

# Using World Café to Enhance Relationship-building for the Purpose of Developing Trust in Emotional Intelligence Training Environments

Dr Lesley Gill<sup>1</sup>, Dr Philip Ramsey<sup>2</sup>, Prof Sarah Leberman<sup>2</sup>, Dr Stephen Atkins<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand

<sup>2</sup>Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

[lesleyg@op.ac.nz](mailto:lesleyg@op.ac.nz)

[P.L.Ramsey@massey.ac.nz](mailto:P.L.Ramsey@massey.ac.nz)

[S.I.Lebberman@massey.ac.nz](mailto:S.I.Lebberman@massey.ac.nz)

[SAtkins@op.ac.nz](mailto:SAtkins@op.ac.nz)

**Abstract:** Every conversation or action between people involves an element of trust, particularly in workplace training environments. Personal development relies on the quality of trust relationships between trainer and learners, and between learners who experience feelings of vulnerability when dealing with issues that impact self-esteem and individual identity. Responsibility is placed on the trainer to create an environment characterised by trust so that learners feel safe, and unrestricted to embrace personal change, address challenging situations, and reflect on behaviours. Developing such an environment requires attentiveness to effective qualitative methodology. The research aim was to explore the need for relationship-building methodology such as World Café for encouraging the development of trusting relationships. The World Café followed an earlier study of 21 Emotional Intelligence (EI) trainers in New Zealand which sought to identify what variables contribute to the design of successful EI training. World Café was utilised as a relationship-building methodology for further exploring the nature of trust and for evaluating the method. This paper begins with a summary of literature on the nature of trust, then presents themes based on participants' perspectives. Trust was firstly viewed through the lens of 'inputs'. While offering a useful perspective, viewing trust as an output offered a practical way for training across different learning environments, organisational contexts, and differences between learners. These findings informed a new practice-based definition of trust. We also present our findings that support the need for relationship-building methods, such as World Café, for building trust during the process of EI training.

**Keywords:** World Café, relationship-building methodology, trust, emotional intelligence, training and development.

---

## 1 Introduction

Relationships in the learning environment are shaped by trust, a key element that impacts learning. Trust affects the relationship between trainers and learners (Gill, Ramsey, & Leberman, 2015). The level of trust can influence the degree to which learning objectives are achieved, so responsibility falls to the trainer to create an environment characterised by trust, so that learners feel safe; free to embrace personal change or address a challenging situation or behaviour. The dilemma highlights the need for exploring relationship-building methodology, since trust always happens within relationships - between people. This article proposes the use of World Café (Brown, Isaacs, & Margulies, 1997; Fouché & Light, 2011) as an approach for building relationships that support personal development while engaging in research.

The World Café exercise followed an earlier study of 21 Emotional Intelligence (EI) trainers in New Zealand which sought to identify what variables contribute to the design of successful EI training. Trust emerged as a key element of a safe learning environment, although areas of ambiguity were raised what and how trust is defined. On this basis we sought to answer the research question: "How can EI training practitioners design their training in ways that encourage trust?" We begin with a summary of literature on the nature of trust and the findings that informed the new practice-based definition of trust. Further, our findings supported the need for relationship-building methods, such as World Café, for building trust during the process of EI training and while conducting research.

EI trainers and consultants who took part in the earlier study also indicated that, because of the nature of their work they often felt isolated from professional colleagues. As a result, and in order to build a community of practice amongst EI trainers, a national EI symposium was held in 2012. During symposium the World Café was implemented and feedback sought via survey to explore what worked and why.

## 2 The Nature of Trust

The nature of trust involves an expectation of interactional reciprocity which entails an expectancy that the words or 'promise' of an individual or group can be consistently relied on without guarantees (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rotter, 1967). Gabarro and Athos (1978) define trust as confidence in another's integrity, motives and objectives, including behavioural consistency, openness and discretion. According to Doney and Cannon (1997) trust is established on two components: the credibility of the one being trusted that their word can be relied on; and secondly, benevolence, which describes the degree to which genuine care for the welfare of the other is acted on to fulfil the trust intention.

Trust is characterised by "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trust-or, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer et al, 1995, p. 709). Trust is built through demonstrations of loyalty and an expectation of reciprocity, as each person accumulates positive trust experiences (Ferris et al, 2009). Trust is given with the expectation that the trustor will protect the vulnerability of the trustee in relation to the object of that trust (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Vangen & Huxham, 2003). Thus, trust is expressed as confidence in one's own self-evaluation that the other will act with integrity to fulfil the expectation that has been conferred. An individual's choice to trust is moderated by the perceived benefits to the trust-ee in extending trust (Kramer, 1999). Several factors make people reluctant to be vulnerable to the influence of others, including past trauma and fear (Daft, 2002). Trust is usually freely given until a betrayal occurs. Over time, people learn to moderate trust by weighing up the risk involved, their willingness to put themselves at risk, and the benefits of extending trust (Kramer, 1999).

When defining trust in organisational life, Bachmann (2011) asserts the need for a demarcation between the traditional perspective of trust as *interaction-based*, and *institution-based* trust stating the factors within the organisation directly influence trust development, therefore justifying delineation. He defines the former as involving micro-level factors which describes ongoing connections between individuals in roles of 'trustor' and 'trustee' while emphasising the need to pay attention to organisation culture and context. This means that business contexts are more or less conducive to building trusting relationships" (Bachmann, 2011, p. 207). Dietz (2011) challenges Bachmann's assumptions suggesting that both bases exist in tandem, arguing that trust is an evaluation of trustworthiness of the trustee by the trustor in any setting. He considers the role of cultural norms and practices that trustees use as cues for making trust-based judgments. Culture, the embedded and implicit rules operating within a group of actors (Gill & Pio, 2007) can be applied individually and organisationally.

We suggest learners do not necessarily make this distinction and enter the training situation with a compendium of positive and negative trust experiences drawn from a multitude of personal, professional and organisational assumptions, each involving varying levels of contextualised relational trust. At times trust is formalised institutionally (i.e., in NZ employment agreements which contain the term "trust and confidence" defining the employment agreement relationally). Trust is part of the psychological contract between the employee and an organisational (institutional) representative, and so constitutes relationship-based trust. The difference is a situational one; contingent on whether the trust-relationship occurs privately or within an institutional context; the point is that it always occurs between *people*. As in every potentially trust-generating engagement, trustees' 'lived' experience of trustors within any setting (including institutional) informs their predisposition to trust, or trust again in the same or different situation. In the workplace some people might hold values such as honesty and transparency as important, which are at odds with others who engage in politicking, behind-closed-doors conversations, in- and out-groups, hidden agendas, bullying, sabotage, resistance, and open confrontation, which destroy trust, even though as Fox and Stallworth (2009) remarked, we often still go on 'playing the game'.

Bachmann's (2011) article describes how complexity of trust issues increase in changing times. Institutional relationships have to deal with increasing complexity and so "organisational executives face a bewildering and chaotic environment in which they have to act as stewards of their organisation" (Gill & Ramsey, 2012, p. 120). Adding to the complexity of organisations is the escalation of unethical behaviour which undermines trust resulting in increased cynicism and resistance to change (Stephenson, 2004). This dilemma has implications for EI trainers, who not only need to support learners to develop resilience, while finding strategies to build/re-

build trust for learners who show a reluctance to put themselves in a place of vulnerability where they risk being let down.

Enduring relationships are behavioural demonstrations of trust (Hoffman, 2002). Therefore, where relationships are strong, there are likely to be high levels of openness, self-disclosure and trust (Gardner et al, 2005). Harari (2002) found a positive link between interpersonal trust and analogous concepts such as openness, integrity, benevolence, and competency. The level of trust in the relationship is established through the many interactions that happen between the people in the relationship, and are prioritised by their relative importance when measured against the trustor's values system. McKnight and Chervaney (2001, p. 31) identified "goodwill, honesty, morality, expertness and caring" (p.31) as the starting point.

A pre-condition of trust is that the trustee perceives him or her as trust 'worthy'. Multiple encounters collectively establish the trustworthiness of the trust-ee (Maxwell, 1993). The building blocks of a trusting relationship grow with each successful experience (Redling, 2004). Conversely, poor relationships are characterised by dis-trust. Because people are human and therefore imperfect, there will always be instances where the trustor's expectations remain unfulfilled. Reasons for this failure might be human error, lack of ethical integrity, and lack of competence (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2009; Williams, 2008).

At a deeply personal level, training in EI development carries a challenge to learners in reflecting on themselves and their situation which are often disturbing and chaotic and that can act as emotional triggers. Developmental change, unlike traditional knowledge-acquisition, is rationally and emotionally perturbing, and necessitates a level of vulnerability and an equally disturbing need to trust others in the learning environment (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). Further, because of the time pressures associated with training programs, trainers have to build trust relatively quickly, which can be a significant challenge. Learners trust the trainer and other learners to show respect, to value and validate disclosure and, more importantly, hold their conversations in confidence (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). Thus, it raises the question as to how to design EI training in a way that facilitates building trusting relationships.

In summary, trust is high in complexity and abstraction, making it problematic to operationalise for people wanting to design EI training (Gill & Ramsey, 2012). Much depends on quality relationships such as those needed to produce successful EI training outcomes. The time pressures associated with training programs mean trainers have to build trust relatively quickly. Thus the EI trainer must design EI training so that trust is developed in the trainer-learner relationship and learner-to-learner relationships. But knowing that trust is needed is distinct from knowing *how* to develop it in EI training design.

### **3 Methodology**

As part of the wider research program, an EI Symposium was arranged that provided the opportunity for EI trainers who had participated in the research and others interested in the role of EI in education to meet and exchange ideas. The context of the symposium provided an opportunity for further research into the experiences of EI trainers and consultants, a group who are not widely considered in research literature. Any research carried out would need to involve a methodology that would fit within and contribute to the relationship-building intent of the symposium. Block (2008) pointed to the World Café as a relationship-building method that needs to be more widely implemented in order to establish healthy communities. For this reason the researchers decided to adapt the World Café process as a means of gathering rich data, while at the same time enabling participants to establish professional connections and model a technique that they could incorporate into their EI training practice. The World Café was designed to meet the research objectives in further exploring how to establish an operational definition of trust that can be used in the design of training, while doing so in a way that positively contributed to building trust relationships.

Next, we describe the participants taking part in the research, summarise the trust findings, and outline the background of the World Café and its application in this study. Of the 45 delegates attending the EI Symposium, ten had taken part in the original research that had prompted this effort. An invitation was also made through the Otago Polytechnic staff Intranet, with 30 staff attending. Invitations to the wider business community resulted in another five registrations.

### 3.1 World Café for relationship-building

World Café is a technique developed by Juanita Brown, who observed that people readily engaged in dialogue when they are in a café setting. (Brown, Isaacs, & Margulies, 1997). By creating a café-like environment people would naturally engage with one another, share and connect ideas, and generate new thinking. World Café methodology values the power of relationships formed and maintained through conversations that build trust and “create living knowledge and new possibilities for action in large groups” (Brown, 2002, p. 2), and for “assessing collective intelligence and creating actionable knowledge” (Tan & Brown, 2005, p. 84). Brown refers to the power of conversation for identifying what is important to us, what we care about and how that emerges and shapes people naturally in conversation. The key assumption of World Café methodology is that people already have the answers within them and which they will share if the Café can pose questions that are thought-provoking and stimulate dialogue (Anderson, 2011). The trainer’s role in a World Café environment is “to ensure there is an appropriate mix of the ‘familiar’ and the ‘exciting’, and that groups engage in...work that is punctuated by the injection of challenging concepts that illuminate the work they are doing” (Ramsey, 2006, p. 32). In this instance, ‘exciting’ means intriguing but, still psychologically-safe.

A key component of World Café is the opportunity to start the conversation with one group and later move to another group, thus becoming part of new conversations with new people; letting ideas and insights to intersect and overlap. This movement allows conversations to arrive at collective knowledges and the tempting potential for mutual understandings. World Café offers an environment in which people participate in “invisible learning networks more intentionally” (Brown, 2002, p. 3). World Café conversations are guided by six operating principles that applied in tandem, have the “capacity to foster collaborative dialogue, strengthen community, spark creative insight, and create new possibilities for constructive action” (Brown, 2002, p. 4). The six principles are: Create a hospitable space; Explore questions that matter; Encourage everyone’s contribution; Connect diverse people and ideas; Listen together for insights, patterns and deeper questions and; Make collective knowledge visible.

People who might contribute little to organisational discussions tend to naturally engage in conversations when they are in café-like surroundings (Brown et al, 1997). Dialogue is generated when the person hosting the conversation creates an hospitable space for the group to address a question that matters to them. People have more opportunity to talk (if one person is talking in each of 10 small groups then 10 people are talking at once, compared with a large group where only one person is talking). People talk better in small groups where they can moderate their exposure to factors such as trust/distrust, shyness, embarrassment or shame. People are more engaged around a topic if the environment is relaxed.

The EI Symposium World Café, which ran for 2 ¾ hours, was set in a large room with several clusters of 4-5 armchairs arranged around central coffee tables. Drinks and treats were placed on each table to help establish a café ‘feel’. These actions addressed the importance of hospitality and informality as part of the ‘personal touch’ essential for World Café success (Brown, 2002). Large sheets of paper covered the tables, providing opportunity for delegates to record their thoughts and provided a focus for taking thinking deeper. The World Café host welcomed people to their groups then explained café etiquette. The first intervention began with the Café host presenting people with the research question: “How can EI training practitioners design their training in ways that encourage trust?” Brown (2002) states that powerful questions are “simple and clear, thought-provoking, energy-generating, focus the inquiry, challenge assumptions, open new possibilities and evoke more questions” (p.8). Café groups began discussing the question with the Café host observing the dynamics of the conversations, who responded to cues such as the level of energy on display, the time individuals spent talking, and the attentiveness of those in each group.

A second deliberate intervention was turn-taking; everyone had an opportunity to speak uninterrupted to the group for two-minutes. This resulted in individual perspectives being heard without interruption and meant that everyone else had an opportunity to listen. After the turn-taking intervention which lasted about 20 minutes, normal conversation resumed.

Upon the completion of this initial ‘round’ a third variation occurred. The groups were re-organised: one person stayed at the table while the others distributed themselves around other tables. The Table host (the person who had stayed) shared a summary of the key thoughts from the previous group, then invited those newly arrived to share what they had discussed at their tables. In this way, the thinking of people throughout

the room was hopefully cross-pollinated with ideas from other conversations. The conversations continued, taking their own direction at each table. New thoughts that emerged were captured on the large sheet of paper. This variation was repeated later in the session, so most people had opportunity to be in conversation with 12 to 15 other participants, hopefully exposing everyone to the thinking of many others.

The fourth variation involved groups being invited to write an “engaging and provocative question which would take the group in a new direction”, given as a ‘gift’ to delegates at another table, who had the option of working on it or continuing with the conversation they were having. The intention was to stimulate new thinking or offer the option of introducing a new perspective into each group’s interactions. The World Café offered delegates opportunity to engage in conversation with people from a variety of backgrounds, some of whom were experienced in EI training and others with little experience. At the end of the group discussions the Café host facilitated a discussion of all of the groups’ perspectives so as to convey key insights of each table’s discussion.

At the end of the World Café process, participants were asked to write a page of reflections on the question that had been originally posed to the group. Writing their reflections provided an opportunity for participants to crystallise insights that had become apparent during the World Café. The reflections also served as rich data that could be used by the researchers for the further exploration of EI trainers’ perspectives on practice. The use of this data will be considered in the following section.

### **3.2 Methods of Data Evaluation**

Two forms of data collection were employed for exploring trust and the World Café’s utility for build trusting relationships: an online survey; and the reflection sheet mentioned above, on which delegates could write their personal thoughts and feedback. This latter activity was an individual one aimed at generating qualitative data through reflection. Reflection is a formative process, a “discourse the mind carries on with itself that is essential to retaining experiences” (Evans & Abbott, 1998, p. 7). Reflection is “the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self and which results in a changed conceptual perspective (Boyd & Fayles, 1983, p. 100). Delegates were given an A4 reflection sheet<sup>1</sup> and asked to reflect on and respond to the question: “If trust is a key to transformation, what does this require of us when we design training?” Delegates were invited to hand in their A4 reflection sheet to the researchers. Responses were coded to NVivo 9 tree nodes and further analysed for emerging themes.

Secondly, delegates were invited to participate in a descriptive survey. Survey is an effective way to obtain self-reported information (Edwards, Thomas, Rosenfeld, & Booth-Kewley, 1997) offering a systematic standardised process for collecting information, particularly useful after participants have returned to their various geographic locales (Rossi, Wright, & Anderson, 1983). The survey consisted of four ‘forced’ short-answer questions and two ‘unforced’ demographic questions. Demographic questions asked participants to state their name and/or organisation, which, if provided, constituted consent. The following four questions were put to participants:

1. One of the goals of the Symposium was to connect people. How well did this happen for you?
2. A second goal was to stimulate new thinking about your practice in the area of EI training. How well did this happen for you?
3. As you reflect, what was the most important thing you took away?
4. Is there anything else you wish to add?

## **4 Findings**

Of the 45 delegates attending the Symposium, 32 (71%r.r.) delegates handed in their A4 reflection sheet. Overall, 23 of the 32 delegates who handed in their reflection sheet also signed it with their name (71.9%r.r.), including nine of the 10 original research participants present at the Symposium (90%r.r.). One of the original research participants also sent two follow-up emails containing further reflections on the question. These findings indicate firstly delegates’ readiness to participate in communicating their perspectives, and secondly a strong indication that delegates trusted the researchers, observed in their willingness to be identified, which

---

<sup>1</sup> To meet ethical obligations, delegates were invited to fill out the A4 reflection sheet, which stated, “I understand by handing in my comments I am giving permission for them to be anonymously used in Lesley Gill’s PhD and/or subsequent publications”.

might be able to be linked to the relationship-building nature of the World Café. The original research participants showed an even higher return rate of named comments, which points to their use of the World Café for articulating trust through their readiness to comment and willingness to be known to the researchers.

Twenty responses to the online descriptive survey were received. Cleaning the data resulted in one response being removed<sup>2</sup> resulting in a 42.2%r.r. Of these 19 responses, nine (47.4%r.r.) signed their name including four of the original research participants. This finding points to delegates placing greater value on giving feedback in a face-to-face World Café forum which offered opportunity to building trusting relationships, as compared with an on-line survey which is concerned more with 'information' dispersion, not relationship-building.

#### 4.1 Summary of trust findings

Confusion about trust and how to build it was reiterated in the findings, highlighting the struggle to define whether trust is a quality embedded in the trainer (trustworthiness) and so is present by default, or whether it is an external element that the trainer explicitly establishes in the training program.

*Posing the question: "Is trust something we bring or is it something that is created?"*

*Developing trust takes time and can be easily damaged. Trust is complicated!*

The intangibility of trust contributed to the confusion. Delegates discussed the high subjectivity of trust, which was based on variable degrees of willingness on the part of the learner to be vulnerable and to trust the trainer, even despite an aversion to trust. A complicating factor that emerged was that some people refused to be vulnerable despite working with a highly trustworthy trainer.

*I am thinking that there is little influence I have over how much another person trusts me. There are things that I might do or say, i.e. self-disclosure or making assurance about confidence, but at the end of the day, trust is a choice, and influenced by a number of different things, e.g. the experience of the person.*

Some participants questioned if trust was needed for transformation to occur.

*Is trust necessary? Some argued that trust was misunderstood and that transformation could happen without it.*

*Transformation can happen despite a lack of trust, but I think it helps all the same.*

There may be other factors that account for a learner's trust in the *process* rather than a perception that they are assigning trust to the trainer. The desperateness of the learner was cited as contributing to learners' willingness to participate in the process because of their self-identified need for the development, and so transformational outcomes occurred for them without relying on trusting relationships. This highlighted another complexity of trust which is that learners have choice to trust or not. Trainers cannot control who trusts, as there are some who were quick to trust and others who were reluctant or refused.

*In disclosing the 'self' we lay bare the perceived inadequacies of that present state. This relies on a sense of trust in the process that involves supportive facilitation and confidentiality, so that we feel OK about this self-disclosure.*

Creating an environment in which learners are ready to talk makes a subtle but important shift from trainer responsibility to learner accountability. Six of the nine original research participants commented on the need for trainers to be 'present', flexible and responsive to learners; which trainers implied a context in which to generate readiness to talk. El trainers commented that to be 'present' referred to learners being fully engaged in the learning process, and at least temporarily detached from current anxieties.

*A trainer builds trust to the extent that they actively and non-judgmentally try to find out the client's interests, and take those interests into account in the training session [meaning] the session is client-focused rather than trainer-focused.*

Responding flexibly entailed being perceptive and sensitive to the times when learners were closer to greater disclosure.

---

<sup>2</sup> One person gave a numerical number response to all of the questions; no 'scale' was given by the researcher or the participant, so the response could not be interpreted.

*I pushed once and noted that this shifted them in their seat, so I tried to provide a way out (save face) by offering the guise "that there is so much information it must be tough to shrink it to one point". I knew not to push this person again. I think that the greatest learning is that people like to be stretched only if it is a truly safe and trusting place.*

To develop an environment that supported the development of trust, trainers need to be aware that the training must move learners towards the areas of most interest and importance to them. So a structural design feature of EI training must be that it is learner-focused and learner-paced.

*The design needs sufficient flexibility to meet the emergent needs of the group. The pacing of the learning is a design variable.*

This finding reinforces the significance of social constructivist theory because it highlights the emphasis on *learners* discerning their need. Social constructivism encourages trainers to allow the learner to arrive at their own self-paced self-awareness, and acknowledges the importance of "social intersections of people, interactions that involves sharing, comparing and debating among learners and mentors" (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2000, p. 12) to the act of learning. Learner development relies on readiness to talk to others in an EI learning environment, since discussions inevitably delve into deeper reasoning and emotions that lead to new observations of self, and recognition of thinking and behavioural patterns.

A further theme expressed by eight of the nine research participants, was the need for trainers to demonstrate the openness they desired in their learners. Several EI trainers articulated how they chose to operate from an assumption of unconditional acceptance, belief in the learner's trustworthiness, from a place of humility. They commented on the importance of alignment between their values and actions.

*I operate from a basis that people are trustworthy because that is how I am in the world.*

*My own degree of openness towards the participants will deeply influence the degree of change that is possible.*

EI trainers recalled the power of their personal stories in relating their human frailty and vulnerability, thereby modelling behaviours that learners needed to engage in, so as to be able to talk at increasingly deeper levels of honesty and disclosure.

*I am prepared to expose my weak side – to tell the bad stories on myself and the good stories on others.*

## **4.2 Inputs to trust**

It was evident that while many participants reflected on inputs to trust relationships—that is, what the parties bring to the relationship that contributes to trust—EI trainers from the original research tended to use an output-based approach when defining 'trust'. That is, they tended to discuss what a trusting relationship produced, and the comments of these trainers had much in common. In this section we will examine the 'inputs' that were discussed, and in the next section focus attention on 'outputs'.

The emphasis of many participants was placed on the perceived willingness of the learner to 'give trust' versus trust being 'assumed' or taken (expected).

*As soon as I am expected to 'change' or 'be changed', trust begins to erode. I trust because I can have a view, an opinion, and you will be 'kind' enough to respect my difference. Though, expect to change me, and I will begin to question 'trust'. It is not that people don't like change; they just don't like 'being changed'.*

The expertise of the trainer was also factored in when understanding elements of trust. Participants commented that 'experts' from outside their organisation were often more trusted than those inside the organisation. Some said that trust in the trainer's expertise derived from their position or 'uniform' (i.e. ambulance officer), their qualifications, or their word-of-mouth reputation which engendered credibility.

*Individuals will assess the others' degree of expertise, if important. [They] may not like the person but around competence (specialist), will trust.*

Other factors of trust were linked to demonstrating qualities such as showing respect, sincerity, empathy, integrity and kindness; concepts implicit to meaningful relationships.

*One of the key theories around trust is sincerity and the other is promise-keeping.*

*Building trust and empathy is one of our competencies.*

All of these inputs are encapsulated in the concept of meaningful relationships captured in the following comments and phrases:

*What's the kind of relationship-building you want to foster...for building time and space for people to develop trusting relationships?*

In summary, several inputs were mentioned such as learner's willingness to trust, trustworthiness, trainer expertise, and qualities such respect, sincerity, empathy, integrity and kindness. However, delegates recognised that they were not always effective in achieving the desired level of trust, so our attention turned to an output of trust.

### 4.3 Output of Trust

When the responses of the original research participants were viewed as a group, a pattern emerged. While not explicitly defining trust as an output, their reflections on the question quickly turned to a discussion of what trust produces in a learning relationship. The most observable output of trust emphasised openness, transparency and readiness to talk to others.

*In the design of EI training, recognising that talking and making connections is a key part of building trust.*

Reflections of these EI trainers suggested the purpose of trust was to ensure learners were ready to talk, thereby making it a tangible output. Employing the term 'readiness to talk' cuts through the bluff of learners *saying* that they trust but not *demonstrating* that trust through engagement and conversation. Therefore espoused trust needs to be fulfilled in giving actual trust if useful learning outcomes are to be achieved and evidenced through 'readiness to talk'.

*In order to share effectively trust is vital. We normally associate trust with being able to tell people a secret or to be able to talk in confidence, but really trust is about having the safety to be open and to have the self-confidence to share irrespective of the outcome of that sharing.*

*Opportunities to deepen trust – more conversations.*

By treating trust as synonymous with readiness to talk, EI trainers have a basis on which to connect trust to the transformation process.

*Trust enables us to put out stuff that we mightn't ordinarily put out – to make ourselves vulnerable. As we put it out and others listen to us (actively) so we make sense of our own lives.*

The flip-side of 'readiness to talk' is the trainers' willingness to listen. Listening demonstrated to learners that what they were saying was valued and respected. Listening was a trainer skill that was identified as vital for developing a reciprocal trusting relationship.

*As [learners] express themselves and perhaps say things they may not have told anyone else (make personal disclosures), and if the trainer listens non-judgmentally, then the learner can start to make sense of things in their own life in new ways. Without this listening process in a trusting environment, self-talk means that people tend to go round and round in established grooves.*

Learners' willingness to be open was found to be contingent on the perceived health of the organisation and team dynamics, which also relies on trust.

*It depends on the health of the organisation and the team. Sometimes you'll have a team where there is a high degree of trust where people can speak openly.*

This finding suggests that Bachmann's (2011) viewpoint regarding institutional trust is relevant though not exclusive. Willingness to speak openly involved learners accepting it necessitated them being vulnerable with others and a reliance on others' ability to be empathetic:

*The transformation in participants comes about through participants allowing themselves to be vulnerable.*

In summary, the complexity of trust was evident in exploring the nature of trust. Points raised included the role of the trainer in developing an environment conducive to developing trust, demonstrated in the trainer's

willingness to be open and vulnerable with learners; something learners perceived through the personal stories trainers told. The learner's perspective in taking responsibility for learning was also noted and conveyed in their willingness to trust the trainer for the transformation goals they sought (at least in delivering the process). A number of inputs were raised: learner's willingness to trust, trustworthiness, trainer expertise, and qualities such as respect, sincerity, empathy, integrity and kindness, and are in line with McKnight and Chervaney's (2001) research on trust definitions. Delegates also recognised that they were not always effective in achieving the desired level of trust, so attention turned to an output of trust – learners' demonstration of trust through their readiness to talk. What they are prepared to disclose indicates the extent to which they were willing to trust even when they experienced feelings of vulnerability. Equally, the disinclination to trust was also evidenced by behaviours such as withdrawal from engagement and absence of personal disclosure or refusal to talk.

#### **4.4 Developing an outputs-based trust definition**

Previously, definitions of trust have been based on inputs of trust, mostly with regard to qualities of the trustee (McKnight & Chervoney, 2001). The findings of this study provide the basis for a new definition of trust based on outputs of a trust relationship (Gill & Ramsey, 2012). On this basis the following definition for trust was proposed:

*Trust is the expectation that others can be relied upon, demonstrated through one's readiness to talk about issues with which one experiences feelings of vulnerability.*

This definition can be applied sensitively across different learning environments, and so is adaptable to organisational contextualisation. Interestingly, the definition alerts EI trainers to the differences between learners: some undertake training programs ready and willing to talk, and so already have trust in the change process; others low in trust are less willing to talk about areas where development is needed.

In summary, there is a complex relationship between trust and the connections people make through conversation. We have argued that high levels of trust generate readiness to engage in conversations around personal issues that involve vulnerability. It could also be the case that people are more likely to feel trust towards those with whom they have connected through conversation, thus reinforcing the connection between trust and relationship-building. In addition, using 'readiness to talk' as basis for building trust gives trainers a way of initiating trust-building through conversation that increases commitment to engagement incrementally. By providing a focus on engagement through relationship-building greater understanding about the nature of trust as an 'output' emerges, suggesting the need for an effective relationship-building methodology.

#### **4.5 Exploring World Café as a Relationship-building Methodology**

The comments gathered from the World Café session were analysed to explore its value for building trust relationships. Themes that emerged were: World Café was useful for mixing people up, which in turn created opportunity to connect, that in turn provided a platform for building trusting relationships that lead to ever-deepening conversations that in turn, trusting relationships.

Several delegates commented on the success of World Café for mixing people up. While this point may seem obvious, it plays an important part in initiating relationship-building with strangers:

*Mixing people up in the cage of conversation is good (if at times uncomfortable). [We] hear more voices and different perspectives and how other people approach the issues.*

Without the explicit process of moving people from table to table which mixed them up, delegates would have likely traditionally stayed in one seat, which would have limited their ability to make connections with others. Several commented on the usefulness of World Café method for connectivity:

*I enjoyed meeting and connecting with new people.*

*The joy of just talking and making connections.*

*Being able to talk to others; the [World] Cafe style worked very well*

The World Café also seemed to offer a way for that 'connecting' to evolve into deeper conversations that involved transparency and vulnerability:

*The quality/level of our conversation changed markedly (was more focused and went deeper) when on the first round [of the World Café], we took it in turns to speak.*

*I do think an atmosphere where people can express their ideas without being ridiculed is important – so perhaps EI training should take place in cafés!*

This finding potentially identifies real value for implementing World Café as a relationship-building methodology, however to verify this, further research is needed; research that conceivably offers a way of developing measurement of depth of perceptions in conversations. The outcome of being ‘mixed up’ which foreshadowed delegates ‘connecting’ appears to be part of the process towards building trusting relationships, which World Café method facilitates:

*Being able to talk to others; the [World] Cafe style worked very well.*

*Therefore the extent to which we act “as if people matter”, building relationships and forging connections contributes to a whole greater than the sum of the parts...An affirming and extending [World Café] workshop.*

*Developing relationships, enjoyment, connectivity, genuine openness, [and] authenticity.*

The transparency of these shared conversations collectively, made knowledge about trust visible so that everyone could ‘see’ others perspectives and comment on them openly, and which demonstrated trust relationships. In these quotes participants make a direct link between World Café and relationship-building. The progressive nature of activities within World Café method which results in mixing people up, offered opportunity for them to connect, thereby facilitating “readiness to talk”, so that meaningful conversations occurred, which in turn, assists relationship-building built on trust. This progressive deepening of relationships in the learning environment can be viewed as a reinforcing feedback loop as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Causal Loop Diagram using World Café method for building trust relationships

The implications of these findings are that the World Café method offers trainers a process for creating a safe learning environment in a way that demonstrates trust, conspicuous by people’s readiness to talk. World Café method appears to be a rich seedbed for building trusting relationships, as learners are “led” by the EI trainer into talking about issues that progressively require deepening trust relationships with others.

Bergold and Thomas (2012) praise Participatory Qualitative Research methods for their democracy, safe environment and community participation, with an advantage that all can participate though at differing degrees. World Café methodology makes this research and practical contribution through inclusiveness, voice, and community. Participatory qualitative research offers participants the opportunity for the “reconstruction of their knowledge and ability in a process of understanding and empowerment” (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, para 17). World Café methodology extends the borders of traditional qualitative research, for example edging into descriptive surveys and reflective practice, and offers a way of measuring descriptive collective dialogue (Takahashi, Nemoto, Hayashi, & Horita, 2014) and for using qualitative thematic content analysis during data analysis (van Graan, Williams, & Koen, 2016).

#### **4.6 Recommendations for Future Methodological Research**

As indicated above, there are further research needs to pursue. This paper leaned heavily on interpretations of post-activity survey comments. It would be of value to have an expert panel rate the sincerity of positive affective response reflected in the comments of these delegates. By repeating the same sequence, timing and procedures used to collect the data we presented above, it will be possible to assemble a data set of approximately one hundred sentences (i.e., like those above, these will have been written by EI delegates in the same World Café activity). This would yield affordances for replicating the Q-methodology employed in Gill, McConnell, and Atkins (2011) and Atkins, Gill, and McConnell (2014). Q-sorts facilitate the use of commonly-available *dimension-reduction* algorithms (e.g., SPSS factor analysis) in studies of human subjectivity. Factor analysis is most commonly used to identify sub-tests or sub-scales or groupings of questionnaire items (e.g., Likert scale survey questions) measuring targeted constructs, attributes, or attitudes. It essentially allows researchers to empirically group “like-evoking” questions. Q-methodology, in contrast, uses factor analysis algorithms to group “like-minded” raters or participants. While this requires reasonably large numbers of statements, phrases, images, or other relevant related stimuli, the number of raters employed can be reasonably small. As described by Davis and Michelle (2011) this approach is:

*...consistent with the post-structuralist view that meaning is inherently social and contextual, and that audience members must inevitably draw on discourses of the wider social world in constructing and articulating an account from their own unique location...It is this insistence on subjectivity as self-referential within a field of discourse produced by other selves that makes Stephensonian Q-methodology attractive to post-positivist, critical realist and post-structuralist scholars alike” (p.566).*

Future research could explore a hundred-plus sentences twice Q-sorted by a panel of communication experts. For example, in one Q-sort pass, these communication experts could rate the likelihood (e.g., say 0% to 90%) that each sentence was “Written by an EI delegate who sincerely appreciated the World Café method.” Later, these experts would rate the likelihood that each sentence was “Written by an EI attendee who had NOT sincerely appreciated the World Café method.” The order of these Q-sort passes would be counter-balanced for sequential effects (e.g., fatigue, etc.). The clustering of rater-endeavours would include negatively-correlated dimensions, thus oblique rotations (e.g., SPSS direct oblimin) would be used. Consistent with PANAS research outcomes (Kercher, 1992), these “positive-affective” and “negative-affective” appraisal-outcome dimensions should still be notably independent. Subsequently, as described in Stergiou and Airey (2011), Q-methods could be used alongside traditional R-methods to develop an EI-training feedback questionnaire for assessing EI delegate appraisals of conversational depth and candidness. World Café methodology likely increases the latter. But this could then be quantitatively assessed by turning the most strongly rated comments, re: the potential interplay between “candidness” and “depth” and “sincere appreciation” dimensions, into Likert items (...following on from Stergiou and Airey, 2011). These, in turn, could be used for large-sample research, preferably attempted across the whole of the EI “World Café-attending” community (globally).

It was evident to researchers taking part in the World Café exercise that stronger relationships with research participants had been built as a result of the process, and were considered a part of the emerging community. As a result, we believe that members of the community have an increased awareness of the value of research and, as a result of their positive experiences, will have an increased willingness to take part in future research, whether it is based around the World Café or more standard research methods.

## **5 Conclusion**

In this article we have explored the value of the World Café methodology for building a safe environment that encourages relationship-building for purposes of building trust to underpin transformation change. The World Café formed a basis to engage participants in exploring the question: How can EI training practitioners design their training in ways that encourage trust? Using a World Café approach that fosters facilitated conversations, provides a forum that supports and facilitates learners’ readiness to talk about issues where they experience feelings of vulnerability about, and for which, they are ready to talk for the purpose of transformational change; this new definition of trust addresses these issues.

The relationship-building function of the World Café provides a process for encouraging these conversations and engaging in meaningful dialogue that advances understanding, and in turn, creates a potential platform

for developing an EI community of practice with enduring *trusting* qualities. The World Café methodology offers a practical process that supports meaningful conversations on an issue (in this instance, trust) while acting as a practical basis for building purposeful trusting relationships.

## References

- Anderson, L. (2011) "Use the World Café concept to create an interactive learning environment". *Education for Primary Care*, Vol 22, No. 5, pp 337-338.
- Applefield, J. M., Huber, R. L., & Moallem, M. (2000). "Constructivism in theory and practice: Toward a better understanding", [online], *High School Journal*, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-71823933.html>
- Bachmann, R. (2011) "At the crossroad: Future directions in trust research". *Journal of Trust Research*, Vol 1, No. 2, pp 203-213.
- Bergold, J., & Thomas, S. (2012). "Participatory Research Methods: A Methodological Approach in Motion", [online], <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1801/3334>
- Boyd, E. M. E., & Fayles, A. M. (1983) "Reflective learning: Key to learning from experience". *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol 23, No. 2, pp 99-117.
- Brown, J. (2002). "A resource guide for hosting conversations that matter at World Café", [online], [http://www.inscena.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/inscena/pdf/worldcafé.pdf](http://www.inscena.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/inscena/pdf/worldcafé.pdf)
- Brown, J., Isaacs, D., & Margulies, N. (1997). "The World Café: Creating the future, one conversation at a time", [online], <http://www.theworldcafé.com/articles/TWC.pdf>
- Curzon-Hobson, A. (2002) "A pedagogy of trust in higher learning". *Teaching in Higher Education*, Vol 7, No. 3, pp 265-276.
- Dietz, G. (2011) "Going back to the source: Why do people trust each other?". *Journal of Trust Research*, Vol 1, No. 2, pp 215-222.
- Doney, P. M., & Cannon, J. P. (1997) "An examination of the nature of trust in buyer-seller relationships". *Journal of Marketing*, Vol 61, No. 2, pp 35-51.
- Edwards, J. E., Thomas, M. D., Rosenfeld, P., & Booth-Kewley, S. (1997) *How to conduct organizational surveys: A step-by-step guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.
- Evans, I., & Abbott, I. (1998) *Teaching and learning in higher education*. New York, Cassell.
- Ferris, G. R., Liden, R. C., Munyon, T. P., Summers, J. K., Basik, K. J., & Buckley, M. R. (2009) "Relationships at work: Toward a multidimensional conceptualization of dyadic work relationships". *Journal of Management*, Vol 35, No. 6, pp 1379-1403.
- Fox, S., & Stallworth, L. E. (2009) "Building a framework for two internal organizational approaches to resolving and preventing workplace bullying: Alternative dispute resolution and training". *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, Vol 61, No. 3, pp 220-241.
- Garbarro, J. J., & Athos, A. G. (1978) *Interpersonal behaviour: Communication and understanding in relationships*. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall.
- Gardner, W. L., Bruce, T., Avolio, J., Luthans, F., May, D. R., & Walumbwa, F. (2005) "Can you see the real me? A self-based model of authentic leader and follower development". *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol 16, No. 3, pp 343-372.
- Gill, L., & Pio, E. (Eds.). (2007). *Organisations and management*. Auckland: Pearson Education.
- Gill, L. J., & Ramsey, P. L. (2012) "Shedding light on trust". *Asia Pacific Management and Business Application*, Vol 1, No. 2, pp 117-128.
- Harari, O. (2002) "The trust factor". *Public Management*, Vol 84, No. 8, pp 6-9.
- Hoffman, A. M. (2002) "A conceptualization of trust in international relations". *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol 8, No., pp 375-401.
- Kramer, R. M. (1999) "Trust and distrust in organisation: Emerging perspectives, enduring questions". *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol 50, No. 1, pp 569-599.
- Lewicki, R., & Brinsfield, C. (2009). Trust, distrust and building social capital *Social capital: Reaching out, reaching in*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Maxwell, J. C. (1993) *Developing the leader within you*. Nashville, Injoy.
- Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995) "An integrative model of organizational trust". *Academy of Management Review*, Vol 20, No. 3, pp 709-734.
- McKnight, D. H., & Chervaney, N. L. (2001). Trust and distrust definitions: One bite at a time. In R. Falcone, S. K. Singh & Y. H. Tan (Eds.), *Trust in cyber-societies: Integrating the human and artificial perspectives* (pp. 27-54). Berlin: Springer-Verlag.
- Ramsey, P. (2006) "Teaching organisational learning: Permission to exhale". *Reflections: the SoL Journal*, Vol 7, No. 4, pp 29-37.
- Redling, R. (2004) "How to get - and keep - employees' trust. Good management is the foundation". *Magma Connexion*, Vol 4, No. 1, pp 27-29.
- Rossi, P. H., Wright, J. D., & Anderson, A. B. (1983) *Handbook of survey research*. Orlando, FL, Academic.
- Rotter, J. B. (1967) "A new scale for the measurement of interpersonal trust". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol 35, No. 4, pp 651-665.
- Stephenson, C. (2004) "Rebuilding trust: The integral role of leadership in fostering values, honesty and vision". *Ivey Business Journal*, Vol 68, No. 3, pp 1-5.

- Takahashi, M., Nemoto, K., Hayashi, N., & Horita, R. (2014) "The measurement of dialogue: From a case study of the workshop using world café as a collective dialogue method". *Journal of Information Processing*, Vol 22, No. 1, pp 88-95.
- Tan, S., & Brown, J. (2005) "The World Café in Singapore". *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol 41, No. 1, pp 83-80.
- van Graan, A. C., Williams, M. J., & Koen, M. P. (2016) "Professional nurses' understanding of clinical judgement: A contextual inquiry". *Health SA Gesondheid*, Vol 21, No. 1, pp 280-293.
- Vangen, S., & Huxham, C. (2003) "Nurturing collaborative relations: Building trust in interorganizational collaboration". *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Vol 39, No. 5, pp 5-31.
- Williams, P. A. H. (2008) "In a 'trusting' environment, everyone is responsible for information security". *Information Security Technical Report*, Vol 13, No. 4, pp 207-215.