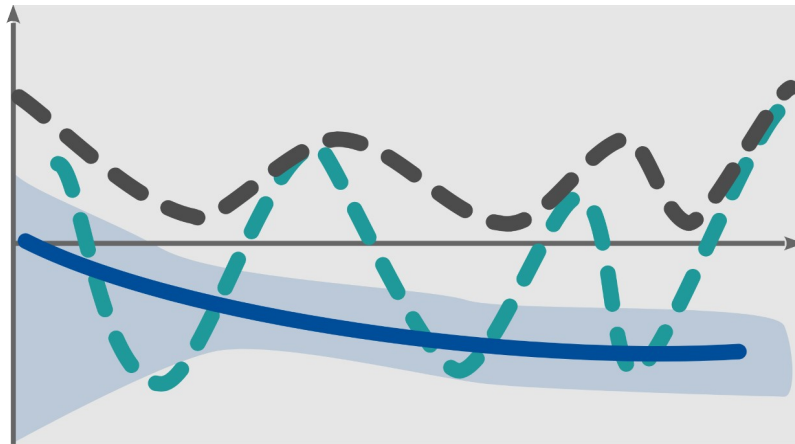


Figure 9: Grey line: Behavior in dysfunctional relationships, we deny, are co-dependent, or in vain hope. This also happens when I can't trust myself - then I also turn a blind eye.

Real trust in **Limbi** is tuned to the *minimum situations*—the lowest consistent level of safety we've experienced. This inner split—acting **against Limbi**, against our true feeling—gives an extra **emotional kick**. Such people live off **extreme emotional stimuli**: the more intense, the better. But that intensity doesn't mean it's good.

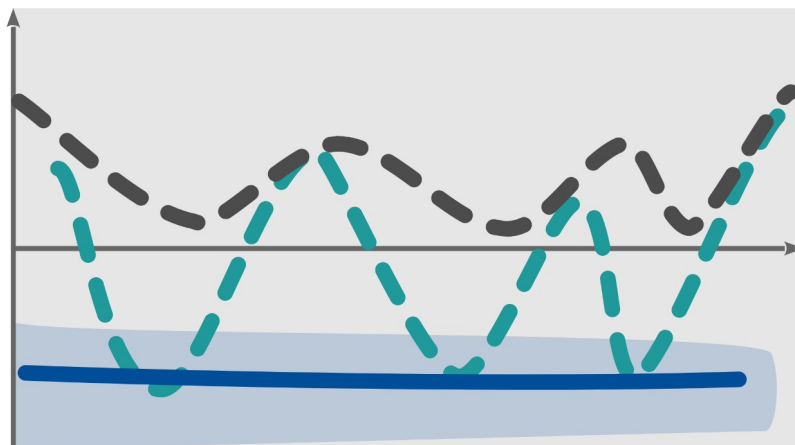


Figure 10: Resignation or a world view of mistrust. We have arrived in a hostile or dangerous world. Gecko constantly active.

On the other hand, this leads our **Limbi** to **resignation**. Limbi increasingly slips into the belief that “*there are no trustworthy people*,” simply because it can't gather any good data. The experiences are disappointing and frustrating—one part of us keeps choosing the same kind of people, while another part says, “*See? I knew it.*”

Learning From Falling in Love

We can't go into falling in love in detail here, but as the language already suggests, *verlieben* (to fall in love) is much like *verlaufen* (to lose one's way); from the outside it looks similar—but it's directionless.

What we're really doing is **external emotional regulation**, replaying a familiar pattern. Falling in love usually follows the cycle of **exaggerated expectation** and **bottomless disappointment**—and, of course, we create that ourselves.

We idealize the other person so that their attention gives us an immense sense of worth. The more worthless we feel inside, the greater the external validation we need (see [Egoism and Fear Patterns](#)). Naturally, no one can live up to that. So reality arrives as disappointment, and we move on to the next person.

If we find someone whose life already has drama, that's even better for us, because it keeps us oscillating between both poles.

And that's exactly what the curve looks like: we start in "soulmate mode"—we give trust even though there's no reason to. We treat the other person as if they had already earned that trust. The more closely we look, the more trust we lose.

When we start with inflated expectations ("cloud nine"), **disillusionment** is built into the program.

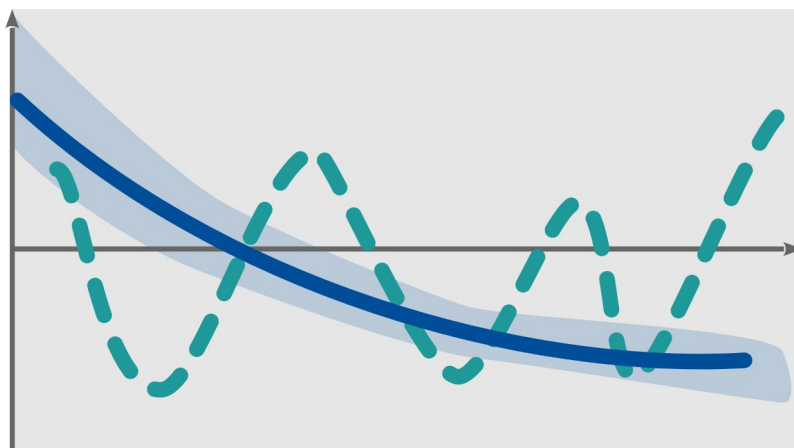


Figure 11: Falling in love with drama. Excessive expectation leads to disappointment

Now it gets a little crazy. If by chance we were to meet someone who actually fulfilled our initial expectations—as shown in the image below—our trust curve would still follow the same pattern. We would simply create the drama and disappointment in our own minds.

Because what we're really doing is **confirming our worldview**. The other person is just an instrument—an **NPC** (Non-Player Character, as in video games): a side character, ultimately without real significance.

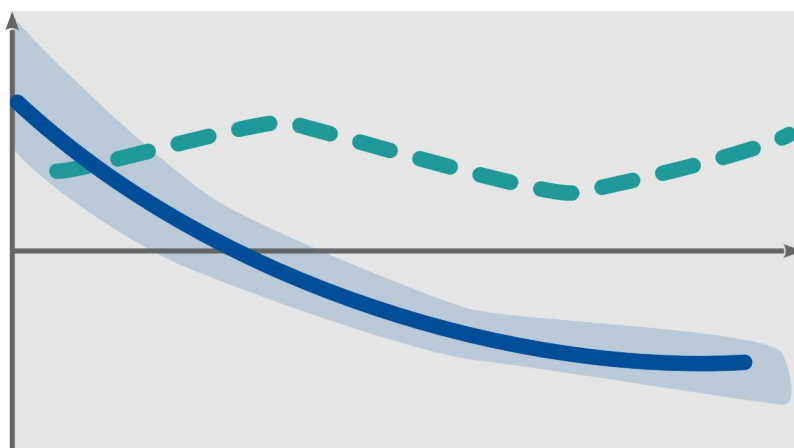


Figure 12: We go through with the program even when there is no reason to.

Breach of Trust and Forgiveness

After **self-deception**, we now turn to **betrayal**—the actual **breach of trust**. We'll look at it from the perspective of the **hurt (betrayed) person**. **Love (red)** is shown in the diagram to illustrate that love, as a basic attitude, remains untouched. The getting-to-know process is the same as before: we start at zero and build trust that aligns with the other person's behavior.

As a reminder, each line represents the seven dimensions of trust. Betrayal can occur in **any** of these areas.

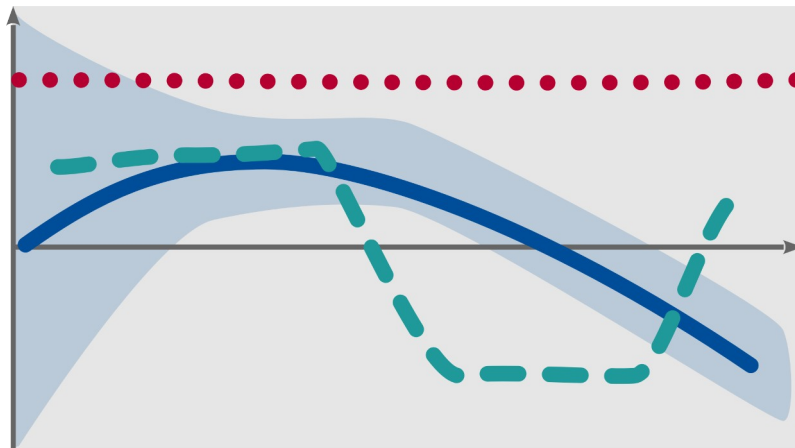


Figure 13: Breach of trust

We can see how **trust** gradually aligns with the **behavior line**. Then comes the **deviating action**—the **betrayal**. And our trust drops. Sometimes it falls sharply, but often we still hold on to **hope** and don't want to face reality. So the curve can vary in how steeply it declines.

Note: People who are generally distrustful—because they've been hurt many times before—will naturally meet new people with suspicion. No surprise there. But there's an interesting exception: they will give their *full trust* to those who will bring **drama and pain** into their lives.

They trust exactly the ones everyone else warns them about—*"Don't do it, it'll only end in pain."* And they do it because **pain is their reality**. They recreate the familiar drama in their lives and use the people who help them play it out.

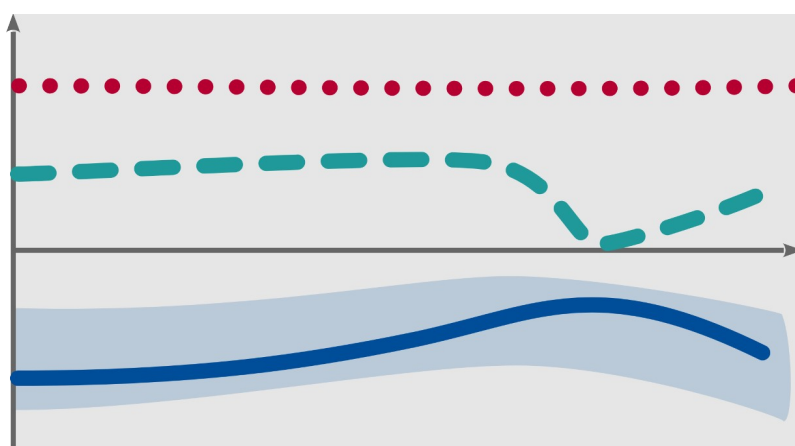


Figure 14: Forgiveness is the willingness to try again. It is not a reset.

Forgiveness is the request and the willingness to try again—to rebuild trust. But as we can see, the **trust corridor** (the light blue area—the space of possibilities) is never as open as it was the first time. **Forgiveness is not a reset**. The actual **trust level** (blue) rebuilds much more slowly than before; we're more cautious now. And since we're human, we'll continue to "betray" one another—often unconsciously. After being hurt, we simply react with greater sensitivity.

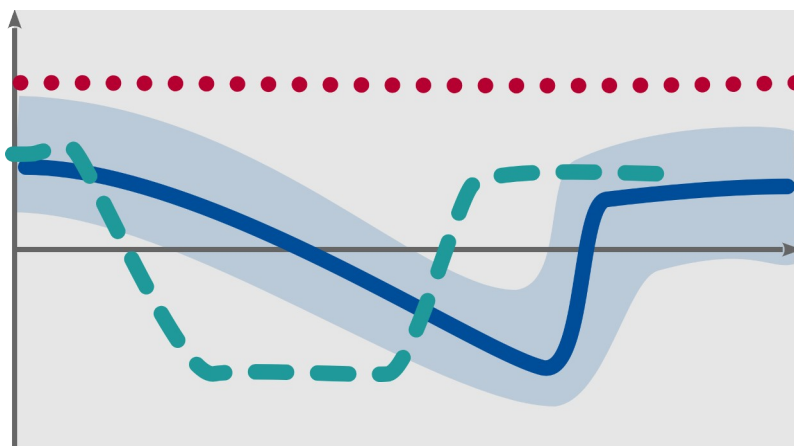


Figure 15: The expectation towards forgiveness.

Perception after betrayal differs greatly between the two sides. The person who caused the hurt usually doesn't feel any change in trust—for them, everything seems just as before. That's often why they expect a *reset* after forgiveness instead of investing in *repair*.

This makes such relationships difficult, because the **trust levels remain misaligned** for a long time—they're **asymmetric**. The effort required on the behavioral level to return to the original level of trust (which directly determines the *quality* of the relationship) is much greater. It can take **three to five times longer** than it did the first time.

That's why it's fair and legitimate to ask whether the quality of the relationship justifies that effort. If it's a **real relationship**, it's worth it—and it's possible. But in **non-relationships**, it's usually the end. Especially when love is missing and the focus was only on validation or self-enhancement. In that case, everything that follows loses its meaning—it becomes **worthless and interchangeable**. The value is gone.³

Sadia Khan from *Sadia Psychology* once said that women lose respect for men who give them another chance after they've cheated. Her reasoning, in short, is this: When a man takes a woman back after she's been unfaithful, it signals weak boundaries and neediness. As a result, attraction and respect decline—he's seen only as a *temporary stop* or *safe harbor* until she moves on. In her view, strength lies in clear consequences. That's why Khan emphasizes boundaries and accountability over "rewarding" disrespectful behavior.

She certainly has a point—but her argument is a bit too general:

a) She doesn't distinguish between a *relationship* and an *irrelationship*. There can always be hunger or desperation on both sides, unnoticed and unspoken. But within a real relationship, the value system is different: I value the relationship itself—it's not about the other person's worth. We are all equally valuable and should never be reduced to our actions.

b) In an *irrelationship*, contact exists only on the surface—as a transaction. There's no bridge between the hearts. There's actually nothing to repair. And Khan's argument applies here: when there's dependency based on validation. The woman doesn't seek closeness or connection but rather a *strict owner*. Through this jealous, controlling owner, she gets her sense of worth. The more jealous and controlling he is, the more valuable she must be—or so it feels.

What's missing in *irrelationships* is an understanding of the **dynamics of betrayal**. Most people believe forgiveness or a second chance is a *reset*—but it isn't.

c) We actually need to understand the **hunger-and-desperation dynamic** behind infidelity. Cheating happens only when fundamental needs are unmet. The one who cheats is merely the **indicator of the pain** within the relationship—the one who breaks first under the pressure of that pain.

³ This is somewhat illogical because I have created the supposed value of the other person (the exaggeration) myself. It's all in my head. I could do the same thing again. It happens in roller coaster relationships, as we heard in the beginning, but mostly we lost the fun.

Lessons

The way we meet each other in the small moments both shapes and reveals our worldview. Social overload and alienation make life difficult for us. The foundation for *great betrayal* is laid in the *small betrayals*—the moments when we become alienated from ourselves and know no safe space other than our pain. Because our pain—that, at least, we can rely on. It will prevail, no matter the resistance.

When we feel empty inside, we constantly need validation from the outside. We act in order to *appear* or to *possess*. We earn our worth as human beings through performance. We are always under pressure to prove ourselves, and the moment we stop achieving and allow ourselves to rest, we feel worthless.

(Of course, this trick only works on the surface—our Limbi can't really be fooled.)

And to gain that external validation, we must *fit in*—conform to outer patterns and expectations. But as **Brené Brown** reminds us, *fitting in* is the opposite of what humans truly seek. It's the opposite of a **safe space**, because a safe space is about *true belonging*.

The better we understand the interplay between **Neocortex** and **Limbi**, the more compassion we can have—for ourselves and for others. Unfortunately, there's no simple fix. Limbi needs its pack—its safe space—and when the Neocortex tries to fake that, it may be well-intentioned, but it only makes things worse.

Intelligent organizations are places where relationships run through Limbi, not the Neocortex. They are places where I don't need masks, roles, or facades. Places for authentic people. For real trust.

At first, that's exhausting—because we've grown used to polished surfaces, to forced friendliness and artificial harmony. But once we rebuild trust—in ourselves and in others—our perspective shifts. We begin to *recognize our worth*.

And that worth then becomes the reason for our actions. What we have and what we can do simply express who we are.

The difference from living in “proof mode” might seem trivial—but it's actually the difference between seeing the world in **deficit** (as hostile) or in **abundance** (as friendly).

Deficit thinking keeps our space for solutions small, while abundance thinking expands it many times over.

And it's within this fundamentally different way of relating—whether on the surface, driven by pain, or at a deeper level, asking together “*What is best for the system?*”—that we find the difference in productivity and energy that **friendly teams** have.

If this topic feels new, it can seem overwhelming—even a bit esoteric. But the same would be true for any other field of science: inter-process communication in distributed systems, environmental perception in autonomous driving, quantum mechanics—anything.

The only difference is that *this*—interpersonal psychology—concerns us all, every single day. And we've grown poor at applying it.

We *should* all know how to build relationships, trust, forgiveness, and repair—but “should” doesn't help.

It's easy to dismiss this topic with “*we've never needed that before.*” That's everyone's right. But the thought “*I don't need to change—everyone else does it this way*” won't hold for long. Just because everyone has cancer doesn't mean it's not a problem. On the contrary—it's the chance to get ahead, to become healthy and strong.

If we do nothing, nothing will happen. New generations will bring new ideas—but they'll starve within the old structures. And that would be a shame.

Smart means using our full potential—technically *and* humanly.

It's time to learn **trust**.