

**Interpersonal Trust:
What is it and how can it be increased?
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Behavior-based Safety (BBS) is essentially a brothers-sisters keepers process whereby line workers work in teams to develop checklists of safe and at-risk behavior, use these checklists to observe the work behaviors of each other, and then provide constructive feedback from their observations in both one-on-one and group situations (e.g., Geller, 2001b, c; 2005; Krause, Hidley, & Hodson, 1996; McSween, 2003). There is substantial evidence that this approach to injury prevention is dramatically effective (Sulzer-Azaroff & Austin, 2000), often moving companies beyond their injury-rate plateaus. However, BBS cannot be effective without interpersonal trust, not only between coworkers who apply an observation and feedback process on each other but also between line workers and the managers who must support such a safety process (DePasquale & Geller, 1999). This paper explores the meaning of interpersonal trust and then offers some practical strategies for building interpersonal trust in a work culture.

What is Interpersonal Trust?

The first definition of "trust" in my *American Heritage Dictionary* (1991) is "confidence in the integrity, ability, character, and truth of a person or thing" (p.1300). "Interpersonal" merely limits this definition to "person" or situations between people. This definition refers to behavior (as in "ability") as well as internal or person-based dimensions (as in "integrity" and "character"). Thus, one might be confident a person means well, but might doubt his or her ability to complete the intended task. In this case, the individual's intentions are trusted

but his or her ability to reach stated outcomes are not. There is lack of confidence in the person's capability to make good on his or her promises. This viewpoint occurs when well-intentioned managers or safety leaders verbalize missions, goals, or policies that are perceived as idealistic or unrealistic. For example, when rewards or penalties are not delivered consistently and fairly, people's interpersonal trust can be limited to only intentions, not actions.

It is also possible for people to believe in the ability of another person, but to mistrust this individual's intentions. This occurs, for example, when workers are not informed of the events or decisions leading up to a policy change which affects their work life. After a change in protocol is sprung on workers without warning or rationale, management's intentions might become suspect. People might perceive their leaders have the intellect and skills to make things happen, but be concerned about what will happen. For example, workers might question whether management has their welfare in mind when they deliberate about changes in equipment design or production quotas.

Consider a possible disconnection between intention and capability when management establishes a safety incentive program that offers everyone a prize or financial bonus if no one gets hurt over a certain period of time. This contingency actually puts pressure on people to cover up an injury. When a person reports an injury, everyone loses their reward. Workers might logically perceive this kind of incentive program as a scheme to keep the injury numbers down without really caring about their personal welfare. Thus, management's

intentions are mistrusted, and the very kind of reports and interpersonal conversations needed for incident analysis and injury prevention are inhibited.

Interpersonal Trust Among Coworkers

All of the examples used so far to distinguish between trusting "intention" versus "ability" refer to management. In other words, the focus was on whether a worker has confidence in the intention and/or ability of a manager or supervisor. Interpersonal trust in a work culture should also refer to the extent people ascribe good intentions and abilities to their peers. In other words, a line worker might have confidence in the ability of a coworker to perform a job safely and competently, but might be wary of telling him or her certain things because mistrusting that person's intentions. For example, a coworker might think, "My partner might use the information against me for personal gain – to get the promotion before me." Alternatively, a worker might trust the intentions of a team member ("He would never take advantage of me"), but lack confidence in his capability on a particular job assignment ("I'm sure he will do his best, but I'm afraid his lack of experience means his best will not be good enough").

An effective behavior-based observation and feedback process requires a high degree of interpersonal trust among coworkers. To accept and use behavioral feedback, a person must believe the feedback is accurate. If this feedback comes from a coworker, as is the case for behavior-based coaching, the worker being observed must have confidence in the coach's ability to obtain the information used for behavioral feedback. This boils down to having

confidence in both the tool used to record behavioral information *and* the observer's ability to use this tool correctly.

It is not enough, however, to believe in the validity of an observation and feedback process and in the ability of a coworker to carry it out. The intentions of an observer must be trusted. The person observed must believe the information will be used *only* for personal protection against injury and never as grounds for punishment.

An Interpersonal Trust Scale

This discussion of interpersonal trust distinguishes two dimensions of trust: a) confidence in the *intentions* of others, and b) confidence in the *ability* of others. From the viewpoint of an employee evaluating the overall interpersonal trust in a work culture, these dimensions can refer to either other coworkers or management. This fourfold classification system was used by Cook and Wall (1980) to derive the 12-item questionnaire given in Figure 1. This scale can be readily administered to a discussion group or work team in order to stimulate interesting and instructive group discussion. It is an excellent way to increase people's understanding and appreciation of interpersonal trust.

<Insert Figure 1 About Here>

The participants can score their own surveys as follows. Except for two items (2 and 12), the higher the scale value the greater the perception of interpersonal trust. Since Items 2 and 12 are negatively phrased, these need to be reverse scored. In other words, for these two items, the number selected is first subtracted from "8," so a "1" becomes "7," a "2" becomes "6," and so on.

Totaling the 12 item scores for a particular survey (with Items 2 and 12 reverse scored) yields an estimate of an individual's perception of overall interpersonal trust in his or her work culture. An overall trust index can be obtained by calculating the mean survey score of a representative sample of workers. The four different dimensions of trust introduced here can be estimated by referring to Figure 2. Specifically, Items 1, 7, and 12 address trust in the intentions of management, while Items 3, 5, and 8 assess faith in the intentions of peers (or coworkers). Confidence in the capability of management is assessed with Items 2, 4, and 6, while trust in the ability or actions of peers is measured by Items 9, 10, and 11.

<Insert Figure 2 About Here>

There is nothing special about the wording of these items. One should feel free to re-word a particular item if different language fits better with a particular work culture. Plus, new items could be added or substituted for existing items. It is noteworthy that this scale was developed to measure interpersonal trust from the viewpoint of an hourly worker. With only slight adjustments in wording, however, the scale can estimate interpersonal trust from a manager's perspective.

In Summary

The fourfold classification system for interpersonal trust is an important contribution of the Cook and Wall survey tool provided here. In industrial settings, it is critical to distinguish between perceptions of interpersonal trust for

management versus one's coworkers, as well as between other people's intentions versus their actions.

Suppose everyone trusted each other's intentions with respect to health and safety. Then when an at-risk behavior, a "near miss," property damage, or an injury occurs, the focus would be on the workers capability to act safely under certain circumstances. This would lead to fact finding (not fault finding) regarding ways to improve behavior (not correct a "bad attitude"). Then a behavior-based coaching process would be trusted as a method for obtaining information relevant to correcting environmental and system factors that facilitate at-risk behavior or human error.

Building a Trusting Culture

With this operational definition of "interpersonal trust," let's address the more important issue. How can interpersonal trust be increased throughout a work culture? Because answers to this intervention question were not available in the research literature, a qualitative research approach was applied. Specifically, I called together a group of my research students and colleagues to discuss interpersonal trust. After explaining the concept of interpersonal trust, as defined here, I asked the question "How can we increase interpersonal trust among the members of our various research teams?" Then I facilitated a "brainstorming" discussion among these nine individuals. When all suggestions were listed, we assigned an "intention" or "ability" label to each.

After generating a long list of comments related to the building of interpersonal trust, the group refined the list with a consensus process. I asked

for suggestions regarding the elimination or combination of list items. During this process it was necessary to remind ourselves we were not looking for items that made us believe another person could be trusted in intention or ability. Instead, the assignment was to suggest ways to increase perceptions of interpersonal trust among groups of people.

After almost two hours, we arrived at a seemingly useful list of proposals for increasing interpersonal trust. Before reporting the findings from our focus group, I want to share a critical lesson. The brainstorming process was extremely valuable. We not only arrived at a list of trust-building strategies, we enhanced feelings of group cohesion and ownership around this important concept. We faced head-on the concept of interpersonal trust and the need to increase it. We explored the variety of things each of us can do to build interpersonal trust in our work culture.

I suggest this brainstorming session as an intervention to initiate the building of interpersonal trust in a work setting. The list of trust-building proposals will likely be similar to ours, but it will be owned by your group. This increases the probability people will consider the recommendations for increasing interpersonal trust. The following summary of our session could be used as a "kick off" for your meeting. For example, you could ask for reactions to the seven key words gleaned from our discussion, and make your own additions, substitutions, or refinements. Owning a set of recommendations for building interpersonal trust is an ideal first step toward encouraging trustworthy behavior.

The Seven "C's" of Trust-Building

Near the end of our two-hour brainstorming session on interpersonal trust, the group encapsulated our various suggestions for facilitating interpersonal trust with seven words beginning with the letter "C". Consequently, the seven C-words listed in Figure 3 capture the essence of our focus group. The phrases associated with these words summarize the key definitions given in both the *American Heritage* (1991) and *New-Merriam-Webster* (1989) dictionaries.

<Insert Figure 3 About Here>

Communication

How we communicate with others is obviously a key determinant of interpersonal trust. What people say and how they say it influences our trust in both their capabilities and their intentions. One's expertise is displayed by the person's words -- spoken or written, and by the confidence and credibility linked to those words. It has been said many times that the way something is said, including intonation, pace, facial expressions, hand gestures, and overall posture, has greater impact than what was actually said. Indeed, how a person communicates information can have a greater impact on trust than the information itself. (Insert stuff from good to great – or brutal facts, etc.)

Consider that most people don't ask enough questions in their interpersonal conversations. Yet, asking is the key to learning how to improve the human dynamics of work and family life. By asking for feedback we establish a context for interpersonal trust and competence-building. By asking for another

person's opinion, we show we care and set the stage for open and frank communication. By asking for advice we gain information and boost the other person's self-esteem. And, by asking for support, we increase the chances of actually getting it. Let's consider some strategies for asking.

Nondirective asking. Nondirective counselors carefully avoid personal judgment or interpretation while listening patiently and empathically to their client's stories. They respect the unique and distinctive views of every individual, and they do not make comparisons or generalizations between the stories of different people. In the same way, nondirective asking occurs when someone's opinion or personal view is solicited without any expectation, judgment, or interpretation. With sincere interest and appreciation, you merely ask for another person's outlook.

This is the kind of asking that shows you care. It facilitates open discussion and builds interpersonal cohesion. The key is to be nondirective (Rogers, 1957; 1977). With no ulterior motive, the one doing the asking shows genuine regard for the other person's perspective. The purpose is to learn more about another person's perceptions, sometimes to understand or improve a particular circumstance.

Developing a safety process. Nondirective asking can be quite useful in obtaining information relevant to developing a safety process, while gaining buy-in at the same time. An open and frank discussion about certain safety guidelines can lead to a customized protocol workers willingly follow because they had an

opportunity to offer input when procedural steps were derived. And this all started with genuine nondirective asking.

Addressing at-risk behavior. What about an observation of at-risk behavior? Can nondirective asking be helpful under these circumstances? First, consider that telling workers they are not following certain safety guidelines can feel insulting and put people on the defensive. Sure, they might quickly fall in line, but how will they feel about such reactive compliance? Will they feel responsible and self-motivated? I doubt it.

On the other hand, a nondirective question can put the focus on personal choice and self-accountability. For example, an observer could remark that certain personal protective equipment is not being used, and ask, “In your opinion, why is that PPE unpopular?” Or, it might be more suitable to ask, “What can I do to facilitate the use of that PPE?”

The key is to ask with genuine and empathic concern. Assume there are legitimate barriers to the safe behavior you want to see and there are ways to remove at least some of these barriers. Who knows better how to address this problem than the workers themselves? Also, believe that most of the workforce wants to help prevent personal injury. With these reasonable presumptions, nondirective asking seems to be a most sensible way to approach the observed occurrence of at-risk behavior.

Directive asking. Sometimes more directive asking is called for, meaning it's useful to ask for something specific. You might ask for behavioral feedback, or you might request support through certain resources, personnel assistance, or

opportunities for professional development. Consider these guidelines for directive asking.

1. Be genuine and sincere. Drop the act of over-competence. No one is perfect, and everyone can improve. So whether you're asking for feedback or support, show a willingness to be vulnerable. Sure, you're good at what you do, and you make things happen with less-than-optimal resources. But, you could do more with the kind of support you're asking for. Speak from your heart with genuine desire to make a bigger difference.

2. Be results-oriented. When you ask for support be sure to project the beneficial results that might be expected. Consider the question most people ask following a request for their services, if only to themselves, "What's in it for me?" You're motivated to ask because of potential consequences, and people are more likely to honor your request when they see the possibility of beneficial consequences coming their way.

Keep it simple, but be direct. In essence, translate your motivation for asking into the kinds of positive consequences that could appeal to those from whom you're asking support. Also, realize people are motivated by more than money, and your request is not impulsive. You've considered the costs and benefits for the support you need, and you're confident the positives outweigh the negatives. Your challenge is to sell this view to the person whose support you need. So while you're vulnerable, you're also convinced the support is advantageous from both a personal and organizational perspective.

3. Be concise and precise. In these hectic days of undersourcing and multitasking, time is precious. Thus, it's critical to be prepared to ask concisely and precisely. Specify what you want and when. Then, explain clearly why you want it, in terms of both short and long-term positive consequences.

Make your thoughtful request direct and to the point. List the benefits as definitively as possible. Then listen attentively and patiently for a response. Wait for a complete reaction before mounting a defense, if needed. Usually, you'll only get questions, which you can answer precisely and concisely because you anticipated them and prepared answers beforehand.

4. Be good-natured. When the reaction is disappointing, resist the urge to argue, unless this is a last-resort request and the support is necessary now or never. But even under these circumstances, you need to sustain a congenial atmosphere if you have any hope of reversing the decision.

If your request is proactive and the support can be delayed, ask for an opportunity to revisit your request at a later date. In other words, if you sense a negative response to your asking, don't enable a commitment to "No". The more often a person says "no" to a request, the more difficult it is for this person to say "yes". This is especially true if the context of the request becomes confrontational. Thus, it's important, but not easy, to remain as friendly and cordial as possible in the face of a disheartening decision.

5. Be persistent. Your first unsuccessful asking for support provided an invaluable needs assessment. You became aware of costs you hadn't anticipated and benefits you exaggerated, at least in the eyes of the person who

must honor your request. So now you have an opportunity to re-group and ask again. At least you remained good-natured and avoided conflict.

Bottom Line: Keep the door open for re-asking, and persist when you know you're right. Timing is often critical. On another day, the climate and relevant person states might be more aligned with your asking. And you will likely make a more powerful request, especially if you consider each of the recommendations offered here.

Caring

When you take time to listen to another person's perspective, you send a most important message – you care. When people believe you sincerely care about them, they will care about what you tell them. They trust you will look out for them when applying your knowledge, skills, and abilities. They trust your intentions because they believe you care.

Actively caring. Years ago I proposed that certain psychological states or expectancies affect the propensity for individuals to actively care for the safety or health of others (Geller, 1991, 1996a, 2001a, b, c, h). Furthermore, I have theorized that certain conditions (including behavioral antecedents and consequences) can influence these psychological states, and thereby enhance the probability an individual will emit caring-related behavior.

This notion that beliefs, expectancies, or person states influence one's propensity to perform in certain ways is analogous to the behavior analysis concept of "establishing operations" (Agnew, 1998; Michael, 1982). For example, behavior therapists have shown significant behavior change in both

normal and developmentally-disabled children as a function of simple manipulations in the social context (Gewirtz & Baer, 1958a, b) or the temporal proximity of lunch and response-consequence contingencies (Vollmer & Iwata, 1991). Thus, the point that certain operations or environmental conditions (past or present) can influence (or establish) psychological states within humans, which in turn affects their behavior, is not new. Here I relate this indirect approach to behavior change to actively caring, behaviors that surely build interpersonal trust.

<Insert Figure 4 About Here>

Figure 4 depicts a model I have used for more than a decade to stimulate discussions among industry employees of specific situations, operations, or incidents that influence their willingness to actively care or participate actively in safety improvement efforts. Factors consistently listed as affecting self-esteem include communication strategies, reinforcement and punishment contingencies, and leadership styles. Participants have suggested a number of ways to build self-esteem, including: a) providing opportunities for personal learning and peer mentoring, b) increasing recognition for desirable behaviors and personal accomplishments, and c) soliciting and following-up a person's suggestions.

Common proposals for increasing an atmosphere of belonging among employees have included decreasing the frequency of top-down directives and "quick-fix" programs, and increasing team-building discussions, group goal setting and feedback, group celebrations for both process and outcome achievements, and the use of self-managed (or self-directed) work teams.

In the management literature, empowerment typically refers to delegating authority or responsibility, or sharing decision-making (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). In contrast, the psychological perspective of empowerment focuses on the reaction of the recipient to increased power or responsibility. In other words, this view of empowerment requires the personal belief “I can make a difference,” and this belief is strengthened with perceptions of personal control (Rotter, 1966), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997) and optimism (Scheir & Carver, 1985; Seligman, 1991). Such an empowerment state is presumed to increase motivation (or effort) to “make a difference” or go beyond the call of duty, and there is empirical support for this intuitive hypothesis (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Barling & Beattie, 1983; Ozer & Bandura, 1990; Phares, 1976).

Employees at my actively-caring training sessions have listed a number of ways to increase empowerment, including: a) setting short-term goals and tracking achievements; b) offering frequent supportive and corrective feedback for safety-related process activities rather than for only outcomes such as total recordable injury rate; c) providing opportunities to set personal goals, teach peers, and chart “small wins” (Weick, 1984); d) teaching employees basic behavior-change intervention strategies (e.g., response feedback and recognition procedures), and providing them time and resources to implement and evaluate intervention programs; e) showing employees how to graph daily records of baseline, intervention, and follow-up data; and f) posting response feedback graphs of group performance.

There are actually a number of empirical studies, mostly in the social psychology literature, that support the individual components of the actively caring model depicted in Figure 4. The bystander intervention paradigm (Darley & Latané, 1968) has been the most common (and rigorous) laboratory technique used to study variables related to actively caring. With this approach, one or more of the person states presumed to affect actively caring (i.e., self-esteem, empowerment, and belonging) were measured or manipulated among subjects, and subsequently these individuals were placed in a situation where they had an opportunity to help another individual who presumably encountered a personal crisis (e.g., falling off a ladder, dropping personal belongings, or feigning an illness or heart attack). The latency in attempting to help the other person was the primary dependent variable, studied as a function of a subject's social situation or personality state. Reviews of this research literature as directly relevant to the actively caring model are available elsewhere (Geller, 1996; 2001a, b, c).

Direct tests of the Actively Caring Model. Geller, Roberts, and Gilmore (1996) developed a "safety culture survey" (SCS) for industrial application which includes measures of each person factor hypothesized to influence actively caring. This actively caring scale includes adaptations from standard measures of self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), self-efficacy (Sherer et al., 1982), personal control (Nowicki & Duke, 1974), optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), and group cohesion (Wheeless et al., 1982).

The survey also includes direct measures of willingness to actively care from an environment focus (“I am willing to pick up after another employee in order to maintain good housekeeping”), a person focus (“If an employee needs assistance with a task, I am willing to help even if it causes me inconvenience”), and a behavior-change focus (“I am willing to observe the work practices of another employee in order to provide direct feedback to him/her”). Respondents’ reactions to each of the 154 items of the survey are given on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Highly Disagree” to “Highly Agree”.

Analyzing the SCS results from three large industrial complexes showed support for the actively caring model (Geller et al., 1996; Roberts & Geller, 1995). The personal control factor was consistently most influential in predicting willingness to actively care. Belonging scores predicted significant differences in actively caring propensity at two of three plants. Self-esteem and optimism always correlated highly with each other, and with willingness to actively care, but only one or the other predicted independent variance in actively caring propensity. For these studies, our survey did not include a measure of self-efficacy. The multiple regression coefficients and sample sizes were .54 (n=262), .57 (n=307), and .71 (n=207) at the three plants, respectively.

In a field test of the actively caring model, Roberts and Geller (1995) studied relationships between workers’ actively caring on the job and prior measures of their self-esteem, optimism, and group cohesion. More specifically, employees (n= 65) were instructed to give their coworkers special “actively caring thank-you cards” (redeemable for a beverage in the cafeteria) whenever they

observed a coworker going beyond the call of duty (i.e., actively caring) for another person's safety. Those employees who gave or received thank-you cards scored significantly higher on measures of self-esteem and group cohesion than those who did not give nor receive an actively caring thank-you card.

In an unpublished study, five of my students asked individuals (n= 156) who had just donated blood at a campus location to complete a 60-item survey which measured each of the five person factors depicted in Figure 4. The high return rate of 92% was consistent with an actively caring profile, but most remarkable was that this group scored significantly higher ($p < .001$) on each of the five subscales than did a group of students (n= 292) from the same university population (Buermeyer, Rasmussen, Roberts, Martin, & Gershenoff, 1994).

Candor

We trust people who are frank and open with us. They don't beat around the bush. They get right to the point, whether asking for a favor or giving us feedback about our participation. When these individuals don't know an answer to our questions they don't ignore us or hem and haw about possibilities. They tell us outright when they don't know something, and they tell us they'll get back to us later. When they get back to us soon with an answer, our trust increases in both their intention and ability.

Collins (2001) reports that companies that made the transition from good to great face brutal facts through open communication. They promote a work culture in which employees engage in rigorous debate, analysis, and continuous learning to uncover and report the objective facts of current reality. A climate of

truth telling is created in part by supervisors leading with questions -- not answers, and seeking facts -- not faults.

Collins claims “one of the primary ways to de-motivate people is to ignore the brutal facts of reality” (p. 89). According to Collins’ research, the great companies deal with as much adversity as other companies. The difference is the great companies uncover the brutal facts of the situation and confront them head-on. The result: They emerge from their troubles stronger than before.

The second dictionary definition of "candor" – freedom from prejudice – reflects another important aspect of trust-building. When a person's interactions reflect prejudice or the tendency to evaluate or judge another person on the basis of a stereotype or preconceived notion about group characteristics, there is reason to mistrust this individual. People are rightfully suspicious about this person's ability to evaluate others and in his or her intention to treat people fairly. Even when the prejudice is directed at another person, an individual’s trust in this person decreases. Right?

When someone gives an opinion about another person because of race, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, or birthplace, this person's ability to make people-related decisions should be mistrusted. One should wonder whether this person's intention to perform on behalf of another person will be biased or tainted by a tendency to pre-judge others on the basis of overly simple and usually inaccurate stereotypes.

Consistency

We usually trust the intentions of people who confess openly their inability to answer a question. Our trust in them might increase when they tell us they'll get back to us right away with a response. However, what happens when we must wait a long time for a reply? Or suppose you never hear from them again. Now what happens to interpersonal trust? Obviously, the topic here is consistency, a word everyone in our discussion group mentioned as a determinant of interpersonal trust.

Perhaps the quickest way to destroy interpersonal trust is not to follow through consistently with interpersonal agreements. A promise is essentially a behavior-consequence contingency. It specifies a certain consequence will follow a certain behavior. Whether the consequence is positive or negative, trust decreases when the behavior is not rewarded or punished as promised.

One of the problems with a punishment contingency (or "discipline" as typically referred to in industry) is that it is difficult to implement fairly and consistently. It is easy to state a policy that anyone not using appropriate personal protective equipment will be "written up," but it's quite difficult or perhaps impossible to carry out this contingency consistently. What about safety incentive programs that offer everyone a reward when no injuries occur over a designated time period and participants observe coworkers getting hurt but not turning in an injury report? Similar "trust-busting" effects occur with "safe employee of the month" programs that select winners according to nonobjective criteria or don't consider everyone consistently as a potential award recipient.

Commitment

People who are dependable and reliable are not only showing consistency, they are demonstrating commitment. When you follow through on a promise or pledge to do something, you tell others they can count on you. You can be trusted to do what you say you will do. Making a commitment and honoring it, builds trust in both intention and ability.

A good way to demonstrate commitment is to tell a personal story that reflects behavior consistent with the commitment. This also increases credibility. The listeners have reason to trust the speaker's intention to give accurate and useful information.

Whenever I give presentations on the psychology of safety, I try to work in one or more personal experiences. I've done many things over the years in an attempt to promote safety, and when a story fits the theme of my talk, the audience hears firsthand evidence of my commitment. When I discuss the value of using safety belts, for example, I can relate any of a number of interventions I've tried over the years to encourage people to buckle up – from setting up safety-belt incentive programs at numerous industrial and community sites to teaching my young daughters to hold up a "Please Buckle Up – I Care" flash card whenever we stopped at an intersection (Geller, 2001b).

Consensus

Demonstrating personal commitment to a mission, purpose, or goal helps to build group consensus. When a group of people reach consensus about

something, all group members agree on a decision or course of action and are willing to support it. Leaders or group facilitators who develop consensus among people build interpersonal trust. Consensus-building is the opposite of top-down decision making, and is not the same as negotiating, calling for a vote and letting the majority win, or working out a compromise between two differing sets of opinions

Whenever the results of a group decision-making process comes across as "win-lose," some mistrust is going to develop. A majority of the group might be pleased, but others will be discontented and might actively or passively resist involvement. And even the "winners" could feel lowered interpersonal trust. "We won this decision, but what about next time?" Without solid back-up support for the decision, the outcome will be less than desired. Without everyone's buy-in, commitment, and involvement, we can't trust the process to come off as expected.

So how can group consensus be developed? How can the outcome of a heated debate on ways to solve a problem be perceived as a win-win solution everyone supports, instead of a win-lose compromise or negotiation headed to depreciate interpersonal trust? Answers are easier said than done. Consensus-building takes time and energy. It requires candid, consistent, and caring communication among all members of a discussion or decision-making group. In other words, when people demonstrate the C-words discussed here for building trust in interpersonal dialogue, they also develop consensus and more interpersonal trust regarding a particular decision or action plan.

Rees (1997) describes six basic steps to reaching a consensus decision.

Briefly, these are:

- *Set the decision goal.* What is the aim or purpose of the consensus-building exercise? What will be the end result, one way or another, of the group's decision process?
- *Spell out the criteria needed to make the group decision worthwhile.* What qualities or characteristics of the decision are needed to reach a particular goal? Which criteria are consistent with the team's ultimate purpose or mission? What are the budget constraints? What principles or quality standards are relevant? What will a decision provide for the team? What criteria or restrictions are essential, and what criteria are desirable but not absolutely necessary?
- *Gather information.* What information is useful for making the decision? Where is this information and who can provide it? How should the information be summarized for optimal understanding and consideration?
- *Brainstorm possible options.* What are the variety of possible solutions? Does everyone understand each option and its ramifications? How does everyone feel about the possibilities? Has everyone had a chance to voice a personal opinion?
- *Evaluate the brainstormed options against the group's criteria.* Which solutions appear to meet the "must have" criteria? Which options

seem to meet the "nice but not necessary" criteria? To what degree will each option meet both the "necessary" and "desirable" criteria?

Can certain solution options be combined to meet more criteria?

- *Make the final decision as a team.* Which option or combination best meets all of the "necessary" criteria and most of the "desirable" criteria? Who has reservations and why? How can we resolve individual skepticism? Can everyone support the most popular option? What can be altered in the most popular action plan to attract unanimous support and ownership?

Obviously, building consensus around a group process or action plan is not easy. There's no quick fix for doing this. It requires plenty of interpersonal communication, including straightforward opinion sharing, intense discussion, emotional debate, active listening, careful evaluation, methodical organization, and systematic prioritizing. But on important matters, the outcome is well worth the investment. When a solution or process is developed that every potential participant can get behind and champion, the degree of interpersonal trust needed for total involvement has been cultivated. Involvement in turn builds personal commitment, more interpersonal trust, and then more involvement.

Character

This final C-word means different things to different people. Generally, a person with "character" is considered honest, ethical, and principled. People with character are credible or worthy of another person's trust because they display confidence and competence in following a consistent set of morally-sound

beliefs. They are believable and trusted because they know who they are; they know where they want to go; and they know how to get there.

All of the strategies discussed here for cultivating a trusting culture are practiced by a person with character. Therefore, this C-word epitomizes interpersonal trust from both the intention and capability perspective. I'd like to add a few additional trust-building methods that also fit this category, although they naturally overlap with other C-words discussed here.

First, individuals with character are willing to admit *vulnerability*. The leaders of good-to-great companies studied by Collins (2001) displayed this quality. They realize they aren't perfect and need behavioral feedback from others. They know their strengths and weaknesses, and find exemplars to model. By actively listening to others and observing their behaviors, individuals with character learn how to improve their own performance. If they're building a high-performance team, they can readily find people with knowledge, skills, and abilities to complement their own competencies. They know how to make diversity work for them, their group, and the entire organization.

Having the courage to admit your weaknesses means you're willing to apologize when you've made a mistake and to ask for forgiveness. There is probably no better way to build trust between individuals than to own up to an error that might have affected another person. Of course you should also indicate what you will do better next time, or you should ask for specific advice on how to improve.

While admitting personal vulnerability is a powerful way to build interpersonal trust, the surest way to reduce interpersonal trust is to tell one person about the weakness of another. In this situation it's natural to think, "If he talks that way about her, I wonder what he says about me behind my back." It's obvious how criticizing or demeaning others in their absence can lead to interpersonal suspiciousness and mistrust.

"Back-stabbing" leads to more "back-stabbing," and eventually to a work culture of independent people doing their own thing, fearful of making an error and unreceptive to any kind of performance-based feedback. Key aspects of behavior-based safety --team building, interpersonal observation, and coaching -- are extremely difficult or impossible to implement in such a culture. Under these circumstances it's necessary to first break down barriers to interpersonal trust before implementing a behavior-based observation and feedback process.

Start to build interpersonal trust by making a personal commitment and implementing a team policy of no "back-stabbing." People with character, as defined here, always talk about other people as if they can hear you. In other words, to replace interpersonal mistrust with trust, never criticize other individuals behind their backs.

In Conclusion

The fourfold classification system for interpersonal trust is an important contribution of the Cook and Wall survey tool. In industrial settings, it's instructive to differentiate perceptions of interpersonal trust as targeting

management or one's coworkers, and with regard to another person's intentions versus his or her actions.

The research literature offers limited guidance on how to build interpersonal trust throughout a work culture. Therefore, it's necessary at this point to resort to common sense or to what people conclude from personal experience. The most frequent recommendation I've heard from consultants and practitioners regarding the facilitation of interpersonal trust is to be trustworthy. "If you want others to trust you," they say, "you need to trust others, and behave toward others in ways that warrant their trust." This is certainly sound advice, but a critical question remains, "What kinds of behaviors are trustworthy?"

The seven C-words reviewed here are easy to remember and although their meanings overlap to some extent, each offers distinct directives for trust-building behavior. **Communicating** these guidelines to others in a **candid** and **caring** way opens up the kind of dialogue that starts people on a journey of interpersonal trust-building. Then people need to give each other **consistent** and **candid** feedback regarding those behaviors that reflect these trust-building principles. With **character** and **commitment**, they need to recognize others for doing it right and offer corrective feedback when there's room for improvement. And of course it's critical for the recipient of such behavior-based feedback to accept it with **caring** appreciation and a **commitment** to improve. Then the feedback recipient needs to show the **character** to thank the observer for the feedback, even when the **communication** is not all positive and is not delivered well. The feedback recipient might offer feedback on how to make the behavior-

based feedback more useful. Dialogue like this is necessary to build **consensus** and sustain a journey of continuous trust-building. Such a journey is essential for an effective interdependent coaching process that prevents unintentional injury.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. A brief survey to assess interpersonal trust (adapted from Cook & Wall, 1980).

Figure 2. A fourfold classification of interpersonal trust, with reference to specific questions in the trust survey in Figure 1.

Figure 3. Seven C-words that define ways to enhance interpersonal trust (adapted from Geller, 2002).

Figure 4. The person states proposed to predict one's willingness to actively care for the safety and health of others (adapted from Geller, 2001b).

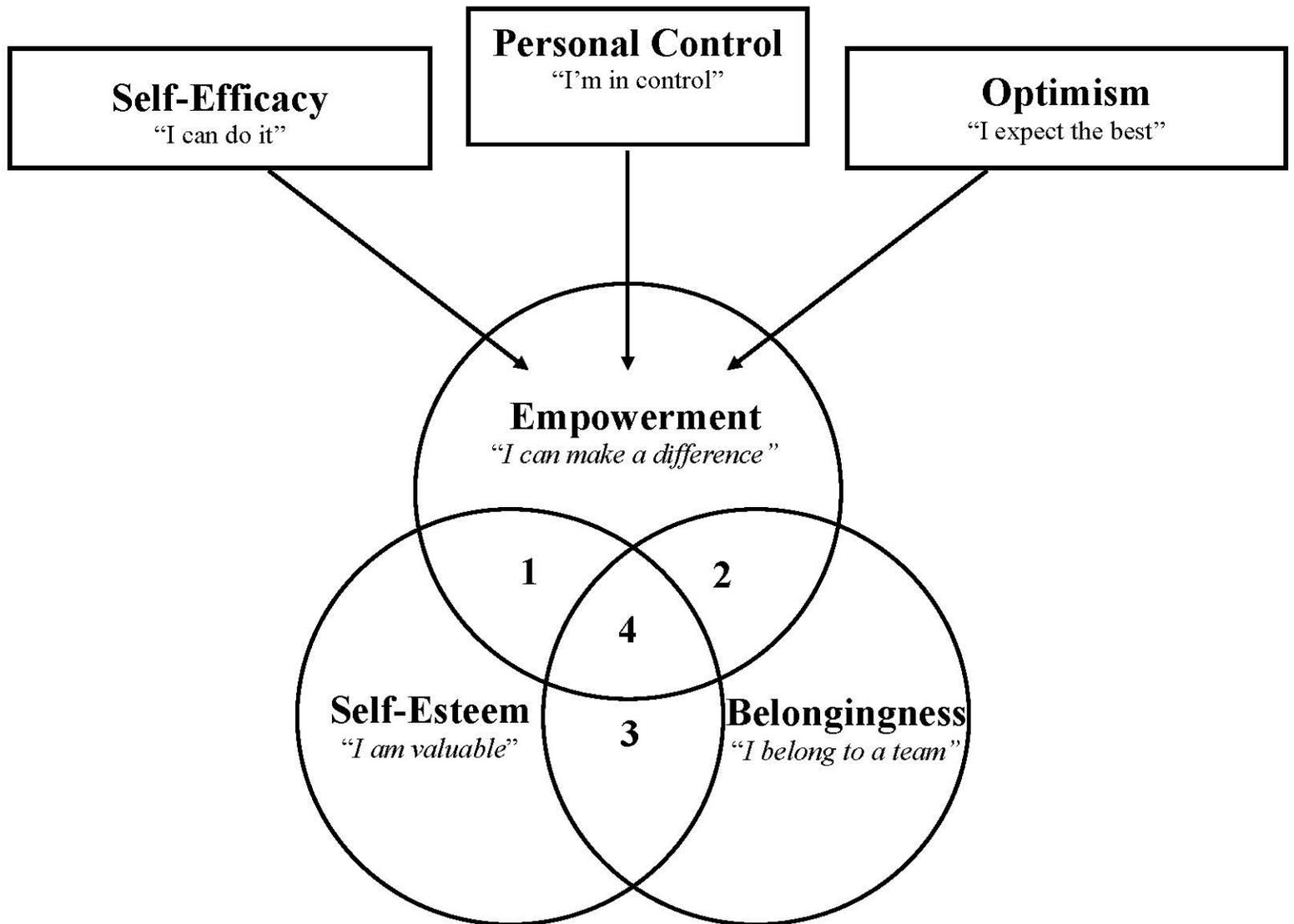
The statements below express opinions that people might hold about the confidence and trust that can be placed in others at work, both fellow workers and management. Circle the scale number next to each statement to indicate how much you agree with it.

	Highly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Highly Agree
1. Management is sincere in its attempts to understand the workers' point of view.	1	2	3	4	5
* 2. Our company has a poor future unless it can attract better managers.	1	2	3	4	5
3. If I got into difficulties at work I know my coworkers would try to help me out.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Management can be trusted to make sensible decisions for the company's future.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I can trust the people I work with to lend me a hand if I need it.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Management seems to do an effective job.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel quite confident that the company will always treat me fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Most of my coworkers can be relied upon to do as they say they will.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I have full confidence in the skills of my coworkers.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Most of my fellow workers are able to do their work well even when supervisors are not around.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I can rely on other workers not to make my job more difficult by doing careless work.	1	2	3	4	5
* 12. I would not be surprised if management tried to gain advantage by deceiving the workers.	1	2	3	4	5

* When totaling your score, subtract the scale numbers for this item from 6.

	Management	Coworkers
Intention	Questions 1, 7, 12	Questions 3, 5, 8
Ability	Questions 2, 4, 6	Questions 9, 10, 11

1. **Communication** -- exchange of information or opinion by speech, writing, or signals.
2. **Caring** -- showing concern or interest about what happens.
3. **Candor** -- straightforwardness and frankness of expression; freedom from prejudice.
4. **Consistency** -- agreement among successive acts, ideas, or events.
5. **Commitment** -- being bound emotionally or intellectually to a course of action.
6. **Consensus** -- agreement in opinion, testimony, or belief.
7. **Character** -- the combined moral or ethical structure of a person or group; integrity; fortitude.



1. I can make a valuable difference.
2. We can make valuable differences.
3. I'm a valuable team member.
4. We can make valuable differences.