

# Insights from the Stillpoint January 2023



## A necessary risk

It is easy to feel overwhelmed in our era of fake news and growing social polarisation. We are living through “a particularly disruptive period in human history” with significant challenges including rising inflation, extreme weather events, geoeconomic confrontations, and social division, according to the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) Global Risks Report 2023, released this month.

The WEF’s Global Health and Healthcare Strategic Outlook 2023 also identifies current and ongoing threats to population health such as widening health inequities, shortages of healthcare professionals, and the impact of the current and predicted future pandemics. Health and wellbeing around the globe are also influenced by the same economic, climate, political and social factors identified in the WEF’s Global Risks Report.

Both reports note that trust is an essential factor in resolving such challenges. Without trust, resolving conflicts, securing supply chains, addressing inequalities, and strengthening civil society will be that much more difficult. Lack of trust also makes healthcare less effective as it can diminish people’s willingness to engage with providers or follow treatment regimens.

Yet trust appears to be in decreasing supply. The Edelman Trust Barometer 2023 continues the trend of previous years in documenting the decline of trust in institutions. In a majority of countries surveyed, trust in governments, NGOs and media has fallen, with business the most trusted of the four sectors at 62%. Australia’s level of trust in each of the four sectors declined by between 4 and 7 points from 2022 to 2023.

Trust is an essential determinant in building and maintaining good health. People with lower trust in the health system are less likely to be vaccinated, less likely to have regular check-ups, and less likely to support public health measures. Interestingly, trust appears to be a mitigating factor even in the presence of social disparities and regardless of quality of care, according to Edelman’s 2022 special report on trust and health.

Our ability to live and age well cannot be separated from the geopolitical, economic and social health of the world in which we live. Ultimately, our future - individually and as a global population - is dependent upon our ability to work together and to care for one another.

# Insights from the Stillpoint January 2023, continued



Studies have shown that when people have equitable opportunities to discuss and air their views (rather than simply receiving the views of social media influencers) there is a natural movement towards the opposing view. That is, when people talk over issues together, they seem to gravitate towards a middle ground. This suggests that one of the ways of overcoming social polarisation is actually to talk with people – those who agree with us and those who don't. To do this requires that we are willing to take the risk of listening openly and with humility about important issues that affect us all. It also takes time.

As we start the new year in this “disruptive period in human history”, each of us can choose to be part of the solution to the challenges we face. As a recent UN article stated, “trust is integral to the functioning of any society.” It is necessary at the global and national levels, but equally as important at the local level. Trust has to be earned, and where it does not yet exist, demonstrating trustworthiness can lead to effective collaboration even as a trusting relationship is being developed.

This is not just good practice for governments or businesses. Evidence from one of the world's longest-running research studies, published this month, indicates that our relationships are predictors of our future patterns of health and ageing. (A summary of this research can be found here in a 2015 TED talk.) Building trusting relationships can make each one of us a little healthier, while also creating networks for cooperation on big issues.

Trust and relationship are integral to our personal and global thriving. These are essential elements of human life and can't be replaced by artificial intelligence or digital communication. Each of us can contribute to building trust in our workplaces, neighbourhoods, and families. We can demonstrate trustworthiness to those with whom we live and work; we can also take a risk and trust others, day by day weaving a fabric of relationships that can lead to better health, social, economic and political outcomes for all. Seen this way, trust is the only antidote to the polarisation and division that surrounds us.



*Linda*