

The Wheel of Disillusionment

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The Wheel of Disillusionment is the process by which trust and respect disintegrate between a leader or organization, the “Idealized Party” (IP), and colleagues or a partner organization, the “Disillusioned Individual” (DI). It usually begins with a mistake being made or is perceived to have been made by the IP, which triggers trauma and conflict in the DI. The DI then forms a group of colleagues for validation and support. This group then generates a narrative about the IP, and then selectively chooses data that supports the narrative, dismissing any data that does not. This group may then coordinate actions to try to rectify the problem, such as going to a higher-up supervisor or board of directors. By then, the IP is hurt and confused and tries to get feedback and reestablish relationship, but is met with resistance. Unable to see what they did wrong, the IP continues the pattern of behaviors, which perpetuates the cycle. These stages may happen in different orders, and some stages may be skipped altogether.

