



...solve thorny business challenges in the time it takes to drink a cup of tea

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# How do you build a healthy working culture that profoundly improves your profits, your business value and growth?

Any builder will tell you that the weakest part of a structure is the mortar connecting the bricks – the stronger the mortar, the stronger the building.

The pyramids, for example, used uber-strong limestone-based mortar and they've survived a rather long time!

In a business, the mortar is *social capital* – your team's sense of *connectedness* – which builds trust amongst your team members, clients and all your business stakeholders.

Weak social capital, weak trust, means that you'll struggle. You'll struggle because, without trust, the energy, commitment and engagement of your people will be half-hearted at best.

## KEY FACTS

2022 research from the Gallup World Poll, shows that 62% of workers globally are emotionally detached from their work, and 18% of workers are downright miserable. The same research study shows that, in the best-run companies, 73% of employees are emotionally engaged and thriving at work – more than 3 times the global average of 20%.



Emotionally engaged employees, as you'd expect, generally work in high-trust environments.

Build connectedness (strong social capital) and you build strong trust, which is the foundation of a robust, resilient and productive working culture. Margaret Heffernan (esteemed business author) calls this a 'just culture', generating profound improvements in results.

*"In any company, you can have a brilliant bunch of individuals – but what prompts them to share ideas and concerns, contribute to one*

*another's thinking, and warn the group early about potential risks?"*

*– Margaret Heffernan, Beyond Measure*

## IN A NUTSHELL

Take responsibility for creating a healthy working culture by building social capital and trust throughout your business, every day and every week. Invest in and influence all the small, everyday moments of human interaction and connectedness and you create strong business mortar.



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## Some teams out-perform others

Why do certain teams add up to be greater than the sum of their parts, while other teams add up to be less? Understanding and acting on the answer to this question helps you build a robust, resilient and healthy working culture.

And this type of working culture is vital in our volatile, complex and uncertain world. Build trust and you build engagement. Build engagement and you build a healthy working culture and a successful business as a result. So...

## ...choose a winning team

The following experiment, conducted over 500 times by Peter Skillman in several countries, demonstrates the value of connectedness and trust.

First, he chose a number of 4-person teams made up of, for example, lawyers, CEOs and other university graduates, along with a team of junior school children.

The competition task was to build the tallest possible structure using:

- 20 pieces of uncooked spaghetti
- 1m of transparent tape
- 1m of string
- One large marshmallow

The marshmallow had to end up on top, and each team was given 18 minutes (plus 2 minutes extra if required). In this experiment, Skillman found that the junior school children won consistently, with average structure heights of the teams as follows:

- Junior school children – 66cm
- CEOs – 55cm

- Lawyers – 38cm
- Graduates – 25cm

If you were building a team to win this (or any) competition, you'd probably focus on finding people with the right intelligence, skills and experience to do a brilliant job. But the science behind a successful working culture suggests it's more important to build social capital through better, stronger and more regular human connectedness.

The junior school children consistently won because they simply worked together with trust and connectedness! The other teams were less connected, less trusting, less effective.

**STOP** thinking that tangible skills, knowledge and experience are all that are required for team success

**START** building greater connectedness in your team so that you develop social capital and deep and strong trust

## Does this translate into the business world?

Yes.

Using personal portable technology (a sociometer) to track personal interactions five times per second – body language, who you talk to, where and when you talk to them – Sandy Pentland, together with an MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) research team, brings science and hard data to support the findings from Peter Skillman's marshmallow challenge. (You'll find more on Pentland's research in the download

tools – see link below.)

And like Skillman, Pentland proves that...

## ...a healthy, successful team culture is all about the little things

When asked, it can be hard to describe the working culture in your business. What working culture boils down to, though, is the moment-by-moment accumulation of small, everyday thoughts, actions and habits.

Culture is all about the quantity and quality of the moments when you and your team are speaking, listening, seeing, arguing and thinking. By taking responsibility for these moments, seeking ways to influence your business's social capital (connections), you tap into a serious source of cultural and business success.

*"With remarkable consistency, the data confirmed that communication indeed plays a critical role in building successful teams.*

*In fact, we've found patterns of communication to be the most important predictor of a team's success.*

*Not only that, but they are as significant as all the other factors – individual intelligence, personality, skill, and the substance of discussions – combined."*

- Sandy Pentland, MIT, HBR article

## A PROVEN SOLUTION FOR YOU...

As a leader, you can influence the energy and informal social interaction (connectedness) so that your team's intellectual capacity is greater than the sum of each individual's intelligence.

Too few business leaders put social capital at the top of their priority list, especially when there's so much work to get done and so many demands on their time. But businesses that do prioritise connectedness – social capital – have surprising results.

## Connectedness or time wasting?

Pentland acknowledges that it may seem illogical that those informal side exchanges contribute to better performance, rather than acting as

a distraction, but the data proves otherwise. And Pentland's research shows that this is a common theme across teams.:

*"...patterns vary little, regardless of the type of team and its goal—be it a call centre team striving for efficiency, an innovation team at a pharmaceutical company looking for new product ideas, or a senior management team hoping to improve its leadership.*

*Productive teams have certain data signatures, and they're so consistent that we can predict a team's success simply by looking at the data—without ever meeting its members."*

– Sandy Pentland, MIT, HBR article

## SAFETY FIRST if you want to build a healthy working culture...

Daniel Coyle is also worthy of your attention because he spent 4 years visiting and researching 8 successful teams from the fields of sport, business, education, entertainment, the military and more.

Coyle concludes that feeling safe is a vital and primary building block of high-performing (trusting) cultures. The Mercer/Sirota research into enthusiastic teams also shows that a sense of safety is a key element of 'fairness', without which you'll be unable to build an enthusiastic, engaged and motivated team culture.

## How do people recognise they are safe?

In human brain evolution, 'belonging cues' massively preceded the development of human language. And the use of belonging cues today results in a deep, subconscious sense that YOU ARE SAFE HERE.

Pentland's sociometer provided data that showed the importance of belonging cues:

*"Belonging cues are behaviours that create safe connection in groups. They include, among others, proximity, eye contact, energy, mimicry, turn taking, attention, body language, vocal pitch, consistency of emphasis, and whether everyone talks to everyone else in the group."*

– Daniel Coyle, *The Culture Code*

You'll find more on belonging cues,

including examples, by clicking the download tools button towards the end of this report.

## So, how do you build a sense of safety?

Coyle suggests 13 specific actions which tap into these belonging cues to build a sense of safety. You can get a summary of these actions in the download tools and get the full details from Coyle's outstanding book. Because leading by example works, as a leader you set the standard, and here are 4 biggies from Coyle's 13 to start you off:

- a. **Overcommunicate your listening** – Lead from the front on connectedness because, as Pentland's research shows, high-volume, high-quality connectedness pays off. Deep, active listening is a powerful belonging cue that makes people feel safe.
- b. **Spotlight your fallibility early** – Hiding weakness and faking competence is inauthentic, undermines trust and demonstrates
- c. **Embrace the messenger** – Rather than resist or simply tolerate bad news, embrace it. Hug (and perhaps not just metaphorically!) the messenger of such news even if they're the one behind it. Everyone will then feel safe sharing the truth and you'll create an environment where challenges are openly tackled, not swept under the rug.
- d. **Make sure everyone has a voice** – Multiple connections across your entire team foster social capital, trust and a healthy working culture. Get everyone sharing their thoughts, not just in formal meetings, but informally too, such as in joint coffee or lunch breaks.

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## 4 helping hands for you...



A healthy, high-performing work culture results in team and business success. For team members, it also results in a great place to work and a deep sense of joy and pride in the work they do, the company they work for and the team they work with. What's not to like?

1. **Take responsibility for all the small moments that generate the working culture in your business** – Accept that you as a leader influence and guide the quantity and quality of the many daily moments of connectedness between everyone in your business. You're then ready to build a healthier work culture (and reap the results that will follow).
2. **Build a sense of safety using 'belonging cues'** – Safety is the foundation of every healthy and high-performance work culture. Belonging cues are the tools you use to foster a greater feeling of safety.
3. **Be vulnerable** – Your vulnerability is a major source of trust amongst your people. Use the questions, phrases and prompts that show you're open to criticism, suggestions and improvements as a leader. Remember, you have to go first!
4. **Connect with purpose** – Work on building a deep sense of purpose in what your business does and you'll build an emotional connection that holds real meaning for your team, contributing to a healthy and high-performance culture.

## Safety alone isn't enough!

Daniel Coyle, in his influential book *The Culture Code*, proposes 3 factors that feed social capital and build the healthy working culture you want for your business. The running order is important, which is why we've zeroed-in on 'Build safety':

- 1. Build safety** – connections laden with 'belonging cues' generate bonds of belonging and identity and trust
- 2. Share vulnerability** – habits of mutual risk drive trusting cooperation and enable open constructive conflict
- 3. Establish purpose** – purpose-led narratives create shared goals and values in which everyone believes and holds dear

Isn't that the sort of working culture you're after, especially given the difficulties of recruiting and retaining great people?

Find out more about vulnerability and purpose in the download tools link below.

## TIME TO DISAGREE:

**"Too many social interactions are a costly distraction for everyone – this makes no sense if we're seeking greater profits."**

What if you could have more connectedness and could achieve more work, faster and to a better standard?

We know of a bank call centre, by simply asking everyone to have the

same tea break, no extra time was expended, but it was more 'together', more connected. In another example of connectedness, a business leader changed the lunchroom layout by using long, refectory-style tables and benches (think Hogwarts!), which resulted in more people connecting with those they'd not normally mix with. No additional time was needed, but it resulted in more connectedness every day.

In what other ways could you put connectedness to work without impacting on time?

**"We aren't social scientists who know how to send 'belonging cues' to our team. We're too busy getting the work done."**

It does take time to learn about belonging cues and to put them into practice. However, once you have a few of them in your leadership toolkit, using them requires no additional time to what you require currently.

## ULTIMATE ARGUMENT:

**"We already have a safe workplace – do we really need to do more to build a sense of safety?"**

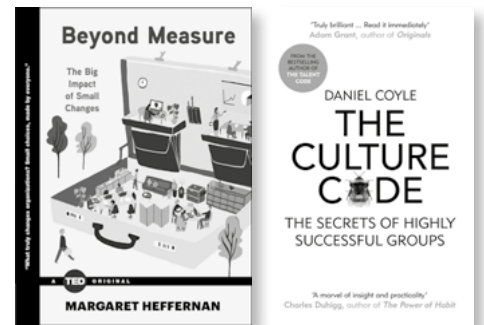
Coyle's 4-year study proved to him that a sense of emotional, psychological and physical safety is the necessary foundation for a high-performing culture. As humans, when we're threatened in any way, we automatically resort to a flight, fight or freeze response. In this 'unsafe' state, we cannot think clearly, make good

decisions or do our best work.

Coyle's insights are backed up by the Sirota/Mercer research that puts fairness as the cornerstone of an enthusiastic working culture. And at the core of this sense of fairness is a sense of safety, according to Sirota/Mercer's 13million+ surveys.

We can all improve our 'belonging cues' to build a greater sense of emotional, psychological and physical safety. Which one of Coyle's list of actions can you put to work today or tomorrow?

## Want to know more?



Both Coyle's and Heffernan's books point to stories, details, insights and actions that can support your efforts at building the healthy working culture you want for your business. Both are well worth your time and money.

Check out the support tools at the link below, particularly the Margaret Heffernan Ted talk that stimulated this report, and some of the practical next steps and actions you might take.

For more insights, click on the download tools button at the bottom of this report.

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Use these tools and resources to take responsibility for creating a healthy working culture by building social capital and trust throughout your business, every day and every week.

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