

# Supervisors as Safety Leaders

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## Conversation at Work!

Face-to-face communication is the most effective form of engagement.

Lots of research has shown us that supervisors are the most important link to employee engagement. In safety, they are the primary communicator and reinforcer of safety as a priority. They cannot play this important role effectively if they don't understand or believe in the importance of

conversation and relationship building.

*Conversation at Work!* is our program constructed to help supervisors understand

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People are motivated to act based on their perceptions and self-interests.

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Is an internationally recognized leader in the field of leadership and organization development. Invited as a keynote speaker from Bahrain to Latin and North America, she has designed and implemented leadership development programs for major corporate and government clients, including General Electric, Honeywell, NRC, World Bank, Altamed, Aramco, Exxon-Mobil, Southern California Edison, Johnson & Johnson, UC Berkley, and Lawrence Livermore Laboratories. In addition, as president of Carrillo & Associates, Inc., Carrillo works as a management consultant with family owned businesses. Through effective and inspirational management coaching, Carrillo outlines fresh approaches to improving productivity, enabling the progress of diversity, and boosting the bottom line.

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## Practical on the Job Application

No trust = Poor communication = Failure

As trust decreases so does communication; lack of communication leads to organizational failure.

Most mistrust is a result of managers making decisions based on the material evidence they see such as cost, quality, time equipment, behavior or output.

Low trust and blocked communication are due to management's failure to pay sufficient attention to relationships and it's close companion, power.

Relationships and power influence the emotions, feelings and thinking that ultimately determine how people choose to behave.

Working on the soft stuff is much harder than working on the concrete stuff and results are not immediately measurable. This creates more resistance to working with the very elements that will improve trust and communication levels.

*Face-to-face communication, conversation and dialogue are the tools to manage relationships and influence power and politics.*

Building the trust necessary to maintain the free flow of information needed to run a successful organization is a

permanent task and challenge. Conversation and face-to-face communication are the primary means of influence. Trust is rooted in both the interpersonal dimension, the culture and is primarily influenced by power and politics.

The *Trust and Open Communication (TOC) Iceberg* is a metaphor for the relative importance for managing the visible and invisible aspects of an organization. The tip of the iceberg, the visible aspects, typically receives the most attention because they are concrete and easier to measure. However the invisible aspects pose a much larger threat when not managed properly. Managers receive very little education in these areas, thus tend to be more uncomfortable managing them. This can result in organizational failure, as the more powerful dynamics go



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## Scientific Basis for Conversation Management

People are motivated to act based on their perceptions and self-interests.

Ralph Stacey (Director of the Complexity and Management Centre, Business School of the University of Hertfordshire), after years of study arrived at the conclusion that organizational results stem from the interactions and communications between individuals and among groups. He calls this field of thought "Relationship Psychology," and it rocks the foundation of popular approaches to behavioral or cultural change because it takes the focus away from individuals to organizational relationships in all of its forms. This means human interaction is the primary influencer in organizations. It says that systems such as rewards, measurements, or rules do not control outcomes. Instead, outcomes are influenced by 1) the human tendency for self-interest and

relating everything to their own experience, 2) conversations that shape people's understanding of what is true and what is appropriate action (although sometimes the conversation takes place silently within), and 3) the radical unpredictability of the direction in which connections and relationships evolve. (Stacey: *Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics*, 2007)

The "law of relationship" is to organizations what the law of gravity is to the planetary system. It keeps order for continued survival. A successful leader acknowledges and works in accord with this law.

why these elements are so important and how they affect an element they know to be quite important—the levels of trust and open communication in the workplace.

### **Conversation at Work!**

*Conversation at Work!* is a program designed to improve leadership skills in such areas as productivity, handling employee conflict, performance improvement, delegation, and overcoming resistance to change by teaching positive communication models that focus on self awareness and building relationships with others. All skills are targeted for on-the-job application. Participants learn and practice skills that are demonstrated by experienced facilitators. To date thousands of managers and employees have been trained in a wide range of industries such as government, banking, insurance, and manufacturing.

Targeted for intact work groups *Conversations at Work!* involves six central components: 1) Content overview—The facilitator identifies the skills to be learned based on previous assessments and presents factual content about the

topic; 2) Learners see the skills demonstrated by expert facilitators and strict rules of conduct are set to guide discussion or real work issues; 3) Skill practice—Learners practice using and applying skills in a group conversation that mirrors life at work; 4) Feedback—Participants receive feedback on how well they used the skills; 5) Application on the job—Learners select a skill or issue they will practice on before the next session; and 6) Regroup and evaluation—Learners report on what they learned and address new work issues.

### **Measurable Results**

In one study, a major manufacturing firm assessed the effects of *Conversation at Work!* by evaluating employees' lost-time accidents before and after their supervisors were trained. Lost-time accidents were reduced by 22 percent. Investigation of formal grievances and productivity were also evaluated. Formal grievances were reduced from an average of 7 per year to 1 per year. The plant exceeded productivity goals by \$1,000,000.

After supervisors in a manufacturing plant received training communication competencies such as how to listen better and solicit

feedback for better understanding, lost-time accidents were reduced by 50 percent, formal grievances were reduced from an average of 15 per year to 3 per year, and the plant exceeded productivity goals by \$250,000 (Pesuric & Byham, 1996). In another manufacturing plant where supervisors received similar training, production increased 17 percent. There was no such increase in production for a group of matched supervisors who were not trained (Porrás & Anderson, 1981).

*Conversation at Work!* develops emotional intelligence skills, which like technical skill, can be developed through a systematic and consistent approach. However, unlike technical skills, neuroscience shows that it takes work over a long period of time to bring about change.

When you hire Carrillo & Associates, we begin with an assessment of your communication culture as it relates to safety environment and health. C&A utilizes the Relational Coordination survey to determine where the communication and collaboration breaks down to the detriment of getting the

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work done safely, profitably, and with a high level of customer satisfaction.

The extensive research of Jody Gittel, PhD, provides measurable data proving that the quality of relationships in an organization affect the bottom line. Her data includes extensive application in health care and the airlines industry.

The survey measures relational coordination using seven survey questions including four questions about communication (frequency, timeliness, accuracy, problem-solving) and three questions about relationships (shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect).

Respondents from each of the functions believed to be most central to the focal work process are asked to answer each of the following questions with respect to each of the other functions, with responses recorded on a five-point Likert-type scale:

"How frequently do people in each of these groups communicate with you about [focal work process or client population]" (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=occasionally, 4=often, 5=constantly),

"Do people in these groups communicate with you in a timely way about [focal work process or client population]" (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=occasionally, 4=often, 5=always),

"Do people in these groups communicate with

you accurately about [focal work process or client population]" (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=occasionally, 4=often, 5=always),

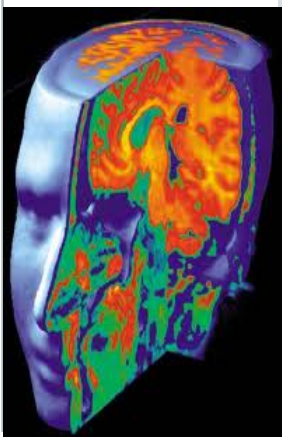
"When there is a problem in [focal work process or client population], do people in these groups blame others or work with you to solve the problem" (1=always blame, 2=sometimes blame, 3=neither blame nor solve, 4=sometimes solve, 5=always solve),

"Do people in these groups share your goals for [focal work process or client population]" (1=not at all, 2=a little, 3=some, 4=a lot, 5=completely),

"Do people in these groups know about the work you do with [focal work process or client population]" (1=nothing, 2=little, 3=some, 4=a lot, 5=everything), and

"Do people in these groups respect you and the work you do with [focal work process or client population]" (1=not at all, 2=a little, 3=some, 4=a lot, 5=completely).

For more information visit  
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## Neuroscience Contribution

An important piece of the puzzle that supports the law of relationship is the research in neuroscience reported by researchers like David Rock in multiple books and articles. In *Managing with the Brain in Mind* (2009) he summarized the research

into four main themes:

1. The rational is overrated
2. We've got emotions backwards
3. Social issues are primary
4. Attention changes the brain

## Building relationships through conversation is the foundation of organizational effectiveness because:

- We construct our interpretation of reality in interaction with others
- What we experience as our mind is the internalization of social relationships
- Interaction between relationships is the means for transmission of information between humans
- The threat of ostracism is equal to the threat of violence
- There is no such thing as a powerful autonomous individual or lone creator.
- We create within a web of relationships that provide identity, purpose and meaning



Contact: [rosa@carrilloconsultants.com](mailto:rosa@carrilloconsultants.com) for a complete description of the Relationship-Based Change Model

Step	Process Description	©2012 Rosa Antonia Carrillo
1: Initiation	Dissatisfaction with the current experience is creating a desire for change. Neither the preferred outcomes nor the nature of the obstacles are yet clear.	
2: Conversation	Conversation is the path to developing a common understanding of the problem and acceptable approaches to solutions. To do this the questions must go to uncovering the beliefs that have formed around why things work or don't.	
3: Inquiry	Gather people with the knowledge of specific operational details and others who understand the larger picture. We cannot solve the complex problems we've created with yesterday's beliefs.	
4: Gathering Support	The goal is to arrive at a common sense of the problem and possible solutions through sensemaking. Through common understanding we engender trust and open communication; and thus, gather support.	
5: Perpetual Assessment	This is a state of constant awareness and evaluation. Measurement takes the form of describing the ways of thinking that people need to adopt to correct deficiencies as soon as they appear	
6: Reframing	Newly understood data reveals former misunderstandings and mistaken ideas so that correct action is more likely now that the problem is seen more clearly.	
7: Completion	Changes occur in stages or layers and by necessity each completion is a new beginning. This is a time for vigilance to monitor the measurements previously set up, and prepare to change course.	