

The Trust Building Survey: Measuring and Improving Employer-Employee Trust

Psych Health + Safety Consulting Inc. & The Graham Lowe Group Inc.

The Importance of Trust

Research and practice consistently demonstrate that trust between employees and their employer and is a key determinant of organizational performance and employee well-being. Trust is the foundation for a culture of health and safety, making it a prerequisite for a psychologically healthy and safe workplace.

Employees trust organizations, and leaders, that actively promote a healthy, safe and engaging work environment. In return, employees will show loyalty and commitment, energetically immersing themselves in their jobs and fully contributing to organizational goals.

However, trust is fragile. During times of uncertainty and unpredictable change – like the COVID-19 pandemic -- trust easily can be eroded. The COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding lockdown are straining the employer-employee relationship. This is true for those organizations that have suffered a substantial turndown in business and had to reduce staffing, such as in the tourist or retail sector, or have had to rejig their activities to permit employees to work from home, as in financial and business services. It is particularly true for organizations providing essential healthcare and protective services, whose workers face increased demands, as well as physical and psychological health and safety risks. This explains the surge in mental health issues even as the lockdown and pandemic threat are easing.

Regardless, for organizations to thrive during and beyond the pandemic requires a strong, trust-based psychological contract with their employees. The Trust Building Survey© provides a quick and accurate tool for assessing trust in your organization and identifying the best opportunities to strengthen it.

Our expertise

The Bilsker-Gilbert-Lowe team has extensive expertise developing, conducting, analysing and reporting employee surveys that assess trust and psychological health and safety. Our

experience includes many sectors, including a wide range of healthcare organizations. For example:

- As part of a Simon Fraser University research team, Bilsker and Gilbert developed the widely-used Guarding Minds @ Work (GM@W) survey of workplace psychological health and safety, and have adapted this survey to healthcare and paramedical personnel. GM@W informed the development of the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard).
- This work shows that a critical feature of workplace psychological health and safety is the level of trust between employers and employees, captured by one survey item: *“Employees and management trust one another”*. Survey items associated with trust cut across the thirteen psychosocial factors in the Standard, identifying specific actions that an employer can take to address trust and enhance psychological health and safety (e.g. *I am informed about important changes at work in a timely manner”).*
- Lowe has done extensive action research with numerous healthcare organizations, having developed for the Ontario Hospital Association employee and physician experience surveys that measure trust, psychological health and safety, engagement, and the quality of patient care and internal services. These surveys, now provided by NRC Health, are widely used by Ontario hospitals.
- Lowe also contributed to the development of Accreditation Canada’s (Health Standards Organization’s) original worklife pulse tool. He subsequently validated and revised the tool and developed a physician version.
- Lowe has advised many healthcare organizations on how to make effective use of employee and physician survey results for action planning and improvement.
- Lowe and a business partner launched (and later sold) Great Place to Work Institute Canada, which conducted employee surveys in hundreds of organizations that focused on trust.
- Lowe has custom-designed and conducted dozens of employee experience and work environment surveys that, among other topics, examined trust as a contributor to worker well-being and job performance. Some of these surveys were done in partnerships with EKOS Research Associates.

How We Developed the Trust Building Survey

The Trust Building Survey© is based on extensive statistical analysis of the Guarding Minds@Work employee survey results.

GM@W measures the extent to which an organization is successful at mitigating psychosocial hazards in their workplace that impact the psychological health and safety of workers. The survey findings from an organization using the tool are reported in comparison with norms based on a 2009, 2012 and 2016 stratified reference sample of working Canadians (N=5,010)

who completed the survey as well as several additional measures of psychological distress and workplace functioning.

Development of GM@W was based on a review of the relevant scientific literature, consultation with experts in workplace health and safety and input from informants from organized labour and employer groups from diverse public and private sectors. Psychometric analysis of the reference sample indicated a high level of internal reliability, validity and test-retest reliability.

Since its inception in 2009, the GM@W employee survey has been widely used in Canada and abroad. The thirteen factors identified by GM@W informed the development and implementation of the Standard.

Benefits of Using the Trust Building Survey©

Based on this statistical analysis, we have created a brief (less than 10 minutes), validated on-line survey, the Trust Building Survey© (TBS). Employers can use the TBS to assess their employees' level of trust, the strength of the psychological contract, and essential conditions for workplace psychological health and safety, overall employee well-being and job performance. The benefits of this tool are:

- The tool consists of 21 items from GM@W, 6 demographic questions to be used to report group breakdowns, and one open-ended question asking for suggestions to improve employee-employer trust. The TBS is short and easy to administer, so it can be used in repeated 'pulse checks' to capture the evolving recovery phase of the pandemic, and beyond.
- The TBS can be administered in both French and English.
- In larger organizations, the TBS may be administered to different departments, occupational groups or worksites.
- Clients can include custom items relevant to their workforce.
- Clients will receive a succinct report of organizational-level results, highlighting strengths and opportunities for improvement, as well as national pre-pandemic benchmarks.
- All items in the tool are actionable, which facilitates action-planning based on results.
- The TBS can be administered on-line using an organization's existing email platform or independently by the consulting group with results stored on a secure Canadian server.

Deliverables

TBS project deliverables include:

- Coordination with key organizational partners (HR, IT, OH&S) to determine timing, communication, and security requirements for administration of the TBS.
- Customization options (separately priced):
 - Language and format tailored to the organization.
 - Additional survey items that address unique aspects of the work experience.
 - Inclusion of open-ended questions to capture qualitative data on important issues.
- Assistance with preparation of communication about the survey and strategies to optimize participation rates. An option may be an online webinar presentation to staff on workplace psychological health and safety in order to build awareness and enhance uptake (separately priced).
- Programming, administration and management of the on-line TBS through an independent IT provider, with data stored on a secure third-party Canadian server.
- A report providing organization-level TBS results, comparison with national norms, suggestions for dissemination and discussion of this information with staff, and recommendations for practical, evidence-informed actions based on these findings.
- Pricing for larger organizations can include separate reports for multiple departments and/or sites.

About Us

Drs. Merv Gilbert and Dan Bilsker are consultants and directors of Psych Health + Safety Consulting Inc. (www.psychhealthandsafety.org). Merv and Dan are the two leading experts in workplace psychological health and safety in Canada, having participated in major national initiatives on this topic, created multiple practical and widely used resources, presented at distinguished conferences and public events, and published in peer-reviewed journals. As part of a research centre at Simon Fraser University, they developed Guarding Minds@Work and have continued to provide expert input on the use and development of this resource. They have also adapted and created customized surveys for specific sectors and organizations.

For the past 20 years, they have been assisting employers and employees by providing practical, effective and efficient approaches to improve PH+S. They work with public and private Canadian organizations across a range of sectors. They collaborate with government and not-for-profit bodies by developing knowledge and resources that will transform the field of workplace mental health. They are committed to providing services and resources that are cost-effective, easily accessible and solidly based in evidence. This approach helps organizations

implement practices that will satisfy the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace related workplace legislation.

Dr. Graham Lowe has over 30 years of organizational, labour market, and policy consulting experience across Canada and internationally. He is president of The Graham Lowe Group Inc., a workplace consulting and research firm (www.grahamlowe.ca). He also was a founding partner of the Great Place to Work® Institute Canada, an affiliate of the U.S.-based global consulting firm specializing in transforming workplace cultures. He is Professor Emeritus at the University of Alberta and has been a visiting professor, lecturer, and researcher at other universities in Canada, Europe, and Asia. Graham is the author of several books. A revised and expanded 2nd edition of *Creating Healthy Organizations: Taking Action to Improve Employee Well-Being* was published in 2020. Graham also has contributed many articles to publications such as *The Globe & Mail*, *Policy Options*, *Canadian HR Reporter*, *HR Professional*, *Education Canada*, *Health & Productivity Management*, *Canadian Business*, *Healthcare Quarterly*, *Healthcare Papers* and *Qmentum Quarterly*. He is a recipient of the Canadian Workplace Wellness Pioneer Award and holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Toronto.