

MyPerformance Guide to Building Workplace Trust



Where ideas work



Contents

3	Overview
4	Why does workplace trust matter?
6	What is trust in the workplace?
6	How do I build workplace trust?
14	The biology of trust - How do we know that any of this is true?
15	The future of work
15	Summary
16	Appendix A: Workplace trust worksheet

Summary

MyPerformance is built upon the importance of trusted feedback between a supervisor and an employee. Trust is a critical component of any relationship. We know that employees are more engaged and more successful when they have a strong relationship with their supervisors. By examining the level of trust in supervisory relationships, we can take the steps necessary to build and enhance that workplace trust. Trust is built when both the supervisor and employee take the time and effort to be vulnerable, connect, and have honest conversations with each other's well-being held as priority. Trust is also built through integrity, accountability and empowerment. By building trust, we build a better, more productive work environment and Public Service.

Overview

The MyPerformance Guide to Building Workplace Trust is written for both supervisors and employees because both contribute to trust in similar ways. This guide will define workplace trust and explain why trust matters to the organization, supervisors and employees. This guide provides a way to assess trust in your supervisory relationships and offers best practices for building workplace trust in practical ways that lead to an increase in performance.

We rely on many things. We rely on computers for everything from our day to day work to our personal banking. We rely on vehicles to transport us safely. While we rely on objects, trust exists between people. When we trust an organization we do so in part because we trust the people in that organization to make decisions in our best interest. When we as a public service ask the citizens of British Columbia to trust us, we must do so on the basis of being trustworthy and trusting each other.

Trust and MyPerformance go hand in hand. MyPerformance is all about the conversation, and conversations about goals, values, trusted feedback, competencies, challenges, and more, build and require trust. MyPerformance conversations are ongoing, and so is building trust.

As a supervisor, what does building workplace trust look like in practical terms?

Here are some tidbits on what it looks like to build trust:

INTEGRITY – align your actions with your good intentions.

ACCOUNTABILITY - have clear agreements around who does what, when and why – including you.

EMPOWERMENT - assess when employees are ready for more autonomy, and give them the space and support to perform and grow their skills and expertise.

Trust exists in a supervisor and employee relationship when both people believe they can be honest and count on each other to be honest and follow through on commitments.

Have you ever heard someone say something like:

- ▶ How can I talk to my supervisor about the stress I'm feeling with my current workload? She might think I'm not capable of performing my job and then put that in my profile.
- ▶ Won't my supervisor get upset if I talk to him about career goals that involve leaving my work unit? I'd better approach that conversation with caution!
- ▶ You had a conversation with your supervisor about wanting more work that will challenge you? I wish I could do that.

“ Trust is the life-blood of an organization – STEPHEN COVEY, *The SPEED of Trust* ”

These are real questions from real employees and many of the questions boil down to having trust. When supervisors and employees have trust in place, they are able to have more productive conversations that lead to greater results for the organization and the employee.

Read on to learn more about how to purposefully build greater levels of trust with your supervisor and employees. You can adapt the actions in this guide to build trust with colleagues, clients, or people in other areas of your life.

Isn't this a little bit ... fluffy?

Trust is a biochemical phenomenon that occurs within us, and its presence or absence has very large measurable impacts on our lives and work. Trust is not fluffy, it's not abstract, and it's not something we can ignore. Trust is a very concrete neurological process that we can leverage to have better relationships at work and in other areas of our lives. Your relationship with your supervisor is a workplace relationship, and research shows us that all healthy relationships are built on a foundation of trust. We're not talking about absolute trust - you wouldn't trust your mechanic to fix a broken leg, and you don't have to trust your supervisor or employees with your carburetor or the deep secrets of your soul.

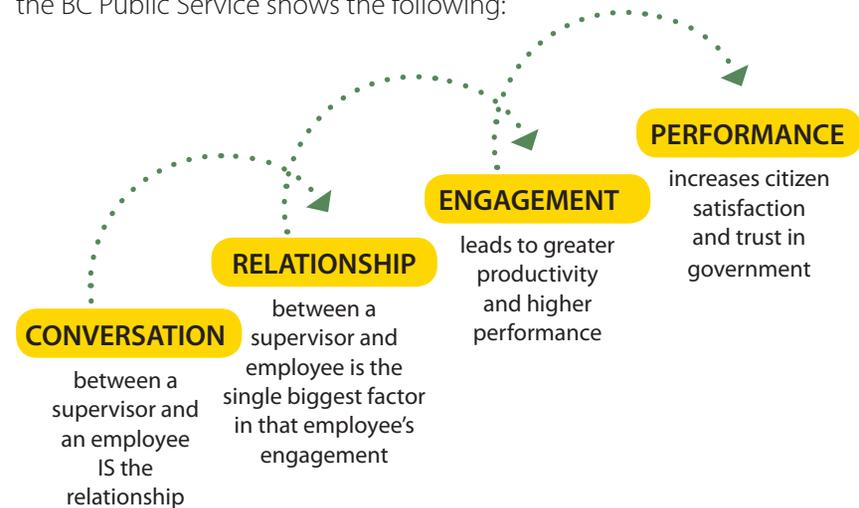
We're talking about trusting your supervisor or employees with what they need to do their jobs effectively and support you in yours, and that looks a little different for everyone.

Why does workplace trust matter?

Workplace trust benefits the BC Public Service

"We are a workforce of trusted professionals" – *Being the Best 2010-2014*

Research conducted around the world as well as by BC Stats right here in the BC Public Service shows the following:



The key to those effective conversations is trust. Trust enables the strong working relationships that build up to high performance and an effective public service. For more about employee engagement, MyPerformance conversations, and other helpful topics, check out the other *MyPerformance Guides* in this series.

“ We're talking about trusting your supervisor or employees with what they need to do their jobs effectively and support you in yours, and that looks a little different for everyone. ”

Workplace trust benefits supervisors

As a supervisor, you want your employees to be thriving high performers, engaged in their work, and dedicated to the Public Service. All of this requires workplace trust. And remember – trust has to go both ways. Employees who don't feel trusted may not trust you, either. Keep reading for actions you can take to demonstrate and build trust.

Having that trusting relationship will pay off when the need for a difficult conversation arises. This could be a conversation about your employee's performance, aspirations for development, organizational priorities, or even events in an employee's life that are impacting the workplace. Trust builds the "emotional bank account" needed in challenging situations to know that you will both get through the challenge.

Finally, research on engagement has shown that the most critical factor in an employee's work experience is their relationship with their supervisor¹ – it creates the conditions that allow the employee to do their best work. By building trust with your employee, you are building their trust in the BC Public Service as a whole, and their ability in turn to create trust with others in the workplace – colleagues, clients, and employees who report to them.

My emotional bank account – Say what??

Stephen Covey uses the bank account as a metaphor to describe how trust is built over time. Just like with our financial bank accounts, we make deposits for later and withdraw to meet our needs now. Covey talks about six ways that a person can deposit trust into an emotional bank account that a person holds with another person, including understanding the individual, keeping commitments, and clarifying expectations. MyPerformance conversations are an excellent way to build that emotional bank account and then withdraw from it when the need arises, such as when we make a mistake or when we have to have a more difficult conversation.

Workplace trust benefits employees

As an employee, if you realize you've dropped a ball, that a piece of work is going astray, or that you don't know what to do, can you go to your supervisor for coaching, advice, or support? Does your supervisor know what you REALLY want next in your career, what you enjoy about your job, and where you feel you're struggling or less engaged? If you said yes, you trust that you will be supported in your work and in your career. If you're not sure what difference that makes, read on.

An exercise

To demonstrate the impact of trust, try this exercise. First, think about the least productive relationship you've had with a supervisor. Spend some time reflecting, and imagine how you would have responded if that supervisor asked you these questions.

- ▶ What interests you the most?
- ▶ What does your gut tell you?
- ▶ What did you learn from that experience?
- ▶ What is holding you back?
- ▶ What would you do if you were me?

Now think about the BEST, most productive relationship you've had with a supervisor. How would you have responded to these questions? Imagine it. What did that feel like?

The difference between the two scenarios is likely trust. You are likely to answer a trusted supervisor more thoughtfully. What difference can having that kind of conversation with your supervisor have on your engagement, growth and career development?

¹ According to Gallup Organization, managers account for up to 70% of the variance in employee engagement. Read the *MyPerformance Guide to Employee Engagement* for more information on enhancing engagement in the BC Public Service.

What is trust in the workplace?

Trust, particularly in the workplace, is believing someone will be honest, will meet their commitments and follow through on agreements you make together. This belief is based on observations as well as our own evaluations, which makes it crucial to be aware of our assessments, ensuring they are specific and formed through observable behaviours rather than hearsay or assumptions.

Another exercise to demonstrate the impact of trust – Multipliers

1. Think about the WORST supervisor that you've had. Write 3 to 5 adjectives that describe that person. Now write down what percentage of effort/performance that your worst supervisor received from you.
2. Think about the BEST supervisor that you've had. Write 3 to 5 adjectives that best describe that person. Now write down what percentage of effort/performance that your best supervisor received from you.
3. What's different?
4. The majority of people and groups say that they put forth, on average, DOUBLE the effort for their best supervisor; Liz Wiseman calls these supervisors "Multipliers." As a supervisor, you have the power to MULTIPLY your impact. Wiseman outlines many strategies for becoming a multiplier in her books. Additionally, the actions in this guide will support building trust in your supervisory relationships as a way to set the foundation for having a significant and positive impact on your employees.

– LIZ WISEMAN, *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter*

There are several aspects to workplace trust and they include:

- ▶ Reciprocity
- ▶ Connection
- ▶ Concern for well-being
- ▶ Honesty
- ▶ Integrity
- ▶ Accountability
- ▶ Empowerment
- ▶ Vulnerability and Courage

While ideally all traits would be present in a supervisory relationship, there are some traits that may be more important for some relationships or roles. For example, a supervisor may want to focus more on demonstrating concern for well-being, integrity, and empowerment. An employee may want to focus more on demonstrating connection, accountability, and courage. Reflecting on these elements will help you understand which behaviours are most relevant for your supervisory relationship.

How do I build workplace trust?

Trust is built one decision at a time. This next section discusses how you can build trust with each other over time.



“Trust is like the air we breathe. When it’s present, nobody really notices. But when it’s absent, everybody notices. – WARREN BUFFETT”

Building workplace trust through key actions

RECIPROCITY

As with MyPerformance, both the employee and supervisor contribute towards trust in their relationship. You choose to put more trust in someone, trust that will hopefully be reciprocated. You can also demonstrate your own trustworthiness. Trust cannot exist within a relationship without both people taking the time and effort to build trust. Both people must show each other that they are worthy of trusting, and both people must make the decision to trust each other based on that information. That means having conversations with each other on topics important to each of you like priorities, career aspirations, and workload rather than relying on emails or guessing about what is important to the other person.

KEY ACTIONS

Whether you are a supervisor or an employee, schedule conversations with each other to talk about a topic or priority that matters to you.

SUPERVISOR TIP

You notice your employee doesn't share a lot when you have conversations. Instead of saying, "My door is always open", keep having conversations, share what's important to you, and ask open ended questions. See the *Coaching Questions Resource* in the MyPerformance Profile for ideas.

Let's look at an example of demonstrating and building trust through a MyPerformance conversation:

An employee initiates a conversation with her supervisor about career development. Instead of simply listing training courses available, the supervisor shows an interest in the employee's career by asking questions about her career aspirations: "Where do you see yourself in 5 years? How do you define success for your career?". The employee responds by telling her supervisor about her career goals and interests.

The supervisor talks about what he can do to support the employee's career development. He suggests a challenging work assignment that may develop her skills if she works hard at it. The employee talks about her strengths and how she believes she is capable of the work.

The employee goes on to talk about how she has followed through on all of her work assignments in the past, including those that involved tight deadlines. The supervisor follows through on his offer to support her career development by assigning her a challenging work assignment and setting up more developmental conversations with her.

Creating a culture of innovation through workplace trust

Researcher Amy Edmondson at Harvard University studied whether nurses who have better relationships with their supervisors and colleagues made fewer mistakes. The results initially showed that more mistakes were made with better relationships. Edmondson then discovered that people with better relationships with their supervisors and colleagues do not perform more mistakes; they report more mistakes. When employees have better relationships with their supervisors, mistakes are more likely to be discussed so that the team can learn, improve and reach higher performance.

- RON FRIEDMAN, PHD, *The Best Place to Work: The Art and Science of Creating an Extraordinary Workplace*

CONNECTION

Human interaction is how people get to know one another. In a workplace setting, getting to know each other means learning each other's interests, strengths and preferences. For example, how do you each like to receive feedback, or at what point in the day are you most creative and ready to brainstorm? You get to know each other in team meetings, roaming the halls, and at the virtual water cooler. In a virtual work environment you may need to reach out more. Taking the time and effort to connect with one another on a regular basis creates the environment necessary for there to be trust.

KEY ACTIONS

Have real-time conversations with each other, whether in person or over web-cam. Limit potential distractions like your phone and the work that's waiting for you when the meeting is over.

SUPERVISOR TIP

Your employee asks "How's your day going?". Instead of saying "fine", take a moment to connect and answer the question with something like, "Great, I had a really good meeting with my boss today and I'll tell you about it at our team meeting", or "Not that great, I'm working on budgets and math isn't my strong suit".

CONCERN FOR WELL-BEING

Focusing on each other's well-being is essential in building trust. Simon Sinek in *Leaders Eat Last* talks about how important it is for a leader to create "a Circle of Safety", an environment where employees feel safe and therefore able to focus on their work. Taking care of employees over a desire to win or achieve builds the trust necessary for employees to feel safe to invest themselves into their work and create success for the team.



Source: Simon Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last*

Having concern for a supervisor's well-being is true for employees too. Supervisors are people and they make mistakes as well. What makes them supervisors is their ability to lead others; it is not their ability to be perfect. Caring for a supervisor's well-being through stressful times can go a long way in building trust.

KEY ACTIONS

Ask each other, "How are you doing?", and take the time to celebrate achievements, discuss challenges, and support each other. Be curious and listen for what matters to the other person. The *MyPerformance Guide to Employee Engagement* will provide you with tips and strategies.

SUPERVISOR TIP

You walk by your employee's cubicle and notice that he's rubbing his forehead and grimacing. Instead of walking by, stop at the person's desk for a moment and ask, "How is your day going?".

HONESTY

When a person consistently demonstrates honesty over time, the other person knows that they mean what they say, whether it's good or bad news. For example, if an employee hears a compliment from his supervisor, he knows that his supervisor isn't just telling him what he wants to hear. Or when one person makes a mistake, trust is built when the other person is open and honest about the mistake rather than pretending it didn't happen.

As a supervisor, there are times when you can't share particular information with your employees, perhaps for confidentiality or operational reasons. Be clear with yourself and your team on what information you can and cannot share. Check any assumptions about what can or cannot be shared. The more transparent you are with your employees, the more you will demonstrate that you trust them. So when you are honest about what you cannot share, your employees will know that you would tell them if you could.

KEY ACTION

Tell each other what the other person needs to know. Find value in your different opinions. Give positive and constructive feedback. Try using the feedback model: What worked well? What was tricky? What do you want to do differently?

SUPERVISOR TIP

You know something that your employees are interested in and you aren't able to share. Instead of saying, "I don't know either", try saying something like, "I'm not able to share that with you right now and here's what I can tell you ...".

INTEGRITY

Integrity is the overarching principle the BC Public Service Values are built on. Trust is built through integrity, a practice where a person's words and actions are consistent with their good intentions.

Intentions are not always seen. We make assumptions all the time about other people's intentions, and it is critical to be aware of those assumptions. It helps to be open and transparent about your own intentions to prevent others from making assumptions about your intentions. At all times, identify what you can do to align your behaviour more closely with your good intentions because your behaviour, not your intentions, is seen. **We are all responsible for our workplace behaviours and people trust us based on the consistency of those behaviours.**

KEY ACTIONS

Articulate your intentions, and align your words and actions with your intentions. Take the most respectful interpretation of the other person's intentions, even when you don't understand or agree with what they say or do. Check out and verify assumptions.

SUPERVISOR TIP

An opportunity comes up that would normally go to your employee and you are interested because of the networking involved. You know your employee would be excited too. Instead of saying, "I'll be taking the lead on this one", try saying: "We have a great networking opportunity on a type of project that you have led in the past with rave reviews from our customers. I'd like you to take the lead on this project as well. I'm going to be more involved than usual and I want you to know that it's not because I have concerns about your performance, it's for my own development."

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is demonstrated when agreements are made and followed through on. If an employee or supervisor isn't able to deliver on what was promised, there is opportunity to start a conversation early on to possibly renegotiate the agreement. For example, perhaps an employee needs more time or found out about another priority. What's important in this scenario is that there is a conversation at the earliest opportunity to identify that there are challenges impacting the employee's ability to deliver and determine if it is possible to renegotiate the agreement.

KEY ACTIONS

Reach clear agreements with each other so that you can hold each other accountable. You can follow up by documenting these agreements in writing, either through email or in your MyPerformance Profile. Then follow through. If you are not able to meet an agreed upon commitment, let the other person know as soon as possible to discuss priorities and the possibility of renegotiating your agreement.

SUPERVISOR TIP

Your employee comes to you with a complaint about another employee talking loudly when on the phone, impacting the first person's ability to concentrate and you know they haven't talked about it. Instead of taking full responsibility for the conflict you could say something like, "What supports do you need to have a conversation with your co-worker so that the two of you can agree on how to work together?"

EMPOWERMENT

One way to build trust is to empower another person. When an employee has shown that they are ready, willing and capable to perform a task, the supervisor can make the decision to advise the employee of the desired outcome and then step away to allow the employee to perform. When an employee is empowered, the employee is being trusted. If the employee isn't able to perform the task independently at this point, the employee can talk to his/her supervisor about the challenge and they can both reach an agreement as to the best way forward. As an employee is empowered, trust continues to build. Read the *MyPerformance Guide to Motivation in the Workplace* for more on empowerment.

KEY ACTIONS

Have a conversation about what it will take for the supervisor to know that the employee is capable and willing to perform the responsibilities of their job with autonomy and what level of support will be required. Be curious with each other and ask questions.

SUPERVISOR TIP

An employee comes to you unsure of what to do on a work assignment. Instead of saying, "Here's what you need to do", try asking, "What do you think needs to happen next?"

“Keep every promise you make and only make promises you can keep.”
- ANTHONY HITT

VULNERABILITY AND COURAGE

“People who aren’t afraid to admit the truth about themselves are not going to engage in the kind of political behaviour that wastes everyone’s time and energy, and more important, makes the accomplishment of results an unlikely scenario.” Simon Lencioni, *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Field Guide for Leaders, Managers, and Facilitators*.

There is an inherent risk to trust. Being vulnerable in the workplace means being honest about challenges, mistakes, and some fears. Again, being vulnerable doesn’t mean oversharing or telling your deepest fears and secrets. Saying “I was wrong about that”, “I’m not sure this time,” “You’re better than I am at this” or even, “I’m sorry” takes courage and builds trust.

KEY ACTION

Be authentic in your conversations with each other by talking about your mistakes and challenges. Request support where you need it. When someone places that level of trust in you, respect that vulnerability.

SUPERVISOR TIP

You discover that one of your employees made a mistake. Instead of starting the conversation with, “I just found out what you did”, invite the employee to tell you by asking, “What went well? What was tricky? What do you want to do differently next time?” By being curious and open, you make it easier for your employee to tell you what happened.

Watch Brené Brown’s TED Talk to learn more about the benefits of vulnerability.

http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html

Building workplace trust through behavioural competencies

Fostering Trust is a behavioural competency for executives and directors that can also apply to all supervisors and employees. Fostering trust involves knowledge and skills to build and sustain trust in an organization and between the leader and his/her colleagues, through integrity, consistent behaviour, following through on commitments and open communications. This competency requires the following behaviours:

- ▶ Treats people in a consistent way
- ▶ Keeps promises
- ▶ Provides opportunities for others to express opinions and outcomes
- ▶ Demonstrates understanding and consideration for the needs and interests of others

We can also look to our *Aboriginal Relations Competencies* for the competency, “Building a Trust-Based Relationship”. Our Aboriginal clients and stakeholders told us that building a trust-based relationship requires a fundamental understanding that relationship is the foundation from which all activities happen, and that building a good relationship takes time and commitment. It is a willingness to build a personal relationship in addition to a professional one, participating in open exchanges of experiences and culture. It requires a genuine, non-controlling approach and relies upon demonstrated integrity and transparency. Examples of behaviours include:

- ▶ Goes without agenda to the person, community or organization to listen and understand their experience
- ▶ Makes a conscious effort to establish and build rapport
- ▶ Learns from interactions and makes adjustments
- ▶ Shares information honestly and openly
- ▶ Schedules an appropriate amount of time for both business and relationship building
- ▶ Nurtures the relationship despite differences in opinion or other conflicting situations

BC Public Service Values

Learn more about the *Values of the BC Public Service* on MyHR.

INTEGRITY is the overarching characteristic and is critical to trust. Let's look at how each of the Public Service Values has a role to play in building trust.

PASSION requires that we let our authentic selves show. That takes trust that we will be supported. Passion builds trust by demonstrating that we are committed to the organization's success and will work towards it.

CURIOSITY requires us to admit we don't know – in a situation without trust, that can be hard to do. Curiosity builds trust when we seek input from others, demonstrating that we trust them.

TEAMWORK can only be achieved when members of the team trust each other to be supportive and hold the needs of the team as paramount. Teamwork builds trust when we demonstrate that commitment to the team.

ACCOUNTABILITY includes owning up to our mistakes – it's much easier to tell a mistake to someone we trust. Accountability builds trust by demonstrating that we are putting the needs of the organization ahead of our need to be seen as perfect.

SERVICE requires that we trust our colleagues and supervisor to follow through on any commitments we might make together; it builds trust, like passion, by showing that we are dedicated to the same outcomes as our team members.

COURAGE thrives when we can trust our supervisor and colleagues to help us step outside our comfort zones. Courage builds trust by allowing us to extend that support to others.

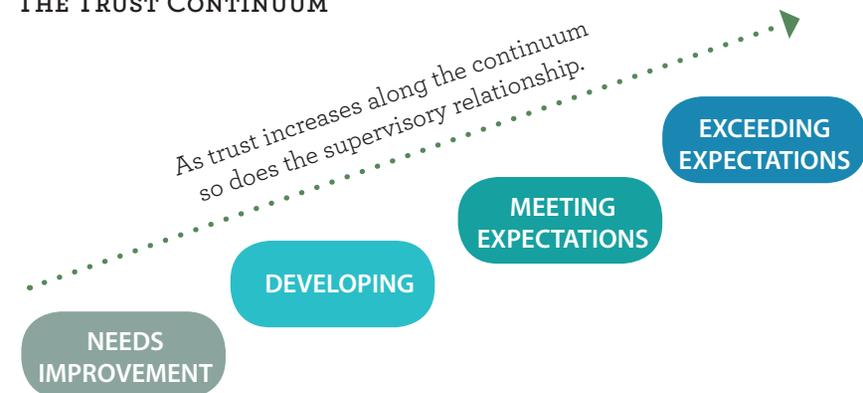
Building workplace trust through a trust continuum

When it comes to building trust, it's about building a relationship between two people and putting focus on how you approach and interact with one another. What you do next depends on the level of trust in your current relationship and where you want it to be.

Consider the following questions and support your opinions with observable behaviours or actions, not what you've heard from others:

- ▶ Where are you on the trust continuum? In other words, on a scale of 1 to 10, how much trust is in the relationship?
- ▶ Where do you want to be on the trust continuum? What will that look like?
- ▶ What will be possible when you reach it?

THE TRUST CONTINUUM



Building trust takes time. Using Stephen Covey's concept of the emotional bank account, as you deposit into that emotional bank account, the needle on the trust continuum moves to the right. As you withdraw, the needle on the continuum moves to the left. Paying attention to which way your needle is moving, if at all, will support your supervisory relationship in the long run.

Also, where you want to be on that continuum may be different for different people. When it comes to workplace trust in a supervisory relationship, you may be comfortable with "meeting expectations" and that's okay. Increasing your awareness around the level of trust in your relationships is important so that you know where to focus and put in the effort.

When the Supervisory Relationship is not as strong as it could be: Always remember that while you're working to build trust, accountability to the Public Service remains the same. Look to the Standards of Conduct for guidance. Be courageous. It isn't easy to be the first one to work towards building trust, and the payoff could be incredible. Set small goals and celebrate every achievement.

When the Supervisory Relationship is new: It's okay to start small. Relationships are built over time. Take small steps during each conversation and don't be afraid to make mistakes – just take ownership, make it right, and keep trying.

When the Supervisory Relationship has been successful in building trust: Continue to take the time and put effort into having conversations that build trust with each other.

See the earlier section, *Building workplace trust through key actions*, for practical tips for building workplace trust.

Talk about trust

Having conversations that build trust does not have to be as awkward as it sounds. Conversations like these may really be about trust, in disguise:

- ▶ Given that we work out of different offices, what is the best way for us to talk about our work and what is happening in each of our worlds?
- ▶ I'm having some questions about my work.
- ▶ When we meet, it seems that I do all of the talking, and I want to hear more of your opinions and ideas. What can I do to support you in telling me more of your thoughts?
- ▶ In our team meeting today, you said X. What did you mean by that?

Get support where needed. *Supervisor Partnered Coaching*, offered to all employees through MyHR, can be a great resource. Also, the *Learning Centre Courses, A Coaching Approach to Conversation* and *Fierce Conversations* offer new tools for effective conversations.

Repairing workplace trust

"Trust is hard to build and easy to lose." Sometimes the trust built in a relationship might be damaged. In the workplace this might happen when someone doesn't follow through on a high priority commitment or when confidential information is shared inappropriately. One of the most important ways to rebuild trust is to make and receive repair attempts. A repair attempt is anything you can do to stop negativity from escalating.

When trust has been damaged it can be difficult to hear repair attempts. Make your attempts obvious and formal in order to emphasize them. You may even want to identify these attempts to the other person by stating your intention. Examples of repair attempts include:

- ▶ Take responsibility for your behaviour or contribution to the problem and be okay with the other person not reciprocating. Somebody has to go first.
- ▶ Verbally apologize with sincerity.
- ▶ Seek to understand their perspective and find a way to show respect

for it (even if you disagree). Showing respect may mean acknowledging the other person's perspective.

- ▶ Express appreciation for the other person or their actions (without expecting a compliment back).
- ▶ Go out of your way to reach agreement with them on an issue (even a small one).

Also, the other person may make a repair attempt that may be clumsy or clouded in negativity. We need to watch for those attempts and go out of our way to formally accept those as well.

Read more about this in *The Relationship Cure* by John Gottmann, PhD.

The biology of trust – how do we know that any of this is true?

“Trust is not simply a matter of shared opinion. Trust is a biological reaction to the belief that someone has our well-being at heart.” Simon Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last*

It's easy to think that trust is entirely mental, outside our control, and not really relevant to work anyhow. It either exists or it doesn't, right? We can't see it and many of us don't know much about the science behind it. How relevant is trust in the workplace anyway?

Like the air we breathe, trust may be invisible, but it's also chemical, and moreover, it's critical. We have more control over trust than we think we do, and it's essential to every aspect of our lives, from our personal relationships, to our banking, to our work.

Neuroeconomist Paul Zak studies trust, morality and oxytocin. He found that the more someone is trusted, the more oxytocin they produce. And the more oxytocin they produce, the more trustworthy they become. In the workplace, this explains why trusted, empowered employees are more productive, a phenomenon also noted by Daniel Pink in his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*.

Little things make a big difference

Having conversations that build trust does not have to be as awkward as it sounds. Conversations like these may really be about trust, in disguise:

Hormones are messengers that your brain and other parts of your body use to send instructions to each other. When it comes to trust, it's helpful to know more about a hormone called oxytocin.

Oxytocin floods the body when you interact with someone you trust, when someone demonstrates trust in you, and when you are under stress. It facilitates building connections between individuals, it makes you more trustworthy, and can actually reduce and repair the damaging effects of stress on the body. Oxytocin has been described as “the molecule of morality” by researcher Paul Zak.

Additional Resources:

[Trust Morality – and Oxytocin? TED Talk by Paul Zak](#)

[How to Make Stress Your Friend TED Talk by Kelly McGonigal](#)

The release of oxytocin in the workplace also helps us to form stronger teams. When you trust the other members of the team to contribute their share, you are more likely to contribute your own, and even to go above and beyond. Oxytocin makes us more likely to help others when they need it, and to be able to ask for help when we need it.

The future of work

We're not sure what life will look like in 10, 15 or even 25 years, but what we're sure WON'T be different is this: the BC Public Service will be made up of people. So how do we prepare for the future of work? What do we need to do now to make sure that we, both as an organization and as individual employees, are ready for whatever the future holds?

There are many trends in the workplace that already highlight the need for increased trust between supervisors and employees. For example, flexible work options may include working from home for some employees, or working in a different office or even city from their supervisors. Supervisors must trust that their employees are working when they don't physically see each other every day – and manage outcomes appropriately – and employees must trust that their supervisors will keep them informed with what they need to do their work effectively.

Another workplace trend that highlights the need for trust is the growing understanding that autonomy over work is profoundly motivating. When employees can make decisions about how, where, when and with whom they work, trust becomes even more essential to ensure that employees feel comfortable going to their supervisors when they experience a set back or challenge. Employees also need to know that if they bring forward a workplace concern, they can trust that their supervisor will take action if appropriate.

The future of work requires work environments that are collaborative, fluid and flexible. When trust is present in a work relationship, people are more open to new ideas. They are more likely to look at what's possible, brainstorm and innovate.

While we do not know exactly what work will look like in the future, there is some certainty in what we do know. Whatever the future of work looks like, trust will be a critical foundation.

The chemistry of coaching

If you've taken the Learning Centre's *Coaching Approach to Conversation* course, then you're familiar with the skill of acknowledgement. Acknowledgements are different from compliments – instead of a thank you, or appreciation of something a person has done, they get at the heart of who someone had to be in order to do it. They took a big risk, showed courage, or proved their dedication. An acknowledgement is about an inner strength, and as a result gives that person more access to growing that strength. And, when the acknowledgement is true and honest the person receiving it will feel truly seen, and that fosters trust.

Coaches will often talk about “seeing the acknowledgement land” when the statement is really meaningful to the person being acknowledged. But what are you seeing? You might be seeing the response to the flood of oxytocin and other hormones through their system.

More generally, the relationship between a coach and the person they're coaching also involves a high degree of trust, which is another great source of oxytocin. You can leverage that by using the skill of acknowledgement in your conversations.

Summary

MyPerformance is built upon the importance of trusted feedback between a supervisor and an employee. Trust is a critical component of any relationship. We know that employees are more engaged and more successful when they have a strong relationship with their supervisors. By examining the level of trust in supervisory relationships, we can take the steps necessary to build and enhance that workplace trust. Trust is built when both the supervisor and employee take the time and effort to be vulnerable, connect, and have honest conversations with each other's well-being held as priority. Trust is also built through integrity, accountability and empowerment. By building trust, we build a better, more productive work environment and Public Service.

Appendix A: Workplace trust worksheet

You can use this worksheet alone, or you can use it with another person to provide a framework for a conversation about trust and record commitments. Use the margins, the back of the page, or another piece of paper if you need more space. Make sure you focus on observable facts, not things you've heard from others, opinions, or guesses.

About the relationship Nature of the relationship (employee/supervisor, colleagues, service provider/client, etc.):	
About you Name: Role in the relationship:	About the other person Name: Role in the relationship:
What trust looks like in this relationship	
For this relationship to be successful, I need to be trusted with:	For this relationship to be successful, I must trust the other person with:
Actions – What will I do to build trust in this relationship	
For suggested actions go back to Building workplace trust through key actions on page 7. How can these best practices apply to your situation?	
In order to demonstrate trust in the relationship, I will:	
In order to demonstrate that I am trustworthy, I will:	

For more information, visit:

MyHR

BC Public Service Agency

810 Blanshard Street

Victoria, B.C.

V8W 2H2



Where ideas work