

Scale 10 - Invitation to Trust

by Tim Sparrow and Jo Maddocks

This month we are looking at the last of the linear, more-is-better scales which measure aspects of self management: Scale 10 Invitation to Trust. This is defined as “the degree to which you invite the trust of others by being principled, reliable, consistent and knowable”.

There are two steps to the process: first, actually being trustworthy (i.e. “principled, reliable and consistent”), and second being known to be so by the person(s) whose trust you are inviting (i.e. “knowable”) – this is the personal openness directly measured by Scale 9 which we looked at last month . If you are a closed book, and not known by others, you can be in fact as trustworthy as you like but others will not trust you because you are an unknown quantity to them. So both steps in the process are necessary, which is why we have changed the name of this scale from “Trustworthiness” to “Invitation to Trust”. To approach from another point of view, there are two sets of reasons why people may not trust you: (i) they know you and/or have previous experience of you and have discovered that to a degree you are not principled, reliable and consistent, or (ii) they do not know you because you are not personally open, and so they are not willing to take the risk of trusting the unknown.

As we have seen with other scales, you need to hold the “I’m OK You’re OK” life position to be truly trustworthy and score high on this scale. People who do not value others, who hold them Not OK, will not take the necessary care to keep their promises to them and not to let them down. And you need to hold yourself OK too: people who hold the “I’m Not OK You’re OK” life position will tend sometimes to say things which are not true and make promises they cannot keep in order to please the other; to this extent they are untrustworthy.

Trustworthy people are pretty easy to recognise when we come across them: they walk their talk, they keep their promises, they behave the same when on their own as when observed by others, they are predictable in the sense that their behaviour can be relied upon. People who are reliable in this sense have largely resolved their internal conflicts so that there are not different bits of them which believe and do different things. They have integrity (“wholeness”).

Developing our Invitation to Trust

If you do not fit this picture, and your invitation to others to trust you is weaker than it might be, how do you set about strengthening it? As always, it depends on what is getting in the way, on what your relevant “interferences” are. Is your pattern sometimes not to do what you have said you will, or sometimes to do what you have said you won’t? Either way, you need to make sure that you don’t give the undertaking in the first place unless you are committed to it. Always check before making an agreement that you really want to do it (or not do it), and are not just “agreeing” out of guilt or duty or a desire to please. Better to say No in the first place than to say Yes and then let the other down. (Obviously this is particularly relevant to those who have a “Please Others” condition of worth.)

1. Self Regard
2. Regard for Others
3. Self Awareness
4. Awareness of Others
5. Emotional Resilience
6. Personal Power
7. Goal Directedness
8. Flexibility
9. Personal Openness
10. Invitation to Trust
11. Trust
12. Balanced Outlook
13. Emotional Expression & Control
14. Conflict Handling
15. Interdependence
16. Self Assessed EI

If there tends to be a disparity between what you say you will or won't do and what you actually do or don't do, then when you are agreeing to do something, make a habit of at the same time planning when and how you are going to do it, and what you will do if prevented from doing so. When you are agreeing not to do something, make sure you identify what the temptations will be and how you will deal with them, and plan in advance what action you will take if you do do what you are promising not to do.

If one of the reasons for the disparity between your words and your actions lies in the fact that you are psychologically unintegrated, that there are different bits of you which feel, want and believe different things and which consequently cause you to behave in different ways, so that there is no way for others to know which bit is going to be in charge at any one time, then in order to get people to rely on you you will need by self reflection to learn to identify the different conflicting bits of you, and work out how you want to resolve the conflicts. You may find talking it through with someone else helpful to this process.

And obviously, if your problem is not a lack of intrinsic trustworthiness but that you are not personally open enough to be known and trusted by others, then experiment with letting people know a bit more about you. Each day make sure you tell at least one other person at least one thing - a fact, an insecurity, an excitement - that you would normally keep to yourself.

Invitation to trust is an important scale because of the range of knock-on effects if you are low in it. Obviously if you are low in Invitation to Trust, then people will tend to trust you less. They are also (depending to a degree on the nature of your unreliability, e.g. Do you betray confidences?) less likely to be personally open with you. And it will harm your capacity to be an effective collaborator: it will lessen others' willingness to be interdependent with you.

The key relevance of attitudes to invitation to trust

Psychologically people who have high 'invitation to trust' are likely to be matching their behaviour with their underlying attitudes. It has long been known that we are drawn to behave in ways that are consistent with our attitudes otherwise we experience anxiety (cognitive dissonance) compelling us to behave differently. Attitudes create our emotional responses which in turn fuel our thinking and lead to our behaviour through a pattern matching process in the limbic brain. So in order to change behaviour in the long term we must also shift our attitudes. For example teaching a person to say no assertively will not last for long if underneath they still feel inadequate. Or introducing a set of consumer service competencies is unlikely to achieve the desired outcome if the person concerned does not want to be of service to others. A recent study using the 'ie' measure found that prison officers who had low regard for inmates (attitude) but were required within their job to show them respect (behaviour) were far more likely to suffer job burnout (1).

People who score high on all three parts of any bipolar scales (an unusual but possible result) may be indicative of a low invitation to trust. There may be different reasons for low trustworthiness such as the person wants to be liked so that they are constantly adapting their behaviour to the environment rather than checking it is consistent with their inner principles. Another possible explanation is they are manipulative and inconsistent, such as being friendly one moment and aggressive the next. This tends to make people feel very uncomfortable for innate biological reasons. The limbic (emotional) brain is there to look after us and anticipate the future, what to expect and check if it is safe for us. It does this by sending out emotions which are in effect expectations. If someone is difficult to read, the limbic brain panics, unsure as to what will happen. We all have a mild experience of this in unfamiliar new experiences such as going to a party with strangers. The limbic system goes on an instant search for familiar patterns for reassurance on how to behave. Children who are brought up in an unsafe environment tend to develop a hyper-vigilance to detect any signs of danger from other people (distorted 'awareness of others'). In a work setting people report they would rather work with a consistently firm and even unfair manager than with one who is highly inconsistent.

Another part of the brain relevant to this scale is the Basal Ganglia, described by Max Liberman as an ethical rudder, which provides us with intuitive feedback on whether any action would fit our inner guiding principles. We can develop our 'invitation to trust' by becoming more self aware / intuitive by listening to our body and the emotional signals it gives us which tell us whether our behaviour fits with our attitudes.

1. Jenkins, D. Maddocks, J. (2005). Prison officers, Emotional Labour and the Intelligent Management of Emotions. SDR, BPS conference. Maddocks, J. (2005). Research studies on the 'ie' - Technical manual. JCA

© Tim Sparrow and Jo Maddocks CAEI 2007