

ANALYSIS OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STRENGTHS OF LEADER/FOLLOWER INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND LEVELS OF TRUST

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ABSTRACT

Originally, this research was conducted to fill the gap of declining trust among and between employees and management at a large computer manufacturer and distributor in Irvine, California. However, the findings of that research are just as relevant, if not more so, to the Los Angeles Air Force Base Space and Missile Systems Center (SMC) in El Segundo, California, currently experiencing a workforce study.

Motivation

Too often, *the people* are overlooked, from the productivity equation—not in terms of what they can produce, but in terms of who they are and what innate abilities they possess. When time is invested by leaders to understand what knowledge, skills, and abilities followers possess and can contribute to the organization if appropriately aligned, then productivity issues can be addressed more effectively.

Approach

For the computer manufacturer mentioned above, results were obtained through three methods, the first being the analysis of an Employee Satisfaction Survey administered on-line to 119 employees of which 95 people, or 80% of the population, responded. The survey report identified and prioritized opportunity areas based upon the cumulative quantitative and qualitative employee feedback. The second research method employed was the facilitation of focus groups examining the organizational setting, exploring the corporate culture, and explaining management leadership styles and principles both in theory and in practice. Third, a comprehensive literature review was completed to provide a basis for the conclusions drawn and recommendations to be implemented by the company.

Results and Findings

As a result of completing the above process, it appeared that the data supported the hypothesis that there is a significant correlation between relationship strength and trust level. Research shows that when people are given the opportunity to understand the correlation between communication, relationship strength, and trust level, the morale and performance of any organization should rise significantly.

Implications and Conclusion

The larger implications of my findings for the problems that SMC is trying to address through the workforce study is best summed up in an article by Daniel Robin, *What's Trust Got to Do With It?* (2002). Robin explains that “a high degree of distrust creates quite a mess: a climate of fear and anxiety would make productive work nearly impossible, shifting focus from flowing collaboration to suspicious second-guessing, guarded (if any) participation, and probably a pattern of conflict avoidance or passive-aggressiveness. Worse, our moral judgments about each other's untrustworthiness make resolutions of these problems quite unlikely.” How people relate to each other enables the gradual building of trust, which in turn helps people relate to each other more effectively by better understanding themselves and others. The impact of that dynamic is decreased conflict which facilitates increased information sharing, increased idea generation, and increased collaboration leading to increased productivity.