



talking about...

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... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

Control, Trust and Culture

"Trust is the lubrication that makes it possible for organizations to work."

... Warren Bennis (b. 1925) US educator, futurologist, advisor and writer

As we have written in the past, we distinguish the "authority dynamic" as the basis of all relationships. You may recall that this dynamic refers to how we constantly give authority to others and ourselves. In doing so, we accept the decisions and declarations others make that affect our future and vice versa.

Given that we want our declarations to create a future as we want it to be, we have a vested interest in being given the authority to validate our declarations. Accordingly, through the ages, human beings have developed key strategies to establish their authority. These can be seen in two distinct paradigms - the "paradigm of control" and the "paradigm of trust".

The paradigm of control stems from the declarer's premise that they must find a way to ensure the listener validates their declaration regardless of other concerns. Its hallmarks are that authority is established by force, threat or manipulation, which can be seen as employing strategies such as emotional blackmail, lying or any other approach where the listener feels they have little or no choice but accept the speaker's declaration. This approach assumes the speaker will have their way.

The paradigm of trust comes from the declarer having a different premise. They will be granted authority if they and others see it as creating the best future for all and the relationships with those involved play a significant part in designing that future. In this paradigm, authority is given when the speaker is trusted by the listeners as being the best person to make the declaration.

These paradigms require different capacities in the speaker. The paradigm of control only needs a self-centred view of the world - "*this is what I want, how do I get it*". On the other hand, the paradigm of trust requires the capacity to interpret the world from other people's points of view. To do so, the speaker has to consider how to take care of the relationships with those involved as well as creating future that works for them. In other words, the paradigm of trust requires the ability to deal with greater complexity.

It is useful to look at the impacts of these paradigms on the relationships of those involved. You may recall that we distinguish four aspects of trust - sincerity, competence, reliability and involvement. Our assessments of involvement - that the other person has a level of care for us - underpin the extent of our trust. When it becomes apparent to us that others are utilising a paradigm of control to gain authority, it can diminish our assessment that they care about us. In other words, authority based on the paradigm of control diminishes trust.

What has this to do with culture? As you most likely are aware, many organisations have an eye on their culture. There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that more constructive cultures provide for better outcomes in a financial sense as well as for the well being of those involved. When we look at how authority is maintained in a constructive culture, it is based in the paradigm of trust. On the other hand, aggressive cultures are based in the paradigm of control.

It follows that if we are to build a constructive organisational culture, one of the key questions to be constantly asked whether we are engaging with each other, or creating policies, systems and processes is, "*How will this help us build trust?*"

We invite you to consider how this applies in your organisation. Do your policies, processes and systems focus on control or building trust? We believe you may well find exploring this question to be a rich source of opportunity to help develop a more constructive culture.

"It is impossible to go through life without trust: that is to be imprisoned in the worst cell of all, oneself "

... Graham Henry Greene (1904 - 1991) English novelist

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Bad Language ...

A mother was working in the kitchen listening to her son playing with his new electric train in the living room. She heard the train stop and her son saying "All of you sons of bitches who want off, get the hell off now, cause this is the last stop! And all of you sons of bitches who are getting on, get your asses in the train, cause we're going down the tracks."

The horrified mother went in and told her son, "We don't use that kind of language in this house. Now I want you to go to your room and you are to stay there for TWO HOURS. When you come out, you may play with your train, but I want you to use nice language."

Two hours later, the son came out of the bedroom and resumed playing with his train. Soon the train stopped and the mother heard her son say, "All passengers who are disembarking the train, please remember to take all of your belongings with you. We thank you for riding with us today; and hope your trip was a pleasant one. We hope you will ride with us again soon."

She hears the little boy continue, "For those of you just boarding, we ask you to stow all of your hand luggage under your seat. Remember, there is no smoking on; the train. We hope you; will have a pleasant and relaxing journey with us today."

As the mother began to smile, the child added, "For those of you who are pissed off about the TWO HOUR delay, please see the bitch in the kitchen."

"You have to pay attention to the moment and make it the best it can be for you. I've been trying to do that. It's really made a major difference for me. I'm a happier person."

... Tracy Chapman (b. 1964) US singer and songwriter

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