

The Relationship Factor in Safety Leadership

Achieving Success through Employee Engagement

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Preface

This book represents a personal journey. I arrived at the conclusion that strong healthy relationships are at the heart of organizational success over a period of 25 years working as an organizational development consultant specializing in building high-performance teams and reducing accidents. I began with an open systems perspective heavily focused on managing change through linear, logical processes. As I helped leaders design organizational systems to support higher performance, I was constantly confronted by the reality of the uncertainty and complexity people experience in everyday life. Unpredictable events, conflicts, demands and results derailed the neat plans and vision. Any success experienced seemed to depend on a leader's ability to establish relationships, and being willing to both listen and respond to people's needs regardless of the program design.

In 1996 a significant transformative experience opened up a new path for me. I was asked to go to a chemical plant in Georgia to help the teams analyze why they had a fatality and how they could prevent a recurrence of what happened. We were in the midst of an organizational systems analysis when an employee kept interrupting with the statement that the root cause of the fatality was lack of trust and open communication. I told him those were symptoms, not causes but he persisted. So I asked why he believed that to be true and he told me that the employees had been trying to tell management about the problems with the equipment but they had been ignored. Management didn't listen.

Suddenly, I saw a world where information to prevent failures rained down upon us but we couldn't see or hear it. Many times our associates are trying to warn us but if we don't listen they can't help us. Since that day I began to teach that trust and open communication were as important to environmental safety and health as addressing physical hazards. Now I actually believe it to be more important because without it people may not heed our warnings to wear PPE or report safety concerns. If we don't trust the people closest to the work we may not listen. I also found that in order to trust we have to be aware of our emotions. There is a lot of pressure to produce results, and to not make mistakes. This anxiety is an obstacle to true listening and hampers our ability to include outside perspectives in our decision-making.

I increasingly noticed a connection between a leadership style and safety performance. Employee perception surveys showed that OSHA recordables were higher at sites where the senior manager was perceived as not caring about people. They also rose after a manager who was perceived as not caring replaced a respected leader who valued employees. I was further convinced of the connection between trust and performance when supervisors who received high trust scores on perception surveys ran accident-free, productive crews in

facilities where supervisors with low trust ratings had high injury rates and poor production.

On the other hand I had experiences with managers who tried to improve performance through tighter controls and stricter disciplinary measures. While these managers desired to increase personal accountability, by asserting their authority they only achieved increased resistance. Paradoxically, leaders who lessened control and shifted power to the people increased accountability while those reducing autonomy decreased it.

This book asks leaders to examine the possibility that the quality and nature of relationships between organizational members is an invisible force that enables the transformation of independent actions into results that benefit the whole. If individuals are not forming positive relationships, the results are accordingly limited.

This approach requires a certain amount of maturity. The lessons shared here are part of my personal journey to increased self-awareness and empathy for the experience of others. I am grateful to the employees who were willing to give me advice to help me recover from my mistakes. I hope that these stories and my learning will help others find their way to greater success in connecting with people to make our workplaces safer and more vibrant.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the individuals who inspired me and supported me in my career as well as in writing this book. First, thank you to my mentor Richard Beckhard who was the first to see in me the possibility of becoming an agent of change. Thank you to Edgar H. Schein who was also a mentor and my professor in the Masters of Organizational Development program at Pepperdine University. The emphasis in this book on beliefs and assumptions was due to his lectures and books on organizational culture and leadership. Thank you to James Loud, Carsten Busch, Sidney Dekker and Mei-Li Lin for the hours they spent reading my work and giving me feedback. Other influencers on my learning journey were Ralph Stacey, Robert Morris, Suzane Otis, Jody H. Gittell and Anthony Suchman. Peter Koestenbaum was the first, however, to encourage me to look beyond the veils of cause-and-effect logic to grapple with the complex reality leaders live with. He said to me, “Rosa when your search for answers has come to a dead end, you have to move into the metaphysical realm.” So I did. I expanded my investigation of reality beyond what is perceptible to the five senses, and that led to my development of the *Five Orientations to Conversation*.

Of course writing a book isn't possible without the encouragement of friends and family, especially my mother, Maria Luisa Leodoro, sister, Yvette VanDalsem and cousin, Marsha Escobedo. I would also like to acknowledge my constant friends and fellow experimenters for over forty years Deborah Newmark, Herma Rand and Wendy Williams.

Foreword

Industry is focused on achieving levels of high performance, aiming to remain safe, productive and competitive in each of our global markets. However, an aging workforce, the millennial generation entering the workplace, senior management and executive turnover, loss of corporate knowledge, and business transformation pressures, all introduce stress into the work environment that often erode strong relationships with the single, most important stakeholder: employees.

My short and fortunate encounter with Rosa at a safety conference in 2017 enabled me to quickly understand how her background in education and training, her experience in multiple sectors of industry, and her understanding of organizational behavior allowed her to brilliantly, in simple terms, elaborate on the key elements that enable organizations to thrive and reach high performance.

All too often, the word accountability floats across our discussions emphasizing that high levels of care, compliance and discipline are all consequences of employees at all levels taking accountability for their actions. In many cases the elements foundational to high performance and safety performance are absent. Further, in many cases, the relationship between employees and their management may not be based on enough trust where open conversations allow for a transparent exchange of information and an honest and mutual commitment to action. Some examples that may take place under these circumstances are that an employee may fear stopping unsafe work because of being unsure of the consequences that could follow, or a supervisor applying command-and-control leadership for fear of not being right or not having all the answers to questions from employees.

A relationship-centered organization is about establishing the environment for strong safety performance to emerge as the only possible outcome and establishing an environment where employees at all levels are taking accountability. And then the one sentence that summarizes it all: “It is what we have been calling the culture that provides the nourishment that your vision, initiatives, processes, and goals, need to become a reality.” Every reader will find realistic and thought-provoking statements throughout the book. It just makes a lot of good sense.

We have all heard the saying, “Leaders who do not listen will eventually be surrounded by people who have nothing to say.” Like me you may be in a situation where safety and company culture need a shift to achieve better performance. It seems we analyze and strategize very well. Now we need to get out there, have conversations with all employees, make mutual commitments to what matters and start building trust.

It was a short encounter at a safety conference but one with lasting consequences personally. As a leadership team, we began eliminating all the less important activities from our agendas and committed to more time in the field for 1-1 conversations with our employees. I found that with a strong and sustained commitment to these conversations, improvements come surprisingly fast.

Thierry Martel
Chief Operating Officer
Iron Ore Company of Canada

1 Making the case for Relationship Centered Safety Leadership

Relationship Centered Leadership (RCL) is a strategy that enables the full commitment and engagement of employees to work together towards excellence in safety performance. Many leaders sense the need for this approach. A company's safety record as well as protecting the environment and the community has become a determining competitive factor. Yet, the traditional safety management activities are not meeting the demands for improvement (Deloitte, 2009).

The principles of RCL have the potential to exponentially improve organizational performance. They focus on developing a leader's ability to engender employee engagement by developing his or her ability to build relationships. This ability is both a set of skills and a set of beliefs about what works to get the best results.

Leaders act from their beliefs about human nature. Beliefs create thoughts and thought informs action. A belief is not a passive thing like a value. Values can be espoused, but not practiced. Beliefs are so deep that you sometimes don't even know they are influencing your decisions. It is not a matter of having faith that something is true; it is *knowing* that it is true. Our understanding of the nature of relationship and how it affects safety performance could be the defining factor between success and failure. The eight beliefs of RCL reflect what successful leaders believe they know about people. These concepts are philosophical, but also based on research in cognitive psychology as captured by Argyris' Ladder of Inference (see Chapter Two).

There is a growing body of research showing that employee engagement is essential to successful organizational performance (Saks and Gruman, 2014; Saks, 2006). A large part of that engagement depends on the quality of relationships that employees experience. So, a leader's effectiveness is impacted by his or her ability to build both personal relationships and enable collaborative team member connections.

The need for belonging and identification with relationships is so strong that people will adopt common attitudes and expectations to belong. The research presented here shows that individuals are so concerned with belonging that they view each interaction as a risk. These hidden emotions and feelings undermine our ability to communicate and maintain trusting relationships. These dynamics make the case for working at the group or relationship level rather than the individual if you want organizational change. The individual is not separate from the group. These findings and implications come from the research of thought leaders in psychology, sociology, organizational psychology, complex responsive processes, relational leadership and neuroscience. All of which I have found validated by my 25 years of experience and related in the stories I recorded in this book.

In spite of the overwhelming evidence that could make building relationships the most important leadership skill, a widely recognized study found that out of 60,000 leaders less than 5% excel at both achieving important results and building social relationships (Lieberman, 2013). So once you read about what worked or didn't work for other leaders you are faced with a decision. Shall I experiment with the eight beliefs to build vital relationships? Shall I find out what could work for me? Or shall I dismiss these ideas as simple coincidence; a flight of fancy created by an individual who wished to see a pattern and connection but has no definitive proof? I can understand either approach, but if you are impatient or frustrated with the results you are currently getting then you might want to take a small risk and experiment with building the trust and empowerment expressed in the eight beliefs.

Someone who did was Bernie Mattimore, a maintenance director at Lawrence Livermore Labs. He had been frustrated for months because employees kept removing the equipment guards. My team had shared some ideas about employee engagement with him, so, one day he called a crew together and said, "You all decide how these guards should work. Here's a budget. Let me know if you need more money." As Bernie related it to us within a month the guards were up, everyone respected them and the crew came in under budget. This happened many times over the years in different companies and industries, eventually leading to the development of RCL and the eight beliefs.

The word *relationship* can bring up immediate resistance in the workplace. Many consider it an irrelevant subject that detracts from getting the work done. They often ask, what about the employee's responsibility? This book focuses on the leader's responsibility because, no matter how flat an organization is, there is still a hierarchy in social relationships. Power relations define what is appropriate interaction—who can disagree or initiate a relationship? Even if you do not consider yourself in a power role, others view you that way if you have a title. They behave accordingly unless you go through specific and consistent effort to build a relationship.

Building a relationship-centered organization or safety program does not mean that the only thing needed to be successful is good relationships. It is the foundation. It is what we have been calling the culture that provides the nourishment that your vision, initiatives, processes and goals need to become a reality.

There will be setbacks and disappointments because of unexpected challenges. Some people will not want to change the way they operate for reasons beyond your control. To meet the challenge each leader must decide if RCL is the right path or if living from a different set of beliefs will serve them best.

The influence of relationship on organizational performance is difficult to measure empirically. However, consistent stories that point to consistent results are valid forms of proof when dealing with dynamics not fully understood. The nature of human relationships is one of them, and the narrative from successful leaders in safety consistently points out that positive relationships and meeting the emotional needs of employees is essential to the well-being of organizations.

Let's begin with one of the most difficult and successful turnarounds that convinced managers to take on the belief that *people are different from machines* and to form positive relations with them.

The Millstone Nuclear Power plant where John Carroll (et al., 2002) participated in culture change activities reported this story of how managers changed their belief system. The work consisted of daily conversations and educational sessions that eventually led to success. It began when a Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) review concluded there was an unhealthy work

environment, which did not tolerate dissenting views and stifled questioning attitudes among employees. The NRC took the unprecedented step of closing the plant until management could show a shift in climate.

The changes needed were to convince employees to believe that managers could be trusted to listen to their concerns and to take appropriate action. The managers had to believe that “employees were worth listening to and worthy of respect...the underlying values had to change from control to openness and trust” (Carroll et al., 2002, p. 114). It took more than three years to shift the culture, but in June 1998 the regulators certified the first unit back on line.

The cultural change required was at the deepest levels. Some of the initiatives included extensive new training programs and coaching. Individual managers experienced personal transformations through exposure to the principles of emotional intelligence. They learned new skills, including sensitivity to their own and others’ emotions and perceptions. Managers learned to respond differently to employees who were afraid of reprisals for speaking up and to those who simply lacked confidence that management would take effective action.

CEO Bruce Kenyon met regularly with small work groups and in large all-hands meetings to give and receive information. An employee concerns program was initiated where employees argued passionately with each other and with management. Over time they were able to communicate and reach a common understanding of the issues and corrective actions. Kenyon publicly admitted some errors and reversed some decisions allowing others to see that mistakes were part of the process but could be corrected.

The belief that people are different from machines took hold. As managers acknowledged the importance of feelings and emotions and maintained an open expression of trust to differing points of view, it allowed for discussion of the human side of organization. This challenged assumptions about human nature and rationality. Trained in a strictly rational approach to problem solving, it was difficult for them to accept that the way they made people feel impacted organizational performance. Of course, many Millstone managers were uncomfortable and initially incompetent in this domain, but the crisis allowed for the openness to viewing relationships and working in new ways because it was painfully obvious that their previous approach had failed.

Many new mechanisms and venues for communication were created. Over time, managers and employees learned by doing and through feedback from colleagues and coaches. This approach resulted in a new culture with higher levels of trust and open communication.

As long as executives, managers and safety professionals fail to adequately address the relational side of organizations they will not effectively engage employees in a mutual commitment to action. Successful leaders do not produce results in isolation. They create powerful generative relationships with people because they are aware of their interconnectedness with others, and consciously develop those connections to achieve objectives.

I acknowledge that even when leaders believe in its importance, cultural and political obstacles could block the implementation of a relationship-centered approach. The RCL model described next is designed to help navigate these obstacles in a way that gains political support and maintains alignment with your values.

RCL: A strategy for employee engagement

RCL is a strategy to achieve operational excellence in safety performance through full employee engagement. Each of the elements is designed to influence decisions and resource allocation towards building the relationships that support safety as a common purpose. The benefit of these elements is in no way limited to safety but extends to every aspect of organizational performance. This book will, however, principally focus on safety impacts.

The definition of employee engagement used for this model integrates Kahn’s theory of engagement and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Saks and Gruman, 2014). While Kahn wrote about engagement as employees expressing their full selves in their work, the JD-R model looks at engagement as a response to the balance or imbalance between demands on the individual and the resources he or she has to deal with those demands. Therefore, the RCL strategy is designed to help the leader maintain engagement by identifying and providing the resources employees see as needed to do the work safely, and creating the inclusive environment where people can bring their whole self to work. Developing trust and relationships is the foundation of this strategy.

Redefining relationship

To accept that relationship is at the center of organizational effectiveness, we have to see it through new eyes.

We usually think of relationship as interpersonal between two or more people ranging from casual to intimate. In the workplace, leaders may feel restricted in the kinds of relationships they may develop to protect themselves from the perception of unfairness or favoritism. I have had workshop participants express fear that relationship is too personal; they feel it necessary to keep their personal and professional lives separate. Edgar Schein (Schein and Schein, 2018), who has been a significant contributor to helping us understand how a leader’s behavior affects the people in organizations, has suggested that until leaders treat relationship as *personal* the trusting relationships needed for top performance will be missing.

In the RCL strategy *relationship* is defined as a biological, mental and emotional connection shared by humans for the purpose of mutual support in adaptation and ultimately survival. This definition is based on research in the areas of neuroscience, psychology and sociology that expands the definition of how we usually think of relationship and its purpose. Scientists found evidence through long-term studies that close relationships actually predict longevity and health (Archie et al., 2014; House et al., 1988) They also found that our need to connect with other people is even more fundamental, more basic, than our need for food or shelter (Lieberman, 2013; Cozolino, 2014).

Relationship is not only a social connection that exists between people who know each other or have frequent interaction. It is also a physical phenomenon. Connections, felt as emotions between people who may or may not be present, are triggered by biological mechanisms in the brain (Cacioppo et al., 2000). Daniel Goleman (2006) describes these connections as a “neural ballet” that connects us brain to brain. We may not be aware but our encounters with employees, bosses and even strangers shape our

brains and affect our bodies in positive and negative ways. Those in a position of authority have greater impact.

The evidence presented by neuroscience may help to persuade leaders on the importance of relationships to getting things done in the workplace and their role in building them. Leaders need to mindfully watch their actions and words to nurture relationships because emotions are contagious. When we see someone miss a step and fall hard on the concrete, we cringe in sympathy. Neuroscience attributes this ability to mirror neurons in our brain that respond equally when we perform an action personally or watch someone else do it. It now appears that even though we feel we are having an individual experience, those around us sense what we think and feel, and they influence us in the same way. We are connected in this way to people we know, as well as strangers. This connectivity is essential to human survival and learning because it helps us interpret the intention and meaning of another's actions (Rizzolatti, 2005).

Throughout the book you will read that conversation is the leader's most powerful tool with which to build relationships. Conversation is the core process that has bound society since the beginning of time. Ancient peoples would sit around the campfire and share stories and talk at the end of the day. This ritual reinforced the sense of belonging.

The very essence of a relationship is *communication* because it is what connects one person to another, or one person to many. By sharing ideas through language and stories the level of trust in each other's intentions increases and shared beliefs and assumptions are created through common experience. Without these elements there is no communication.

RCL strategic model

Figure 1.1, Relationship Centered Leadership Strategy, shows the principal means used by this strategy to achieve operational excellence in safety performance through full employee engagement:



Figure 1.1 Relationship Centered Leadership Strategy

1. Relationship,
2. Conversation, and
3. 5 Leadership Orientations to Conversation

1. Relationship, built on inclusivity and trust, is the foundation of the RCL strategy to increase employee engagement. Chapter Two presents research validating the vital role that relationships play on an individual and organizational level. Chapter Three defines the eight beliefs, which are designed to create and maintain positive relationships that support performance improvement. Chapter Four focuses on the importance of trust in relationships, and the activities that destroy or build it.

2. Conversation is the trigger for change. This is an interactive leadership approach where managers and supervisors engage employees through conversation to understand their needs for resources and to create relationships. It is not a prescriptive safety program. However, I have used a process to transform leadership beliefs that provides a structure for meaningful conversation that I call Leading Below the Waterline. It is an action learning and teaching approach that I've applied at the site level. I've included one of the exercises to examine and change beliefs in Chapter Three.

The leader influences outcomes through frequent interaction, listening to people's ideas and needs, then responding and following up. Its importance appears frequently throughout the book as 1-1s, group sensemaking, storytelling and creating the psychologically safe space for people to speak up to power and peers. Complex responsive processes and relational leadership research present convincing evidence that social interaction via *frequent* conversations is what drives results, suggesting that conversation is a more effective form of control than rules and procedures. This topic is so prevalent that it is covered in every chapter with particular attention in the research chapter, Chapter Two, under CRP and Relational Leadership.

3. The Five Leadership Orientations to Conversation is described in Chapters Five to Ten. They consist of five mental orientations to lead conversations that solve complex problems, and lead a team or organization towards higher performance.

The research in Chapter Two clearly points to psychological safety as critical to speaking up and collaborative relationships, both essential to reducing serious accidents and fatalities. The orientations help the brain process the multiple emotional and social pressures that tend to stifle open communication and inclusivity.

Unification is a state of inclusivity and psychological safety. *Penetration* is the mental discipline to look past superficial answers, question assumptions and listen to divergent voices. Entering into the state of *resolution* means making choices and gathering the will to act. *Enactment* is a focused state. By taking action we realize our goals or learn from them. The fifth state, *perseverance*, means maintaining focus to completion while remaining open to new evidence. Improving learning to improve drift is explored in this orientation.

What does inclusion and belonging have to do with safety?

When we are feeling excluded our awareness narrows. The brain is focused on thinking about that moment of rejection or just feeling sad, or angry. It's a tape that plays over and over in the head. Why won't they listen to me? Why can't I be understood? What am I doing wrong? What's wrong with me? What's wrong with them?

It would be hard to prove a causal link between a fatality and exclusion, and it could not be considered the only cause. However, it was found to be a primary cause in 56% of car crash deaths where the victim drove away angrily after a violent altercation and perceived social rejection (Baylor College of Medicine, 2018). Loss of social relationship has also been linked to the nurse's decision to leave a job. Among the seven factors examined in the nurses' 2007 study, one of the most important predictors of them leaving their job was *affected social relationships*. The others were increased *workload and stress* and the *perceived risks* associated with the work (Shu-Chu Shiao et al., 2007).

The typical self-protection from exclusion is withdrawal. Fortunately, silence is the most common form of protection rather than violence, but that also happens. Withdrawal can also take the form of resigning as the following story illustrates:

I wrote in an anonymous safety team survey that it was very hard to get new ideas heard. The facilitator read it out loud at the teambuilding meeting. The Chair immediately said, "Whoever wrote that is going to have to own up to it because I just don't understand." I felt she was saying, "You're a coward."

The whole thing was that I wrote it because I had experienced stonewalling many times. No matter what I brought up there was a reason it wouldn't work as immediate response. There wasn't any question like, "Oh tell me why you think that would work or let's explore that for a moment." I am a reasonable person. If you look at my idea and you don't think it will work because you've had experience with it then I accept it especially because I am a newcomer and you've had all the experience. I wasn't about to say anything in that room. I was already an outsider, which would only make me more of an outsider.

I used to be naïve. I would have spoken up believing that the truth adds value and expands the capability of the team, but not anymore. It doesn't matter how true something is if the group doesn't listen; you're just wasting your time. That's when I decided to resign from the team.

(Carrillo, 2018, personal correspondence with a safety team member)

How many ideas or observations have been shut down this way? How many accidents or even fatalities could have been prevented if we could have created a safe space to speak and be heard? Anonymous surveys don't create belonging and inclusion. What does is the willingness to listen and being open to accepting that someone else has seen something we've missed.

Can safety outcomes be controlled through relationships?

In Complex Adaptive Systems theory, systems cannot be controlled but can be understood and influenced by looking for patterns within their complexity. These patterns describe potential evolutions of the system. They are not predictions, thus control and order are emergent rather than hierarchical (Dooley et al., 1995; Lewin, 1992; Waldrop, 1992). In practical application listening to or engaging in conversations between organizational members can reveal those patterns so that leaders can influence and take action for improvement when necessary.

When you consider the effect of relationship on the level of trust and the quality of information exchanged, it plays a key role in managing safety. Control can be achieved through power to a certain extent, but it has costs. The unfettered use of power to gain compliance can be highly dysfunctional and create resistance. Even appointed leaders must rely on influence to avoid the negative effects. For individuals without vested authority (i.e., positions such as safety staff) even more so. Influence comes from the relationships we've built with peers and employees.

I participated in a dialogue with safety professionals that illustrated divergent views about the use of control. It began with the question: *What can an HSE professional control? What can she or he change?*

The majority of participants expressed the opinion that control is not an option. Nevertheless, there is tremendous pressure to show evidence of control. Both operational and safety managers face dashboards that call for numbers that often don't reflect the reality of the workplace. Some, like John Green, SVP EHS at Aecon in Canada, are challenging "the entire value of numerical metrics to change the entire basis of control and constraint." He looks at the issue of control as tied to the very definition of safety:

When people think of safety they are often lured into the "freedom from harm" definition, which I find limits their ability to think more widely about the subject seeing it as a task—the elimination of harm—as opposed to anything else. I find if you redefine safety (and it's a variation on Dekker and Hollnagel's definitions) as "the presence of a state of resilience, the capacity to successfully manage change and the ability to recover, in a controlled manner from adversity" then you are able to engage people about the purpose and importance of relationships more freely.

(Carrillo, 2018, personal correspondence)

Green would argue that relationship and psychological safety are an important part of resilience. However, there is another side to this conversation. There are safety professionals that say their role is to inform management of the inherent safety risks and let them know it is their responsibility to ensure the safety of workers. They feel that the trend towards embracing psychology, sensemaking, complexity and leadership is distracting safety professionals from the priority of managing risk and ensuring that known procedures that work are followed. They bring up that many of the large-scale incidents around the world, such as Pike River, the NASA Challenger shuttle, Deepwater Horizon, Longford Esso, BP Texas Refinery, Gulf of Mexico, occurred because well-documented tools and systems were not used as prescribed. All the expertise needed to manage risk was there, but not used.

Investigations often show that an incident could have been averted if a procedure or system had been used. The fact that they weren't leads to two possible thoughts. 1) We need to go beyond control through procedure because workers don't always use them or remember them. 2) We need to create the relationships and structures to keep risk awareness relevant to how the work is performed. This typically happens through conversation.

Consider Gerrit Broekstra's concept that an organization exists in the relationships between members and would not exist without conversation:

An organization is a conversation ... An organization is defined by the sharing, dialogue and discussion of ideas because these create reality and meaning. *These conversations are not about social relationships; they are the relationships.* The organizing process is continually reproduced and constituted in a loosely coupled network of many micro-conversations and builds on the local knowing.

(Broekstra, 1998, p. 175)

The level of performance you are experiencing in your organization is a result of or the same thing as what your people are discussing. So are your people discussing safety or schedule and cost? Are they talking about risks in a knowledgeable way? Are people exchanging relevant information in a timely manner?

The only way to answer this question is to be out among the people. I spoke with Stephanie Neary, a safety professional, who helped to design a shadowing process to improve safety by establishing relationships. Here is her story and her approach:

I oversee safety for 3000 craftsmen in a shipbuilding yard. It was hard to get people to listen to me. The baby boomers would say, "I've got kids your age." Even those my age would say, "You're a female I don't have to work for you." People would run out of the area as I approached because they could see I was from the safety department by my hardhat. They judge you by your cover. They say, "What would you know? You've never done my job."

My management and I were trying to figure out how to improve working conditions. I wanted to see behind the scenes to understand behaviors. So, we came up with the idea of getting to know the workers by shadowing them. They gave me a week off my regular duties, an office and autonomy to do what I thought was necessary. I was out there from the morning safety check-in till the end of the day. I developed a lot of empathy because I saw how thin they are spread out, how they don't always have the resources they need, and how exhausted they are from the 12-hour shifts. They asked me if I wanted to try some of the jobs, so I did. I pulled cable with them that weighed two tons. I did electrical work, and they were surprised that I would get my hands dirty.

I've done this three times now and everything has changed. Now they call me for everything. Some of them I'd never seen before. Now they ask how my kids are doing. "Oh since you're here could you come look at my job?" Now I'm part of the team, and I really focus on the supervisors because they are the ones who explain that I'm there to help when people get nervous. They're starting to understand that I have a tough job too.

It is eye opening to spend time on the work site. Stop and think about how you can help someone just by a small gesture that you care about them. I'm trying to make it more personal. One employee asked me to look at a job and I helped him and his supervisor get what was needed to make it safer. He shook my hand afterwards. That has never happened.

If you don't get personal, people can't see past your cover. They can't find out that you're competent and willing to help. Management by control is impractical; personal relationships are the strongest form of influence. Strategic planning, rewards, metrics and other management tools can only be effective as long as they are part of an ongoing dialogue. Trying to control the organization with a static set of rules and procedures that aren't brought up on a regular basis is meaningless.

Managers know the way to make things happen because they spend most of their time in conversation, emails and meetings to make things work. Why then do they neglect conversation and rely on action plans and metrics to control significant changes?

Take the case where an organization received low engagement survey scores and faced challenges designing and implementing a plan to raise the scores. Their safety incident numbers had been in control, so the business leader and his team had felt rather confident in their action plan to raise engagement levels. Then, the union went on strike.

So another tack was needed to control the situation. Several supervisor focus groups were held to recommend ways to improve employee engagement once workers returned to work. One set of recommendations had to do with fixing the poor state of physical facilities and equipment. Another had to do with addressing recognition, respect, autonomy and opportunity for personal development (training, timely feedback, education).

It was decided to begin with the physical environment so they prioritized, set time lines and started in. A few weeks later everyone was frustrated. They were unable to meet the promised deadlines for repairs and were losing credibility.

At a senior team meeting they were introduced to the importance of conversation and relationship building. One of the most open leaders said, "I feel like I know the equipment more personally than I know the people." He intended to change that.

Privately, the CEO was surprised that the trust level was lower than he expected and there was less agreement than he anticipated on how to move forward to improve the low morale and acrimonious relationships at the plant. I suggested he have one-hour conversations with each direct report once a week to listen, be helpful and explain his expectations in an effort to arrive at common understanding. A month later he wrote me that things were improving rapidly.

The power of 1-1 check-ins and conversations to maintain buy-in and clarity of direction emerges over and over in my interviews with direct reports. If we neglect relationship it is a misconception that we can achieve control through milestones, metrics, plans, or meetings to announce expectations. Without relationship and ongoing discussion you won't get ownership and you won't know when things are going off course. You also won't be able to thank or recognize people when things are going well.

How does relationship affect psychological safety?

Psychological safety is a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. It can be defined as "being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status or career" (Kahn, 1990, p. 708). Amy Edmondson has defined it as a group dynamic as opposed to trust, which is interpersonal. So perhaps personal relationships aren't necessary in a group to feel safe. It may be that the nature of the group or its purpose, agreed-upon protocols and reputation is enough. Examples would include 12-step groups where you can step into an environment where you don't know anyone, but feel safe to reveal information. In organizations, once you have a process or structure that has proven to protect people from retaliation, it may continue to operate successfully as long as it holds true.

Creating psychological safety is a leadership responsibility. As argued by Amy Edmondson, creating conditions of psychological safety is essential to laying a foundation for effective learning in organizations (Edmondson, 1999; 2002). Without that, people will hesitate, or refuse, to take the interpersonal risk of speaking up, asking questions, or asking for help. Such reluctance will impede high performance and innovation. It can also create physical risks in high-hazard industries such as nuclear power, where admitting mistakes and asking for help is essential for avoiding catastrophe (Weick and Roberts, 1993; Carroll, 1998).

The leader's attitude towards mistakes, feedback and questions has a lot to do with encouraging people to take interpersonal risk. However, standing by a perspective that no one else on the team supports is difficult because it is hard to break away from the identity of belonging to the group. A leader must find his or her voice. Potential ostracism is the price of leadership and cannot be minimized, especially when one is a member of a strong collective culture. Leaders, especially CEOs, often find themselves feeling very much alone.

Can too much psychological safety stifle growth?

In a conversation with Adrienne Kelbie, Chief Executive at Office for Nuclear Regulation UK, she raised the question, "How do I maintain psychological safety and still challenge my leaders to grow? You can't really grow without taking risks." In other words can leaders engender too much psychological safety? Could it decrease learning? Could it increase unethical behavior because people are too comfortable? Could there be unforeseen consequences to taking interpersonal risks outside the team? (Frazier et al., 2016)

This is an interesting question because we have all experienced anxiety as we stepped into a more challenging role. Most of us have also been involved in difficult conversations where our boss has told us where we've fallen short. So we know that being challenged to grow doesn't necessarily feel psychologically safe. In fact our threat response is probably activated. To complicate things further, cognitive psychological studies have found that stress both increases and decreases learning (Joëls et al., 2006).

I decided to use the six statements from the Google team research (Rozovsky, 2015) to investigate what leaders do to nurture the psychological safety that develops high performance teams in a safety setting. Then I added two more general questions to see if there would be an overlap with strengths and weaknesses. Participants in my study ranked the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 = don't agree at all and 4 = strongly agree:

1. I feel like I belong on my team.
2. I can take risks on this team without feeling insecure or embarrassed.
3. We can count on each other to do high-quality work in a timely manner. (What are the processes in place? What does the leader do to impact quality?)
4. Our goals and priorities are clear. (What are the processes in place? What does the leader do to impact quality?)
5. I am working on something that is personally important to me. (What are the processes in place? What does the leader do to impact quality?)
6. I'm working on something that matters.
7. What is _____ greatest strength as a leader of this team?
8. Is there one piece of advice you would offer _____ to improve this team's performance?

Statements 1-2 look at the leader's role in creating psychological safety. Statements 3-5 look at the impact the leader has on the quality of work the team produces. Statements 6-7 capture overall leadership impact.

The results indicated that building team relationships and psychological safety also contributed to quality, high performance team output. It was also clear that rigorous governance processes and structures to maintain priorities and clear direction were as important as psychological safety. As expressed in the interviews, much of the sense of security came from receiving feedback from peers that the team was doing high-quality work.

The most frequently mentioned leadership activities that team members valued were:

1. One-hour or more 1-1 conversations and coaching monthly (most frequently mentioned and came up as a reason for high score on every statement.)
2. Breaks down silos
3. Values my opinion and utilizes my ideas

Cognitive psychology has led us to think of ourselves as individuals acting from individual mental models. It studies what is happening within the mind while behaviorism is interested in external behaviors. Behavioral psychology encouraged us to believe that all behaviors are acquired through conditioning in interaction with the environment (Kerlinger, 1966). Although there has been some change in this position, the original behaviorists claimed that internal states like cognition, emotions and moods were too subjective to give any credence to and that genetics should have no place in psychology; they believed that observable behaviors were the only factors in psychology worth considering (Skinner, 1953).

Cognitive psychology arose in part to account for the gaps in behaviorism that did not acknowledge the mind and focused only on visible behavior. Cognitivists focus on how our internal mental processes affect behavior. For example, in learning they pay attention to people's past experience with learning, and their beliefs about learning (including what they believe about their ability to learn). Behavioral psychologists believe that learning takes place and can be controlled through rewards, reinforcement and stimulus from the environment.

Which focus you take—behavioral or cognitive—has implications for beliefs on how people change. Should we change our behaviors to change our minds (behaviorism) or should we change our minds to change our behavior (cognitive)? The Eight Beliefs are founded on the idea that change begins with changing your thinking.

Ladder of inference

One of the men most responsible for the cognitive revolution entering the business world was Chris Argyris (Argyris and Schon, 1974). His Ladder of Inference made it possible for business people to examine and openly discuss how their emotional responses and thought processes affected their decisions. He popularized the idea that people construct reality based on their personal experience, make assumptions, and act on that reality. The idea was that by understanding the mental models underlying their action choices, human beings could achieve intended consequences and observe themselves and learn from their results.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the Ladder, which shows that we begin by observing data like a movie camera, and then select data. Argyris held that we don't see everything going on. Instead, we select what is important based on our experience. We decide what the data means and then make assumptions to help us interpret the data. From there we draw conclusions and form beliefs, which influence the decisions and actions we take.



Figure 2.1 Ladder of Inference

This powerful model encourages us to re-examine the conclusions we draw about people's behavior or what led to an incident. Belief #7: *Our pre-judgments and biases can prevent us from finding the truth in what we see and hear*, is based on the Argyris Ladder. Because our beliefs and assumptions direct our decisions and actions, it is very important for a leader to recognize and examine the validity of his or her assumptions, particularly when offered dissenting information.

Social psychology

Social psychology is about understanding why individuals behave the way they do in groups. It attempts to answer the question of how much influence the environment and others have in shaping our behavior and how we think. The research in this area relates directly to the environment a leader must create to achieve a high level of employee engagement.

One famous social psychologist in this field who influenced the eight beliefs was Douglas McGregor (1960). His *Theory Y and Theory X* of management offers two contrasting models influencing employee motivation. Theory X is based on a pessimistic view of employee motivation, which requires a manager to be controlling. Theory Y, based on an optimistic view of employee motivation led to an empowering management approach. McGregor did not recommend one theory over another; however, when results were compared Theory Y became the "ideal" belief. Its influence will be more fully explained as part of Belief #4: *People are able and willing to contribute to the success of the enterprise*.

Social identity theory made us aware that individuals need to maintain a positive sense of both personal and social identity. The social identity approach points to the centrality of groups and group membership in everyday life. It highlights the inseparability of group membership and individual psychology (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

Finding this sense of identity results in the perception that our own group is better than another's. This is why breaking down silos and collaboration across groups can be so difficult. This work lays the foundation for the importance of inclusion and helping people understand their role in the larger purpose of the organization. On the positive side if safety becomes part of a group's identity newcomers are most likely to adopt the safety practices and attitudes so that they can belong.

Group norms and response to authority

Social psychologists deal with the factors that lead us to behave the way we do in the presence of others, and look at the conditions that trigger certain behavior/actions and feelings. Two famous experiments set the standard for our understanding of group norms.

Let's say that a new employee sees a risk that the more established employees have learned to ignore or mitigate. The employee may speak up once or twice, but upon receiving feedback that the concerns are unwarranted or even wrong, the employee will either adopt the same belief or simply stop speaking up. The Asch experiments (Asch, 1951) provided repeated examples of this behavior in the lab. The experiments were conducted with a group of strangers who did not have any overt power over the participants. The experimental subject was asked to select lines of the same length. The other participants were told to agree on the wrong answer. Surprisingly, 37% of the experimental subjects agreed with the obviously wrong answers. 75% of participants went with the group at least once. When they were interviewed after the experiment, most of them said that they did not really believe their conforming answers, but had gone along with the group for fear of being ridiculed or thought "peculiar." *A few of them said that they really did believe the group's answers were correct.* It lends insight into why people don't speak up when the rest of the group is in agreement and points to the power of needing to belong.

The famous Milgram (1963) experiments shed a disturbing light on the human response to authority. More recently it has also been seen as demonstrating how the need to belong can motivate people to go against their values. They revealed that other people (even if they are strangers) influence the way we view reality and our actions. In the Milgram experiments a majority of subjects went against their personal values to administer what they thought were painful shocks to another person. This behavior was originally attributed to a response to authority—doing what the doctor in charge told them to do.

These early studies led to the recognition of the power of group norms in influencing behavior. Again, in a 2005 study related to safety performance, "Shared employee norms predicted both perceptions of work environment safety and at-risk behavior, trust in supervisor predicted perceptions of a safe work environment, and belief in management's safety values predicted at-risk behaviors" (Watson et al., 2005, p. 333). People are no longer seen as completely independent agents. Even when others are not present there are peer-group forces and power structures placing psychological limits around an individual's ability to act independently.

Neuroscience behind relationship and belonging

For millions of years our ancestors lived as hunter-gatherers. They needed to have a strong sense of group identification to survive. Those who were not part of the clan were viewed as enemies. Possibly 50,000 years ago modern man appeared. We had a huge evolutionary leap in the development of the frontal lobe. Neuroscientists have spent decades scanning the frontal lobe of the brain and have associated the area with function of modern human behavior, such as creative thinking, artistic expression, planning and language (Balter, 2002). However, even as the brain developed its frontal cortex the older limbic brain remained.

The limbic brain is ancient and located beneath the cerebrum. It supports a variety of functions including emotion and long-term memory. One of the main functions of the limbic system is to respond to stress. This includes preparing for and assessing threats through the amygdala and the hypothalamus. When a threat is identified, all of the energy and blood floods to the muscles to run or defend. The cognitive part of the brain can shut down under extreme threat.

Biologically engineered for survival

There is scientific evidence that relationship is biologically engineered into our brain. MRIs show the brain reacts the same way to the threat of social exclusion as it does to the threat of losing food and shelter. We tend to think that relationships only matter in our personal lives with friends, family and a few significant people. However, our brain reacts the same to exclusion even in apparently unimportant situations such as not getting the ball tossed to you by strangers (Eisenberger et.al., 2003; Eisenberger and Lieberman, 2005; Lieberman, 2013; Rock, 2009a; Eagelman, 2011; Eisenberger and Cole, 2012; Bailey, 2014).

The universal tendency to form relationships is an adaptive quality for survival. Scientists speculate that humans are born with a giant circuitry for relation because we depend on others for survival (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Eagelman, 2011; Banks, 2016; Caporael, 1997; Vladas et al., 2015). Tribe members who formed close emotional attachments were less likely to be alone to get picked off by a predator, or fall victim to some other natural danger.

The threat of ostracism, loss of relationship, is felt as strongly and in the same part of the brain as hunger or physical danger. A manager can trigger a threatened response by any one of these actions even when done with positive intentions:

- Not providing clear direction or expectations
- Correcting an employee in front of others
- Failing to give credit for work
- Taking away an assignment
- Checking on progress too frequently and attempting to manage the details
- Promoting or rewarding one person without clear explanation
- Withholding or giving incorrect information regarding upcoming significant events that will affect people's lives
- Not taking action and/or providing feedback on employee input

Because managers are often unaware when their actions are perceived as threatening, some companies supply anonymous feedback from employees in the form of surveys or interview comments. Neuroscience experts question their effectiveness since our brain closes down in the face of criticism. I have found that many managers close down in the face of negative feedback. They don't believe it or simply disregard it. Good surveys are a legitimate way of gathering feedback when management has the maturity to accept it and act on it. Unless the feedback is acted on, it does nothing to build relationships.

RCL is a way for the leader to ask for feedback in conversation by asking for dissenting opinions. Asking for feedback on the effectiveness of his or her communication or responsiveness to concerns, the trust level builds on both sides. Information is

shared in a timely and more acceptable manner.

Emotions are to be taken seriously, not pushed down

Since relationships influence our emotions, our actions and behaviors are influenced by our relationships with others (Schwartz, et al., 2011; Cozolino, 2014). Thus, strengthening relationships between leaders and followers and among team members is critical for performance improvement. In this endeavor, social issues are primary (Rock, 2009; Baumeister and Leary, 1995).

Maintaining an inclusive relationship reduces the threat response. Successful managers are likely to be those that adhere to these five imperatives for managing with the threat response in mind. 1) Help others save face. 2) Supply information to help people manage uncertainty. 3) Respect autonomy. 4) Pay attention to fairness. 5) Create relationships (adapted from Rock, 2009b).

Additionally, when people feel respected and valued as a member of the team, when they have autonomy to do their job their way, and they and their teammates are treated fairly, the same reward centers of their brains light up as if they got a big pay rise. Employees in this state of mind are much more likely to act in supportive ways (Pink, 2009).

According to David Rock (2009b), a well-known neuro-leadership expert, one of the implications of this research is that the rational is overrated and we've got emotions backwards. Many leaders feel they need to suppress their emotional responses, but research shows that this suppression can actually decrease a person's ability to process information and may rouse a threat response from others as they try to interpret the leader's true feelings. If the emotion can be acknowledged and managed in a way that does not cast blame, often the parties can move past it and get on with problem solving. Alternatively, if emotions rise frequently leaders may pursue a self-development path to identify those triggers and decrease their influence on their emotions.

Storytelling and the brain

Pioneering research by Princeton University's Uri Hasson (Stephens et al., 2010) shows what happens inside the brains of two people who connect in storytelling. By putting their subjects in MRI machines they were able to see that, in some cases, the brain patterns of the listener mirrored those of the storyteller after a short time. In other cases, the brain activity synchronized without any time lag between the speaker and the listener. Amazingly, in some rare cases, if the listener was intensely listening his brain activity actually *anticipated* the storyteller's in some cortical areas.

This research validates what so much of the literature states regarding storytelling as a leader's greatest communication tool. It is also very effective in team building, which is why we've included it in the connection exercises offered in Appendix A.

Complex Responsive Processes (CRP)

The theory of complex responsive processes presents perhaps the biggest challenge to the current mental models applied in safety management. It addresses the extreme complexity of reality and the inherent limitations of simplistic linear models of control. Developed by Griffith and Stacey (2005), they drew from analogies of complex adaptive systems. CRPs are understood to be complex, self-organizing, emergent and evolving. Human interaction is seen primarily as taking place through conversation. This type of thinking does not view people as parts producing a system, but rather as people in relationships impacting the system as a whole. The key role of the manager is as participant in sensemaking dialogue.

Most safety management approaches utilize systems theory. One of the key purposes of systems theory is to describe a system in such a manner that automated control mechanisms can maintain the system's behavior at some desired goal (Morgan, 1986). Complex Adaptive System (CAS) theory rejects traditional management control mechanisms. Control and order are emergent rather than hierarchical (Dooley et al., 1995; Lewin, 1992; Waldrop, 1992). Order is emergent as opposed to predetermined, and the state of the system is irreversible and often unpredictable. Direct cause and effect rarely exists because, like people, organizations explore a limited number of alternatives and necessarily act on incomplete information. Trial and error dominates organizational decision-making and thus organizational change (Wheatley, 1992; Stacey, 1996). This idea questions the applicability of incident investigations since they do not recreate the actual environment in which decisions are made.

Table 2.1 compares the differences between the assumptions of systems theory and CAS.

Table 2.1 Comparison of Systems Theory and CAS Theory (Salazar, 2009)

<i>Systems Theory</i>	<i>Complex Adaptive Systems Theory</i>
Based on mathematics	Includes psychology and sociology schools
Processes are predictable	Processes are random and unpredictable
Cause and effect are known	Cause-and-effect linkages do not exist
Organizations seek equilibrium	Individuals experience far from equilibrium conditions of conflict and ambiguity
Long-term goals are either purposeful or emerge	Long-term goals emerge out of both spontaneous and competitive selection
Behavior driven by negative feedback	Positive feedback influences behavior too

Systems theory falls short because managers can make visions, strategies and redesign organizations but once implemented what happens next is not completely in their control. Even reward systems and formal contracts cannot fully control the outcome because everyday human interactions can change the direction of the original destination. Any control leadership has is as a participant as opposed to being a system designer or teacher. When they engage in the conversations that are creating reality all around them they are both influencing and being influenced. Thus, they are making better decisions based on the reality of what is going on around them.

Leadership engagement in conversation is a form of CRP because, in the presence of relationship, people are influenced by what we think is important or not. As people interact they affect each other's decisions. This creates what happens in the organization; it is not created solely by systems. Safety management systems are unsustainable without the relationships or

Experts agree that Goffman's greatest contribution was the concept of "Interaction Order" (Fine et al., 2003). The interaction order consists of an unwritten set of social rules that shapes our development and influences our decisions on how to behave and how to interpret the actions of others. Although we do not choose the Interaction Order in which we operate, it determines both our sense of self and the social structures in which we operate. For this reason, asking people to change the way they interact, for example speaking up to power or including individuals who are not usually part of the group, is very difficult. We are asking people to give up their concept of self.

The Interaction Order affects agility and innovation as well as open communication in organizations. Strict requirements and guidelines on how to do things or how you can communicate leaves people unable to take responsibility or create new solutions. Everyone operates under the beliefs and assumptions of those in power, leaving little room for personal ownership or creativity. Successful leaders are aware of these social dynamics through education or intuition, and follow practices that increase psychological safety. I have described those practices throughout this book.

Norbert Elias and power relations

Insufficiently attending to power relations may be the biggest contributor to the often-quoted 70% failure rate in change efforts (Strebel, 1996; Beer and Nohria, 2000; Beer et al., 1990; Kotter, 1995). People don't like to talk about "many of the emotional and political issues that frequently preoccupy real people in real organizations" during times of change (Ford et al., 2008). Equally, there is very little discussion about how power relationships influence decisions about safety. This can lead to the false perception that saying, "I have an open door policy" or "Everyone has the right to stop an unsafe job," levels the playing field. It doesn't because everyone knows the consequences of alienating a more powerful relationship that may impact him or her in the future.

Norbert Elias (1970), who was very interested in how power, status and wealth shaped society, influenced Stacey's development of CRP and noted that the same dynamics shape our organizations. Yet, I have observed that in countries that value equality and meritocracy, it is difficult to acknowledge that power relations play a role in who is or isn't included in the conversations that matter. Inclusion and exclusion are very much perceived as a reflection of status.

Exclusion as a tool to maintain power has shown up historically as discrimination against people who differ from the group in power. The dynamic extends well beyond race, gender, sexual preferences or socio-economic status. In dysfunctional organizations very few people feel they are heard or respected. This situation usually leads to accidents and business failures.

This disregard of individuals and groups may be unconscious. Studies (Rock, 2009a) showed that the brain placed information from what it considered non-related people in a different part of the brain than that obtained from people seen as part of the group. When management disregards input from certain individuals, it breaks down the sense of belonging and the "we" identity needed for collaboration and engagement. There can be no effective communication, support or engagement without a trust relationship.

CRP is constantly operating. As in the larger society, the interactions that people use to cope with uncertainty are competition, conflict and cooperation. To balance these social interactions in the direction of collaboration, power relations must be managed through inclusion.

Inclusion and exclusion are the primary power-based actions that engage or disengage the workforce. Relationship psychology legitimizes the influence and power of the group in a way that has been undermined by negative terms like "group think," which actually results from fear of exclusion. Thinking in a group is how humans think. According to Stacey we do not create our interpretation of reality from a set of static mental models inside our head. We organize our experience in interaction with others through conversations and stories that we form into themes which could be called beliefs and assumptions. Even when we are alone and think that we are not being influenced by anyone else, there are ideas and voices from the past that do.

The challenge is to avoid the suppression of divergent thinking by creating an environment where power and politics do not prevent an open sensemaking process (Carmeli, et al., 2009). RCL seeks to address the emotional and social needs of individuals while using power dynamics to set up the expectation to question and challenge each other.

Application of CRP concept for leaders

Note that all of these applications of CRP are tied to engaging in purposeful conversation. Leadership is not an assigned role but rather the result of our ability to make sense of emergent issues and raise the conversation to a new level of understanding that leads to successful problem solving.

Because CRP is sensitive to power relations it encourages inclusion and exclusion to consciously identify all affected stakeholders and get their input before initiating changes. Also, during group conversations leaders will pull in silent participants, purposefully seek dissenting opinions and respond in a way that shows understanding of the idea's potential value or problem.

People are continually deciding what to say and do next, and triggering responses in each other. Plans and designs cannot control the direction of their thinking or actions. Conversation (defined as communication understood by Ralph Stacey et al., 2002) is the most common form of social interaction. Conflict is a form of interaction to find meaning. Thus, it is not something to be resolved but rather understood. Complexity science sees conflicting differences as analogous to the role of diversity to adaptability.

Thus, leaders can influence direction by direct participation in conversations. At the same time, if the leader does not engage, his or her influence and access to information is severely limited and increases the risk of failure. The leader's role is to listen and then articulate a new level of understanding from what everyone has said. The leader doesn't necessarily provide the solution to a problem, but creates the psychological atmosphere that allows for a higher quality of problem solving.

While a leader may be able to take control of a conversation, he or she cannot control the meaning people make of what is being said, nor the outcomes. The acceptance of limited control requires us to increase our capacity to live with uncertainty and

anxiety. The leader is able to learn more if they believe that information and answers flow from the interaction between people.

Acquiring facilitation skills such as the ability to listen, pull out relevant data and guide discovery is important. Developing empathy enables a leader to identify emerging themes, attitudes, needs and fears. This leads to the ability to provide information, direction and clarification that specifically address the underlying issues. Thus, resistance diminishes and problem solving is improved.

Finally, the way leaders interact in conversation triggers responses that are replicated throughout the organization. A leader's openness to innovation and risk-taking, and a non-threatening response to mistakes, raises trust levels. This is particularly valuable when venturing into the unknown. It lowers anxiety and helps people step into areas that they might otherwise avoid.

Sensemaking

Sensemaking, a model developed by Karl Weick, is the process by which people make sense of the unknown so that they can take action. When sensemaking is done as a group, it is also serving the function of creating a common understanding of an event, a challenge or potential solution. Weick says that sensemaking is both an individual and group process. However, like Ralph Stacey, he maintains that even when individuals are "alone," they are engaging a collection of selves or recollections bringing to mind diverse perspectives.

Another one of Weick's key contributions that lends importance to the relationship factor in safety performance is his concept of the *Collective Mind in Organizations* (Weick and Roberts, 1993). It was developed to explain the nearly error-free operations of airlines. As he explained, the collective mind is a pattern of mindful interdependent actions in a social system. Errors decrease with the increase of mindfulness and awareness of our interdependence with others and the system. For Weick sensemaking conversations play a major role in building this awareness.

Dave Snowden developed an innovative narrative sensemaking process, which uses storytelling as an investigative tool to understand complex environments. The narrative approach holds promise as a way to learn from failure because people feel freer to share their stories of near misses and other opportunities for learning (Deloitte, 2009).

Effective sensemaking requires the presence of trusting relationships and the ability to withhold blame and negative judgments. It is an important concept in incident prevention and analysis because it explains how we construct reality through an ongoing effort to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs. People engage with each other to create a better understanding of their world and their work. Sensemaking is most powerful in groups because the social context pressures people to justify their actions and to provide plausible information. As Weick says, "Sense may be in the eye of the beholder, but beholders vote and the majority rules" (Weick, 1995, p. 6).

Weick developed his theory through several significant case studies where he investigated complex situations to understand how human beings tried to make sense out of seemingly contradictory information. He found that the danger and complexity of their operations required an open and complete flow of information, a difficult state to achieve.

Uncertainty is a situation workers face frequently in high-risk environments. When relationship is missing in the sensemaking process it prevents the free flow of information needed in high-risk work. To create a high-performance work environment, leaders need to create the relationships that make it easy for workers to report weak signals and speak up when they are uncertain of an expectation.

Weak signals and encouraging people to speak up

How do we encourage people to speak up? There are those who think, "We are all professionals, so each person has the responsibility to speak up." They don't believe it is their responsibility to create a safe environment for people to speak up. We can ask people all we want to speak up, but the minute the first negative consequence is perceived, people will close down. The consequence does not have to be overt. It can be as subtle as sending fewer emails to a co-worker. They might start wondering, "What does that mean about my importance on the team?"

Sometimes people aren't certain of their information so they are hesitant to speak up. Consequently, we miss out on what Weick calls *weak signals* (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2001). He stated that the biggest difference between highly reliable organizations (HRO) and other organizations was that the former had a tendency to detect the significance of small signs and respond strongly when needed. In my experience many of these weak signals lie in the realm of emotions and feelings.

Analysis of serious accidents and airline crew behavior has shown how important these relationships are. When crewmember composition changes from shift to shift the content and quality of information exchange suffers substantially. There are times when there are established ways of doing things where most people can agree on the meaning of an event and what to do without much discussion. However, there are times where a group has to create their own meaning of reality. Without relational connections it is difficult for crews to make sense of emergencies (Murphy, 2001; Snook, 2000).

Relational leadership

Leaders do not operate in a vacuum. Relational leadership is a process where workers and managers interrelate to make sense of a situation, determine what is to be done, and how to do it. It is an iterative and messy social process that is shaped by interactions with others (Sayles, 1964; Gittell and Douglas, 2012).

Many consider relational leadership to be at the forefront of emerging leadership thrusts. One of its precursors, the Leader-Member Exchange Theory of leadership (LMX) recognized that the quality of relationship between leader and follower affected outcome (Graen, 1976; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012). The study documented both the natural development of the relationship between manager and follower, and the tendency of managers to quickly decide whom to trust or listen to. Once these "in-groups" and "out-groups" form, inclusions or exclusions are not conscious and are very difficult to change, creating strong barriers to the free flow of information and diverse perspectives. This would contribute to unconscious bias, and a tendency to exclude information provided by members of the out-groups.

became insulted because I felt I was better suited to make that decision. However, I began to experiment with the psychologist's suggestion that I socialize more and plan ahead to be with friends, do more team projects and so forth. I discovered that I did feel more energized. I am only a slight extrovert but it has increased my willingness to network and socialize, which is good for my business.

These shifts can be beneficial in workplace interpersonal relationships. For example, a co-worker's absence can make us see them as irresponsible. The feeling can change to empathy when we find out they are taking care of an aging parent. This is the reason having people share their stories in a safe environment can make such a positive difference.

Appendix A offers three specific exercises to help increase the level of psychological safety to get personal. Telling your story can be as short as asking participants, "Tell us what are you worried or excited about today," or as long as "Tell us the major high and low points of your life experience until now."

The power behind telling your story is its ability to stir empathy, to break down the barriers that typically can cause people to feel isolated and alone. When we hear someone's story, how they felt, what they are going through now, we realize what we have in common, and this sense of connection ends our isolation at least temporarily. The magic can be as simple as a feeling of cordiality replacing anxiety, all the way to the discovery of an inner strength made possible by learning from the suffering and courage of others.

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