

What If We Trusted Each Other Again?

Rebooting 2025: A Humanist Call to Reclaim Trust

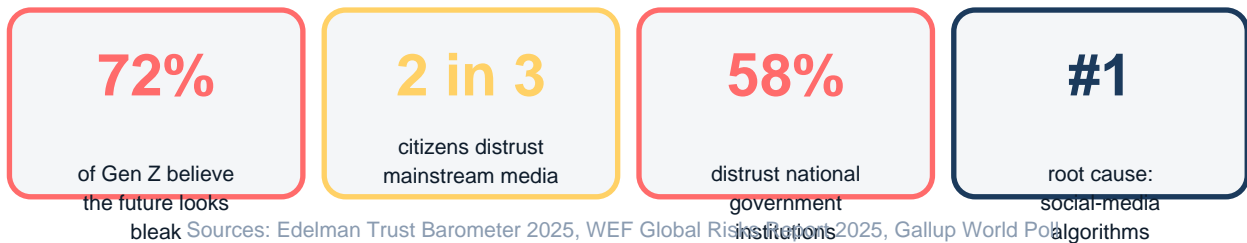
01 THE TRUST CRISIS

Why eroding trust is the defining challenge of our time

Trust is the invisible infrastructure of civilisation. Without it, markets stall, democracies fracture, and communities dissolve. Yet over the past decade, trust in governments, public organisations, media, science, and in each other has been dissolving at an alarming rate.

“Too much technology might be responsible — we increasingly spend more time with screens than with people, and our news is fed to us by algorithms designed not to inform, but to generate the most clicks.”
 — Gerd Leonhard, Futurist & Humanist

Trust Decline — Key Indicators (2024–2025 surveys)



Sources: Edelman Trust Barometer 2025, WEF Global Risks Report 2025, Gallup World Poll

Current Trust Levels by Institution



Figures are illustrative composites from Edelman, Gallup & EU Barometer 2024–2025

02 ROOT CAUSES

The forces driving mistrust in a tech-driven world

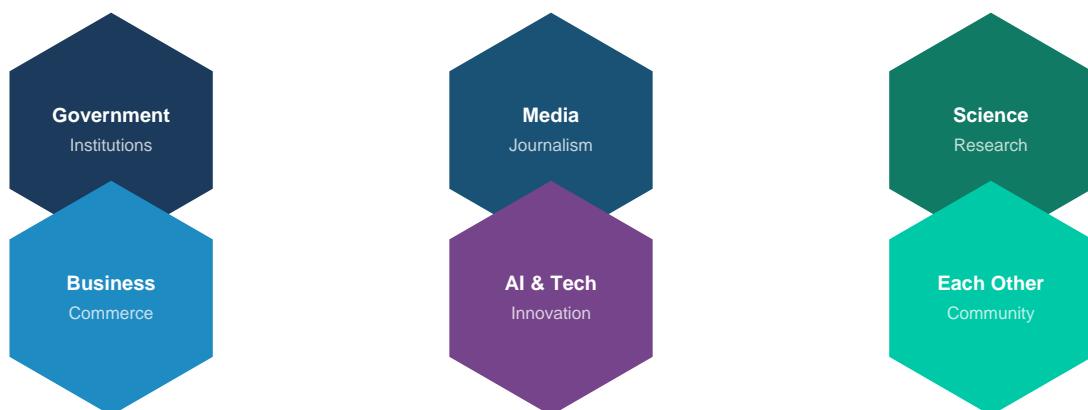
Gerd Leonhard identifies a convergence of structural forces that have systematically dismantled the foundations of social trust over the past decade:

- **Social-media algorithms:** Designed to maximise engagement, not truth. Outrage, division, and fear generate more clicks than nuance and collaboration.
- **Digital screen dominance:** As time spent online displaces face-to-face interaction, empathy and community bonds weaken — the very substrate of interpersonal trust.
- **Information overload & deepfakes:** When everything could be fake, nothing is trusted. AI-generated disinformation accelerates the death of shared reality.
- **Techno-accelerationism:** The Silicon Valley gospel that more technology automatically means more progress. Andreessen-style accelerationism downsizes human judgment and sidelines democratic deliberation.
- **Democratic backsliding:** Authoritarian and populist leaders exploit mistrust, weaponising it to erode institutions that hold power accountable.
- **Climate emergency anxiety:** Existential uncertainty breeds short-termism and cynicism — fertile ground for despair rather than collaborative action.

“Democracy is in decline while authoritarian and populist leaders gain ground. Is democracy likely to die in a digital-first world?”

— Gerd Leonhard

Six Pillars of Trust — All Under Pressure



Each hexagon represents a domain where public trust has declined sharply since 2015

03 THE COUNTER-ARGUMENT

Why Leonhard believes trust — and a Good Future — is still possible

Contrary to the dominant dystopian narrative — especially among younger generations — Gerd Leonhard argues that human history is in fact rich with examples of extraordinary collective collaboration:

Historical Example	What it proves about trust
Nuclear non-proliferation	Nations that could have destroyed each other chose restraint and diplomacy.
Eradicating smallpox	A global public-health campaign succeeded across borders and ideologies.
The Paris Climate Agreement	190+ nations signed a binding commitment to shared planetary stewardship.
The Internet itself	Built on open, collaborative protocols freely shared with the world.
COVID-19 vaccines	Record-breaking scientific collaboration produced vaccines in under a year.

Leonhard's key insight is that **humans are not inherently selfish or untrustworthy**. The evidence of history, anthropology, and game theory all point to cooperation as our species' greatest competitive advantage. The crisis is one of *architecture* — of the systems, incentives, and algorithms we have built — not of human nature itself.

We are to be architects of the future, not its victims.

— Buckminster Fuller (cited by Gerd Leonhard)

04 THE ROADMAP TO REBUILD

Concrete actions Leonhard proposes for rebooting trust

Rebuilding trust requires both a **new narrative** and **decisive action**. Leonhard outlines three interconnected domains where change is both urgent and achievable:

1

Reboot Social Media

Redesign platform incentives to prioritise truth and meaningful discourse over outrage and engagement metrics. Algorithmic transparency must become law.

2

Rekindle Public Media

Fund and protect independent, public-interest journalism as a democratic necessity — the immune system of an informed society.

3

Regulate AI Responsibly

Ensure AI enhances human capability rather than dehumanising us. Mandatory ethics audits, human-in-the-loop requirements, and AGI red lines.

4

Steer Toward Protopia

Move beyond utopia (naive optimism) and dystopia (paralysing fear) toward Protopia — incremental, intentional progress that puts people first.

5

Build New Trust Infrastructure

Digital identity, verifiable provenance for media, and community deliberation platforms that reward quality over virality.

6

Reclaim the Narrative

Counter techno-pessimism with evidence-based optimism: share stories of collaboration, resilience, and human ingenuity every single day.

05 THE VISION — THE GOOD FUTURE

What a trust-rich world could look like by 2030

Leonhard's ultimate aspiration is what he calls **The Good Future** — not a techno-utopia delivered by algorithms, but a human-centred future shaped by conscious choices, democratic values, and a renewed belief that *people can be trusted to collaborate*.

People, Planet, Purpose, Prosperity

The four pillars of a regenerative economy that measures success beyond GDP.

AI as augmentation, not replacement

Technology serving human flourishing — tools in service of meaning, not efficiency alone.

Protopia as the operating system

Continuous, measurable improvement guided by ethics rather than disruption for its own sake.

Trust as competitive advantage

Organisations and nations that invest in trustworthiness outperform those built on surveillance and control.

“TRUST ISN'T DIGITAL. Humans CAN collaborate. The Good Future is entirely possible — but it requires us to be intentional architects, not passive consumers of the systems that shape our world.

— Gerd Leonhard, March 2025

About Gerd Leonhard

Gerd Leonhard is a Futurist, Humanist, author of *Technology vs. Humanity*, filmmaker, and CEO of The Futures Agency in Zürich. He advises governments, Fortune 500 companies, and NGOs on the intersection of technology, ethics, and human flourishing. His credo: **People, Planet, Purpose and Prosperity.**