PETER MILLS

DON'T FIX ME
FIX THE WORKPLACE

A GUIDE TO

Building Constructive Working Relationships

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Using This Book

THIS BOOK PROVIDES a holistic model for building constructive working relationships. It defines what organizations and managers must know and must do to create the working environment that enables the constructive working relationships that lead to productive work.

This book, like my previous book, *Leading People – The 10 Things Successful Managers Know and Do,* is based on The Leadership Framework, a holistic and integrated system of managerial leadership. The reason for using this management framework is that it considers the organization as a purpose-built structure, with systems of work and specifically designed working relationships that enable people to work towards a common business purpose. The Leadership Framework is specifically designed to enable productive work with constructive working relationships.

Being based on the same holistic framework, you will find there is some reiteration of concepts from the previous book, such as the expectations of all employees, the role of the manager, defining roles and building trust. In this book, however, this content is slanted towards building constructive working relationships. There is also substantial new material such as information on organizational structure, systems of work and the interpersonal skills and behaviors required of managers to build constructive working relationships.

As all concepts are fully integrated, by the end of the book, the reader will have a strong understanding of the nature of people in a working environment and how to create a working environment that builds the trust required for constructive working relationships.

At the end of each chapter, there are "Tips for Getting Started." These tips will help you on your journey to create a constructive working environment.

The companion website **www.theleadershipframework.com.au** offers additional free information and tools. You can also decide to join The Leadership Framework Network and gain access to all the information you need for a more comprehensive implementation.

Contents

Chapter 1

The Need for a Different Approach

Organizations with constructive working relationships are positive places to work. They have high-performance cultures with high levels of employee engagement.

CONSTRUCTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS are *where people work together in a positive manner, doing productive work to achieve organizational objectives*. Research continually shows that organizations with constructive working relationships are seen as great places to work. Such organizations are more likely to have high-performance cultures with high levels of employee engagement. They also:

- Attract and retain highly skilled staff.
- Have lower absenteeism.
- Have fewer cases of fraud.
- Have better safety practices with less bullying and harassment leading to reduced workers' compensation costs and insurance premiums.

People in these organizations are more likely to support organizational change and tend to be more innovative and creative, which gives such organizations a competitive edge.

For managers and their teams, having constructive working relationships provide additional benefits. Instead of spending time and energy overcoming problems associated with negative relationships, the focus is on achieving business goals. Day to day, work is more enjoyable, and the team is happier, more satisfied with their lives and feel healthier.

With constructive working relationships, managers get the best out of their team and out of others and achieve their outcomes, often with better results. They also assist others in the organization to do the same.

Having the whole organization working together, in a constructive manner, is good for individuals, customers, suppliers and key stakeholders. It is essential for business success.

So why don't all organizations have the constructive working relationships that enable productive work?

Having had significant experience in senior human resource roles, dealing with CEOs, managers, and individuals, I have seen and experienced first hand the way people work together and the way relationships can fall apart. Even with the best intentions and effort from all parties, working relationships can and do fail. This strains not only the people involved but also the working environment of their co-workers. I have seen whole divisions that, for the most part, refuse to work together, even at the senior level.

When trying to resolve these issues, organizations, CEOs, their top leadership teams and managers often talk about culture, so they target organizational values or behaviors. However, time and time again the focus moves to the individuals involved and not the working environment that created conflict in the first place.

Managers then try to "fix" people by giving them training on interpersonal skills. Sometimes this works, but more often than not it fails, as the working environment continues to be the source of frustration and irritation. Consequently, relationships never get back on track and continue to negatively impact productive work.

Part of the reason for this is that the current trend is to focus on the individual rather than fix the working environment that created the problem in the first place. If you search the internet using the phrase "building constructive working relationships," you will find a plethora of information about behaviors. This reflects the focus on interpersonal skills. There is very little information on the organizational requirements or managerial requirements to create a work environment that both enables and supports constructive work. This has resulted in an overemphasis on the symptoms without looking at the causes of work-related conflict.

Conflict at work often occurs when people are unable to perform their work or when expectations are not met. This then manifests itself in the use of poor behavior by one or both parties. The causes of failure are often due to things outside the control of the individual or groups concerned. These causes include unclear work boundaries, poor definition of work, ineffective systems of work, poor task assignment and differing expectations of outcomes or required service levels, all of which lead to a reduced ability to perform work effectively. In these circumstances, the focus of the individual often moves from what is best for the organization to behavior that says "I will do what is good for me and my mental state and my survival."

If the causal factors are not changed, the conflict will remain unresolved, may reoccur or the individual concerned will develop workarounds, often to the detriment of the organization. Furthermore, team members may inappropriately seek protection and support from others, thus creating third parties to the manager-employee relationship and increasing the conflict. Third parties in this context include other managers, human resources staff, and unions. Both outcomes hinder the development of positive working relationships and are unacceptable for a high performing business.

What is needed is an approach that considers the whole working environment, not an assumption that something is wrong with the individual, while leaving the causes of the poor behavior unattended. It requires a clear understanding of the working environment

that shapes behavior. It needs a model for constructive working relationships based on specific understandings of people at work.

Key Concepts

- Constructive working relationships are where people work together in a positive manner, doing productive work to achieve organizational objectives.
- Research continually shows that organizations with constructive working relationships are seen as great places to work. People in these organizations are more likely to support organizational change and tend to be more innovative and creative.
- People working in constructive working environments are happier, more satisfied with their lives and feel healthier.
- Having the whole organization working in a constructive manner is good for individuals, customers, suppliers and key stakeholders.
- Conflict at work often occurs when people are unable to perform their work or where expectations are not met. This manifests itself in the use of poor behavior by one or both parties.
- While the causes of failure are often due to things outside the control of the individuals or groups concerned, often the assumption is that something is wrong with the individual, leaving the causes of the poor behaviors unattended. If the causal factors are not changed, then conflict will remain unresolved, may reoccur or the individual concerned will develop workarounds, often to the detriment of the organization.
- What is needed is an approach that considers the whole working environment with specific understandings of people at work.

Tips for Getting Started

1. Think about your working relationships. Are there areas where the relationship can be improved? What are the frustrations? What do you think are the causes? Write them down. After reading each chapter from chapter 4 to the summary, write down possible actions you can take to make the relationship more constructive.

2. Think about a member of your team who has a poor working relationship with you or with others. What do you think is driving their behaviors? What frustrates them and you? Write them down. After reading each chapter, from chapter 4 to chapter 10, write down possible actions you can take to make the relationship more constructive.

An introduction to The Leadership Framework is available as a free download. Visit www.theleadershipframework.com.au

Chapter 2

The Work Environment and People

To build constructive working relationships requires an understanding of the nature of working organizations and people in the working environment.

TO BE ABLE to build constructive working relationships, managers need to understand the working environment in which all employees find themselves. They need to understand "the working organization" that creates the working environment. In this way, they can focus on the cause and effect of people issues.

Managers also need to understand the nature of people in a working environment, how and why they react in the way they do. Only then can they take appropriate action to change the environment to enable the constructive working relationships that lead to productive work.

What is a Working Organization?

Working organizations exist to coordinate the work of many people towards a common business purpose, that is, to produce the organization's products and service. Although working organizations have physical assets, they consist of people whose interaction is

essential. The context of this interaction is defined by the organization's strategy and delivered through the organization's structure (functions, roles and role relationships) and its systems of work (policies, processes and information and communication technologies). These are in turn activated by the application of effective managerial leadership. Each component provides the context for people's work and creates the day to day working environment of all employees, including managers (see diagram below).

The Working Organization

In defining the working organization, we can see that four interacting parts create its outputs:

    i.   Purpose and Direction

        The direction of a working organization, and therefore the context of the work for each person, is defined by the organization's purpose and strategy. An organization's purpose and direction provide the focus and context for all work. The strategy specifies what the organization does and does not do. This results in initiatives designed to achieve defined

organizational objectives that are what the organization is attempting to accomplish over a period of years, as represented by the organization's collective objectives.

Without this focus, the context of people's work will be confused, and unproductive work will occur. There will be a lack of prioritization of projects and a waste of time, effort, and resources. There will be confusion on what is important to the organization, and therefore people's day to day work. This resultant confusion will affect working relationships across the organization.

ii. Structure, Functions, Roles and Role Relationships

In order to deliver the organization's purpose and strategy, roles are created and organized into functions. This organizational structure provides the shared understanding of accountability and authority that exists between people whose work must be aligned and integrated with other roles to deliver the organization's products and services in line with the strategy. Each role has a specific purpose with specific accountabilities and authorities that enable people to work together effectively and collaboratively. These roles are commonly represented on paper as a two-dimensional organization chart.
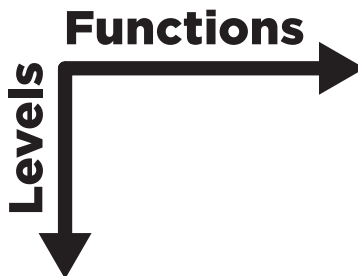
Functions

Levels

Structure, levels of
work, functions

- The horizontal dimension defines how the work is organized into core functions such as sales, service and manufacturing and how it is supported by specialist functions such as finance and human resources.
- The vertical layers reflect levels of complexity of work and that work in organizations occurs over differing time periods, with each layer adding value in a different way.

If well designed the right work will be performed at the right level by the right roles and each role will have clear accountabilities with matching authority to complete their work. People will work in both a constructive and productive manner. If poorly designed there will be gaps or duplication of effort, there will be misaligned accountabilities and authorities for work. This has the potential to cause unnecessary conflict.

iii. Systems of Work

Systems of work are the organization's policies, procedures, processes and information and communication technologies. They provide standardizing methods for work to be done to deliver the organization's products and services. They enable roles to work together, within teams, across teams and the organization. They enable roles (people) to work together to deliver the organization's purpose.

If well designed and aligned with requisite managerial leadership, systems of work help create the work environment that enables constructive working relationships and productive work. When poorly designed or poorly implemented, they will cause confusion and conflict.

iv. Effective Managerial Leadership

Structure and systems of work are activated and deployed through effective leadership practices. Managers at every level are accountable to achieve the business goal set for them in line with the organization's strategy.

Managers:
- Set the purpose and direction for their team and enable team members to move together in that direction with competence, commitment, and enthusiasm.
- Build a team that is capable and committed to achieving business outcomes.
- Provide an environment that allows their team to be effective and satisfied in the work while developing their full potential.

Each part of the working organization must operate effectively to ensure the development and delivery of the constructive working relationships that lead to productive work. Without an effective structure, with appropriate functions, roles, and role relationships and without integrated systems of work, all activated by effective managerial leadership practices, the organization's strategy, and purpose may not be delivered, and the causes of failure will not be clear. Focus will be on individuals as the cause of failure and not the working environment created by the working organization.

People in a Working Environment

As stated in the section "How to Use this Book," The Leadership Framework, a fully integrated set of principles and practices for managing people in a working environment, is the basis of this book's concepts. Importantly, the Leadership Framework contains specific beliefs about people in a working environment. These beliefs are that:

i. People are naturally motivated to work; they are not intrinsically lazy.
ii. People are social beings, and work is an environment where social interaction is required to achieve business outcomes.
iii. Organizations and their employees share a common goal in the need for productive work.

    iv.   The work environment critically influences an individual's ability to do their best work.

    v.   Productive work is enabled by systemic trust and fairness and is reduced by fear.

    vi.   People seek to work at a level in which they can use their capabilities to the fullest.

    vii.   People seek fair differential pay for that work.

Extrapolating these beliefs means:

- People come to work to do the best job they can, but their natural motivation to work and their performance effectiveness is affected by workplace conditions, that is, the working environment created by the working organization. If the conditions in the workplace are such that they induce confusion or fear, people cannot be expected to contribute fully.

- Work is a social environment where social interaction is required to achieve business outcomes. A clear understanding of the "social norms" and the "rules of engagement" are essential for people to work together effectively.

- Constructive working relationships cannot be built without trust. If the working environment does not create trust, then people will not work together constructively or work together effectively.

- Human beings are naturally social creatures — we need positive interactions. It makes sense that the better our relationships are at work, the happier and more productive we're going to be.

- People want to work at a level where they can use their capabilities to the fullest. If their role or tasks in a role do not match their individual capability, they will become frustrated or bored. This will have predictive consequences.

- Someone effectively contributing to their role expects fair payment for the work they do. People paid at equitable

levels feel satisfied, and pay tends not to be raised as a focusing issue in their workplace.

With an understanding of people at work and the working organization, managers can establish the workplace conditions that enable the constructive working relationships that lead to productive work.

Key Concepts

- To be able to build constructive working relationships, managers need to understand the working environment in which all employees find themselves. They need to understand the working organization. They also need to understand the nature of people in a working environment.
- Working organizations exist to coordinate the work of many people towards a common business purpose, that is, to produce the organization's products and service.
- Although working organizations have physical assets, they consist of people whose interaction is required to deliver the organization's purpose. This interaction is defined by the organization's strategy and delivered by the organization's structure (functions, roles and role relationships) and its systems of work (policies, processes and information and communication technologies), all of which are activated by the application of effective managerial leadership.
- Strategy, structure, systems of work and managerial leadership provide the context for people's work and creates the day to day working environment of all employees.
- Without an effective structure, with appropriate functions, roles, and role relationships and without integrated systems of work, all activated by consistent and effective managerial leadership practices, the organization's strategy and purpose may not be delivered, and the causes of failure will not be clear.

- This book uses The Leadership Framework as the basis for the model for constructive working relationships. The Leadership Framework has seven assumptions about people and work. These are:
  o People are naturally motivated to work; they are not intrinsically lazy.
  o People are social beings, and work is an environment where social interaction is required to achieve business outcomes.
  o Organizations and their employees share a common goal in the need for productive work.
  o The work environment critically influences an individual's ability to do their best work.
  o Productive work is enabled by systemic trust and fairness and is reduced by fear.
  o People seek to work at a level in which they can use their capabilities to the fullest.
  o People seek fair differential pay for that work.
- With an understanding of people at work and the working organization, managers can set the workplace conditions that enable the constructive working relationships that lead to productive work.

Tips for Getting Started

1. Consider the nature of working organizations. How does it relate to your organization or department? Think about how the working organization impacts your team.
2. One of The Leadership Framework's beliefs about people is, "The work environment critically influences an individual's ability to do their best work." Identify what aspects of the work environment critically impact your teams working relationships?

Additional information available at www.theleadershipframework.com.au

1. "Why Managers Fail" — available as a free download on The Leadership Framework website.
2. Implement business strategy
3. Design the organization
4. Design and maintain productive systems of work
5. Role of the manager
6. Understand the role of others

Chapter 3

Setting Conditions for Constructive Working Relationships

Building constructive working relationships requires the creation of the right working environment. This goes beyond the use of good interpersonal skills.

ONE OF THE Leadership Framework's beliefs about people at work is that "People are social beings and work is an environment where social interaction is required to achieve business outcomes." It makes sense therefore that the use of good interpersonal skills (by everybody) will assist in establishing more constructive behaviors and will provide some "social glue." However, interpersonal skills have limited value in a workplace and a working relationship which is otherwise flawed in its design or subject to ineffective leadership. To have constructive working relationships requires a working environment that both enables it and sustains it.

To build the constructive working relationships that lead to productive work, managers need to consider the whole working organization. They need a model that considers the interaction of people in a working environment, the environment that impacts every employee, every day.
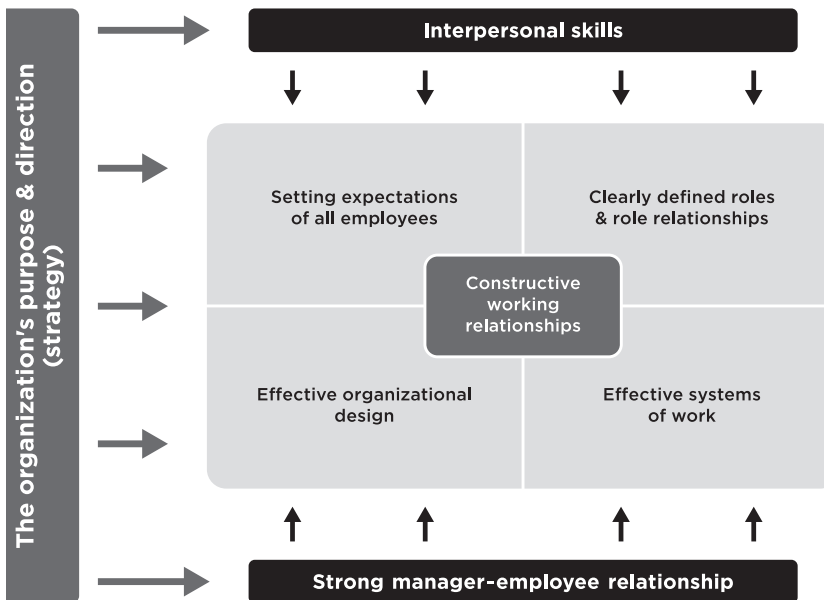
Model for Constructive Working Relationships

The model below incorporates all elements of the working organization, and The Leadership Framework's seven beliefs about people at work is embedded into each element (See Chapter 2: The Work Environment and People).

The basis for collaboration is built on the organization's structure, clearly defined roles and role relationships and the organization's systems of work, all of which is activated by effective managerial leadership, which includes the manager's day to day work.

Model for Constructive Working Relationships

The model for constructive working relationships has six independent but interrelated parts. The context for each part of the model is defined by the organization's purpose and direction (strategy). These six parts are:

i. Setting Expectations of All Employees

   In organizations, all employees are expected to deliver the outputs required of their role and use the resources and processes specified by the organization. Expectations, however, go beyond this. As work is a social environment, where individuals are using their capability in a goal-directed manner, standards on *how* people are to work together is essential.

   The requirements to enable constructive working relationships are defined in Chapter 4: Setting the Expectations for All Employees.

ii. Effective Organizational Design

   An organization's design provides the shared understanding of accountability and authority that exists between people whose work is aligned and integrated to deliver the organization's purpose and direction. Effective design enables constructive working relationships while poor organizational design has the potential to create workplace conflict.

   The requirements to enable constructive working relationships are defined in Chapter 5: Effective Organizational Design.

iii. Clearly Defined Roles and Role Relationships

   In organizations, there are different types of roles. There are leadership roles, of which there are five types, specialist roles with six possible types of authority and team member roles. Well designed roles, with clear accountabilities and authorities, provide the rules for engagement and enables focused thinking about the work to be done. They enable people to work together both constructively and productively, towards business goals.

   The requirements to enable constructive working relationships are defined in Chapter 6: Clearly Defining Roles and Role Relationships — Specialist Roles.

iv. Providing Effective Systems of Work

Systems of work, such as policies and processes enable people to work together. Systems of work create custom, practices, traditions, beliefs and assumptions, which in turn help create the organization's culture. Systems of work reinforce what is valued in the organization by the senior leadership team; therefore, their design is essential to enable constructive working relationships.

The requirements to enable constructive working relationships are defined in Chapter 7: Creating Effective Systems of Work.

v.   Strong Manager-Employee Relationships

The foundation of having constructive working relationships is the manager-employee relationship. A strong manager-employee relationship can only be achieved where managers have strong, personally earned authority gained through effective performance in their role. The focus of this relationship is on achieving business goals. It is based on care, dignity, respect and mutual trust between the manager and each team member and is critical to the success of both the manager and each team member.

The requirements to enable constructive working relationships are defined in Chapter 8: Building Strong Manager-Employee Relationships.

vi. Interpersonal Skills

As people are social beings and work is an environment where social interaction is required to achieve business outcomes, managers need relationship management skills for dealing with people and managing issues. The development of these skills provides the "social glue" for the team to work together.

The requirements to enable constructive working relationships are defined in Chapter 9: Interpersonal skills.

A detailed explanation of each part of the model for constructive working relationships is in the following chapters.

Key Concepts

- The work environment requires social interactions to achieve business outcomes. The use of good interpersonal skills (by everybody) will assist in establishing more constructive behaviors and provide some "social glue."
- Interpersonal skills have limited value in a workplace and a working relationship which is otherwise flawed in its design or subject to ineffective leadership.
- The context for each's person's work is defined by the organization's purpose and direction.
- To have constructive behavior requires an environment that both enables it and sustains it. This environment is created by:
  - o Setting the expectations for how all employees should work together
  - o Providing effective organizational design
  - o Clearly defining roles and role relationships
  - o Providing effective systems of work
  - o Developing interpersonal skills
  - o Building strong manager-employee relationships
- Embedded into the model for constructive working relationships are the Leadership Framework's seven beliefs about people in a working environment.

Tips for Getting Started

1. Consider the working organization and discuss this model for building constructive working relationships with:
   a. Your manager and get feedback
   b. Your peer managers and get feedback
2. Consider how this model for constructive working relationships works for you and your team.

If you desire to learn more about THE LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK SERIES and see books 1 and 2, Click below:

[The Leadership Framework Series](#)

To get the rest of *Don't Fix Me: Fix the Workplace*, click below:

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CONSTRUCTIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT = PRODUCTIVE WORK

Fix the working environment not the person. Even with the best intentions working relationships can and do fail. Conflict at work often occurs when people are unable to perform their work or expectations are not met. This often leads to inappropriate behavior and, if the causal factors are not changed, then conflict will remain unresolved. This book provides an approach that considers the whole working environment, not an assumption that something is wrong with the individual. It provides an integrated model for constructive working relationships based on specific understandings of people at work.

To have constructive working relationships requires an environment that both enables it and sustains it. In this book you will learn how to create a working environment that builds the trust required for constructive working relationships. This environment is created by:

- ✺ Setting the expectations on how all employees are to work together

- ✺ Providing effective organizational design

- ✺ Clearly defining roles and role relationships

- ✺ Providing effective systems of work

- ✺ Developing interpersonal skills

- ✺ Building strong manager-employee working relationships

There are many books on improving working relationships however they are based on interpersonal skills. While acknowledging that interpersonal skills provide the 'social glue' for working relationships, this book identifies the main causes of workplace conflict and how to create the right working environment that enables constructive working relationships which leads to productive work.

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