

Collaborative Communication Training: Assessment of Impact

May 29, 2012

Reported and researched by Jane Connor, Robert Wentworth, Dian Killian, and Martha Lasley. This work was supported by Merck, via a contract with the *Center for Collaborative Communication*.

Contents

Contents	1
Lists of Tables and Figures.....	4
Abstract	5
Introduction.....	6
Context.....	6
What is Collaborative Communication?.....	6
Dimensions That Affect Achievement.....	8
Relationship to Existing Management Literature.....	9
Collaborative Communication Use in Organizations.....	11
Prior Research on Collaborative Communication Training.....	11
Collaborative Communication Training Program at Merck.....	12
Goals	12
Training Components	13
Training Style	14
Participants	14
Qualitative Assessment.....	15
Methodology.....	15
Semi-Quantitative Results	16
Bottom-Line Benefits	16
Software defects reduced	16
Reduced off-shore development costs.....	19
Accelerated development cycle	19
Issue resolution accelerated or enabled	19
Issues resolved with fewer people	21
Overall efficiency improved: explicit.....	21
Overall efficiency improved: inferred from issue resolution acceleration	22
Investment Payback Period	23
Qualitative Benefits	25
Task Dimension.....	25
Decisions stick	25
Alignment.....	27
Key information gets surfaced	27

Conversations stay on track	28
More efficient communication	28
Relationship Dimension.....	28
People feel heard.....	28
Tension gets defused	29
Confidence and skills to address conflict.....	29
Trust.....	30
Support when things get tough.....	31
Support for dealing with diversity and multiple cultures.....	31
Personal Dimension.....	31
Ease in self-expression	31
Flexibility	32
Safety to take risks.....	32
Motivation and trust via appreciation	33
Improved work-life balance	34
Engagement.....	34
Enjoyment of work.....	34
Perspectives Offered	35
What others notice	35
Organizations that need Collaborative Communication.....	35
Experience of Collaborative Communication	36
Experience of the training.....	36
Expanding use by Merck.....	36
What others should know.....	37
Impact of Training Elements	39
Real-plays.....	39
Coaching	40
Practice.....	40
Exercises.....	41
Trainer modeling and humanity	41
Shared experience	41
Higher-up presence	42
Sticky phrases from the training.....	42
Empathy buddies	43
Quantitative Assessment.....	44
Methodology.....	44
Needs Met Instrument.....	44
Behavior Inventory	45
Vignette Inventory	46
Quantitative Results	46
Needs Met Inventory	46
Behavior Inventory	50
Vignette Inventory	51
Discussion.....	52
 Summary of Impact.....	52
 Bringing in Collaborative Communication Training	55
 Recommendations.....	56
Appendices	57
Appendix A. Overall Efficiency and Investment Payback Calculations	57

A.1 Formula for Overall Increase in Efficiency	57
A.2 Formula for Investment Payback Period.....	58
A.3 Investment Payback Period Formula Given Specifics of This Training.....	58
Appendix B. Analysis of Quantitative Results	59
Appendix C. Interview Structure	65
Appendix D. Survey Vignettes	67
Appendix E. Practical Intentions and Behaviors.....	68
Practical Intention: Create Clarity.....	68
Behavior: Identify objective observations	68
Behavior: Offer and request reflections.....	68
Behavior: Seek clarity before acting	69
Behavior: Make clear, positive, do-able requests.....	70
Practical Intention: Prioritize Connection	71
Behavior: Notice when connection isn't present and act to address that	71
Behavior: Be willing to slow down to create connection.....	71
Behavior: Be willing to listen to create connection.....	71
Behavior: Be fully present to create connection.....	72
Behavior: Don't offer more than people can hear.....	72
Behavior: Be open to expressing or hearing feelings	73
Behavior: Go back and clean up after interactions that didn't go well	74
Behavior: Try to understand the other person's point of view.....	74
Behavior: Express specific appreciation and celebrate.....	74
Behavior: Make personal connections.....	75
Behavior: Use CC to make it safe to be authentic	75
Behavior: Mediate conflicts using tools of CC	75
Behavior: Facilitate groups using tools of CC.....	75
Behavior: Be aware that questions can create more openness than statements.....	76
Practical Intention: Focus on Needs	76
Behavior: Express needs to make it easier to hear you.....	76
Behavior: Take the time to surface everyone's needs.....	76
Behavior: Let awareness of needs support flexibility about strategies	77
Behavior: Transform judgment and "enemy Images" by looking at needs.....	77
Behavior: Motivate by considering needs	77
Practical Intention: Value Mutuality.....	77
Behavior: Allow everyone's needs to matter	77
Behavior: Be willing to say "no" and make it okay for others to say it	78
Practical Intention: Be Self-Aware and Empowered.....	78
Behavior: Take time to self-connect	78
Behavior: Be aware of the ability to choose	79

Lists of Tables and Figures

Table 1. Semi-quantitative estimated improvements	18
Table 2. Increase in overall efficiency based on reduction in issue resolution time	22
Table 3. Investment payback period based on reduction in issue resolution time....	23
Table 4. Needs met inventory	44
Table 5. Behavior inventory	45
Table 6. Key to behavior labels used in charts	50
Table 7. Summary of Semi-Quantitative Findings.....	52
Table 8. Summary of Quantitative Findings	53
Table 9. Summary of Qualitative Findings.....	54
Table 10. Analyses of Variance: NEEDS INVENTORY	61
Table 11. Analyses of Variance: BEHAVIOR INVENTORY.....	62
Table 12. Analyses of Variance: VIGNETTE INVENTORY	65
Figure 1. Mean response to needs met	47
Figure 2. Mean response to behavior questions by time	48
Figure 3. Vignette responses	49

Abstract

The success of any business is dependent upon people working together to accomplish tasks that allow the business to achieve its purpose. This is most likely to occur when individuals are thriving and the quality of relationships and communication between people is high. Collaborative Communication (CC) is an integrated system of concepts and skills that foster high quality relationships, a positive environment and effective communication in the service of achieving shared purposes. The purpose of this research is to evaluate whether training a group of executives at Merck in CC does, in fact, improve the quality of relationships and communications among team members and between teams, the efficiency and effectiveness of those receiving training, and the effectiveness of teams which include executives who received training.

A comprehensive six-month training program in CC was offered to 23 executives including a 5-day immersion training, monthly one-day workshops, semi-monthly personalized coaching sessions by phone, and the option of regular partnership conversations with fellow participants.

Quantitative data measuring the executives' perceptions of the work environment, the quality of interpersonal interactions and communication effectiveness were collected before training, midway through the training and after training. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the executives seven months after the training was completed to gain qualitative information about the nature of the long-term benefits of the training that the executives observed.

Results showed statistically significant changes on 31 of the 33 quantitative measures which included variables reflecting changes in skills related to the accomplishment of tasks, the quality of interpersonal interactions, and the effectiveness and motivation of individuals. Executives reported that conversations and meetings were notably more efficient and estimates of the impact of this greater efficiency indicated a probable payback period to Merck of 2-10 months for all expenses incurred by the training and the executives' time. Qualitative results showed executives valued the impact of CC training on their ability to communicate clearly, make requests that solve problems, understand where others are coming from, speak openly and directly, mediate conflicts among team members and facilitate effective meetings. Trust, engagement and other work-culture factors were reported as improved.

The kinds of situations and settings most likely to benefit from CC training and the potential limitations of CC training are described as well as the aspects of the CC training that appeared most meaningful and useful to the participants.

Introduction

The lifeblood of a business is people working together to accomplish tasks that, in aggregate, lead to the business achieving its purpose. People work together most effectively when individuals are thriving and the quality of relationships and communication between people is high. This supports the right tasks getting done, efficiently and with high quality. Putting attention on improving these foundational aspects of business functioning has the potential for major payoffs.

Collaborative Communication (CC) is an integrated system of understandings and skills that support people in thriving and connecting in ways that foster high quality relationships and effective communication in the service of achieving shared purposes. If CC achieves its aims, its use should contribute markedly to business effectiveness.

This thesis has been put to the test at Merck, where a number of organizations have undergone extensive training in CC. This report documents the impact of that training.

Context

What is Collaborative Communication?

Collaborative Communication (CC) is an approach to communicating. Yet, its scope extends beyond surface aspects of communication. So, CC might be more accurately described as an integrated system of understandings, attitudes and associated skills to help people relate to both other people and their own experiences.

The practice of CC is intended to support:

- addressing the needs underlying interactions between people;
- de-escalation and transformation of conflict;
- effective communication;
- healthy relationships;
- thriving of individuals;
- contribution of individuals to the thriving of others.

Collaborative Communication is based in part on an understanding that much of what we have been taught about how to think about and interact with others is rooted, albeit subtly, in a *Control* paradigm. In this paradigm, people are pressured to conform to agendas not wholly of their choosing, and those who appear to have different agendas are viewed as adversaries. Operating out of this paradigm can lead to guardedness and people acting at cross purposes, subtle alienation, and

reduced individual and collective thriving. Yet, practices based on this *Control* paradigm are so pervasive, so much the norm, as to be nearly invisible. People aren't usually aware of how they contribute to undesirable outcomes.

Collaborative Communication is an integrated system for thinking about and relating to people that is rooted in a *Collaboration* paradigm. Its concepts and practices create a favorable climate for people experiencing one another as allies, and for working together effectively. These practices support synergy, openness, trust, bonding, full engagement, and thriving. CC is based on general principles about how human beings work, which are drawn from contemporary thinking in psychology and the social sciences, as well as timeless wisdom from the around the world about relations among people. Because of the breadth and depth of these foundations, CC is broadly applicable.

Experience with CC often leads to an “Aha!” as it becomes apparent that the thinking and behaviors it suggests have desirable consequences. People become aware of new options for choosing behaviors that lead to more rewarding and meaningful outcomes.

Collaborative Communication, also known as *Nonviolent Communication* (NVC),^{1,2,3} was developed by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D., beginning in the 1960s. Today, the model is taught around the world, and has been applied in a wide variety of contexts, including business and nonprofit settings, and in mediation, education, parenting and health-care. CC is applicable to any setting where human beings interact with one another.

The practice of CC can be understood as being organized around these Practical Intentions:⁴

- **Create clarity** – Be aware that: the message sent is often not the message received; the intention of our communication and our suggested next step may not be understood if we do not make these explicit; and objective observations can have advantages over potentially unreliable or divergent interpretations.
- **Prioritize connection** – Pay attention to how words, attitudes and actions affect the relationship. Beware of sacrificing relationship to short-term task

¹ Rosenberg, Marshall (2003). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. Puddledancer Press. ISBN 978-1892005038.

² Connor, Jane Marantz and Killian, Dian (2012). *Connecting Across Differences: Finding Common Ground With Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime*. Puddledancer Press. ISBN 978-1892005243.

³ Lasater, Ike and Stiles, Julia (2010). *Words That Work In Business: A Practical Guide to Effective Communication in the Workplace*. Puddledancer Press. ISBN 978-1892005014.

⁴ This formulation in terms of Practical Intentions, which is original to the authors, is intended to offer a high-level overview of what CC emphasizes, without getting mired in details that are unlikely to be meaningful to those who have not been through the training.

goals. Pay attention to people's moment-by-moment capacity to take in what is said to them, and attend to barriers to communication before trying to communicate.

- **Focus on needs** – Look for the shared positive purposes and values that are implicit in each person's positions and actions, to understand what is important and find a basis for collaboration. Focus on underlying goals, rather than being attached to initial strategies, to be open to new possibilities. Trust that what people say and do is a reflection of the aspirations that are inherent in being human; focus on these aspirations to support seeing one another's goodness and humanity. Remember core human aspirations and values, as a source of vitality and engagement.
- **Value mutuality** – Treat everyone's needs as mattering, and look for solutions that work for everybody. Value people saying "no" to what doesn't work for them, and consciously choosing when to say "yes."
- **Be self-aware and empowered** – Cultivate awareness of what is going on inside ourselves, especially noticing our feelings and needs. Take responsibility for our role in what we feel, and for addressing our needs and asking for assistance. Remember our ability to make conscious choices.

Training in Collaborative Communication involves learning and working with a well-developed body of concepts, suggested attitudes, and specific practices that align with these Practical Intentions.

The ideas of CC are nuanced and are often not understood until their effects are experienced. Consequently, most people find it challenging to learn CC based on abstract descriptions or formal recipes. Effective training relies not only on the transmission of concepts, but also on modeling, experiences, and extensive practice.

Dimensions That Affect Achievement

When people are working together, dimensions that affect what is achieved include

- **Task** – what is done to achieve a purpose.
- **Relationship** – people's attitudes towards one another; sense of comfort and ease with one another; and willingness to support, rely on, and be open with one another.
- **Personal** – individual well-being/thriving, inner resourcefulness, and ability to access and utilize one's inner resources

These dimensions are highly interrelated, and each affects the others.

One might expect Collaborative Communication to primarily enhance the Relationship dimension, given its origins in practices for peacemaking and conflict

resolution. However, close examination suggests the likelihood that CC should contribute directly to the Task and Personal dimensions as well.

The Task dimension is supported by application of the CC Practical Intentions as follows:

- *Focus on needs* supports awareness of and alignment with the purpose of the task.
- *Create clarity* supports accurate sharing of information.
- *Prioritize connection* ensures a clear channel for communication, and supports efficient sharing of information.
- *Value mutuality* helps to ensure that all relevant information is taken into account.

For the Relationship dimension:

- *Focus on needs* supports people in being aware of what they have in common and in being flexible about strategies, thereby offering a basis for transforming conflict.
- *Value mutuality* supports transforming conflict, and contributes to warmth as people experience their needs being respected and addressed.
- *Be self-aware and empowered* encourages taking personal responsibility, and reduces conflict associated with blaming.
- *Prioritize connection* supports awareness of relationships and offers practices to prevent or address relational challenges.
- *Create clarity* reduces misunderstandings.

For the Personal dimension:

- *Focus on needs*, *Value Mutuality* and *Be self-aware and empowered* each contribute to the likelihood that an individual will have their personal needs met, and consequently will thrive and have increased internal resources.
- *Be self-aware and empowered* increases the ability of an individual to access their inner resources and apply them to supporting the shared purpose.

Because Collaborative Communication has the potential to enhance all three dimensions that affect achievement, this provides a theoretical basis for CC to contribute significantly to business success.

Relationship to Existing Management Literature

As is evident from the discussion of the Task, Relationship and Personal dimensions discussed above, CC has direct relevance to any of the extensive management literature that address tasks, relationships and personal issues in management.

However, probably one of the most direct linkages of CC with contemporary management literature is with the writing and research that reflect a new awareness of the importance of emotional factors and empathy in effective organizations. CC training supports the development of empathy, or respectful awareness of what things are like from other people's point of view. The value of

empathy for the well-being of individuals and organizations is a major and prominent theme in contemporary management literature, as well as in the social sciences^{5,6} and the latest neuroscience research⁷.

Lei and Greer (2003) highlight the value of what they call the “Empathetic Organization” as a paradigm that brings important benefits to the business world.⁸ From their case studies they conclude that “the empathetic organization attempts to build competitive advantage by harnessing the knowledge it learns from each customer to conceive entirely new products and solutions that ultimately set a key performance standard for the industry.”

From all directions the importance of empathy for effective functioning is being touted—from esteemed Stanford University Professor Patnaik in *Wired to Care: How Companies Prosper When They Create Widespread Empathy*⁹, to the President of the United States in talking about qualities needed for a Supreme Court justice¹⁰. And, as the empirical data of Scott et al. (2010) shows, the benefits of empathy for business are not just about understanding the perspective of the customer; major benefits accrue to the organization when employees have a manager who relates to them empathically. Employees experience greater physical well-being, more satisfaction and a number of other positive outcomes.¹¹

Most theorists consider empathy a crucial quality for effective leadership^{12,13}. Empathy is also viewed as a vital component of emotional intelligence whose value in business is recognized.^{14,15}

⁵ Rifkin, J. (2009). *The Empathic Civilization: The race to global consciousness in a world in crisis*. New York: Tarcher.

⁶ De Waal, F. (2010). *The Age of Empathy: Nature's lessons for a kinder society*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

⁷ Iacoboni, M. (2009). *Mirroring People: The science of empathy and how we connect with others*. New York: Picador.

⁸ Lei, David and Greer, Charles R. (2003). “The Empathetic Organization,” *Organizational Dynamics* (Elsevier Science, Inc.), vol. 32 no. 2, pp. 142-164.

⁹ Patnaik, Dev. *Wired to Care: How Companies Prosper When They Create Widespread Empathy*, Financial Times Press. ISBN 978-0137142347.

¹⁰ <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/05/01/obama-pushes-empathetic-supreme-court-justices/>

¹¹ Scott, Brent A.; Colquitt, Jason A.; Paddock, E. Layne; Judge, Timothy A. (2010). “A daily investigation of the role of manager empathy on employee well-being,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 113 pp. 127-140.

¹² Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: Free Press.

¹³ Walumbwa, F. O., Avolio, B. J., Gardner, W. L., Wernsing, T. S., Peterson, S. J. (2008). Authentic leadership: Development and validation of a theory-based measure. *Journal of Management*, 34, 89-126.

¹⁴ Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Dell.

¹⁵ Bar-On, R., & Parker, J. D. A. (2000). *The handbook of emotional intelligence*. San Francisco, Ca: Jossey-Bass Inc.

A broad overview of the importance of empathy for success in businesses and organizations of all types is described in the book *The Empathy Factor* by management consultant Maria Miyashiro.¹⁶ Miyashiro also argues that the use of CC and extensions of CC support increases in productivity for individuals, teams, and organizations.

To the extent that CC training makes a difference in the growth of skills and empathy on the part of the participants, current literature thus supports the conclusion that such a difference will have a strong impact on business effectiveness.

Collaborative Communication Use in Organizations

Collaborative Communication has been used in a variety of businesses and nonprofits, particularly in healthcare settings, including hospitals.¹⁷ One hospital is known to have hired a full-time trainer who both does training and advises on policies to support the organization in benefitting from the insights offered by CC. Unfortunately, little has been published about organizational uses of CC, aside from the examples mentioned in Miyashiro (2011).

Prior Research on Collaborative Communication Training

There is very little prior empirical research on the effectiveness of CC. Whereas most models and processes addressing conflict resolution and communication have been developed in a university context, CC was developed by a psychologist working in the community and offering trainings to the general public around the world, including many war-torn areas and developing countries. As a result, there have not been the resources that a university setting provides for grant funding, graduate student research and scholarly activity related to CC. Only four Master's theses and two doctoral dissertations have been located which examine the effectiveness of CC.

Most of these theses have looked at the impact of very brief trainings.¹⁸ Steckal (1994)¹⁹ looked at the levels of *empathy* and *self-empathy* observed in university students before and after a seven-hour training and found that both measures increased for the group that received training and not for the control group.

¹⁶ Miyashiro, Maria (2011). *The Empathy Factor: Your Competitive Factor for Personal, Team, and Business Success*. Puddledancer Press. ISBN 978-1892005250.

¹⁷ Organizational uses are known via private communications with various NVC trainers.

¹⁸ The briefest training, and the only negative result, was reported in Blake, S.M. (2002). *A step towards violence prevention: Non-violent communication as part of a college curriculum*. Unpublished Master's thesis, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton Fl. Blake examined the impact of two hours of training in CC compared with two hours of training on a different model of interpersonal communication. She did not find a differential impact of the CC training among the participants, who were students in a semester-long course in communication. This does not seem very surprising, given the extreme brevity of the training and the substantial amount of time that elapsed before the outcome measure was collected.

¹⁹ Steckal, D. (1994). *Compassionate communication training and levels of participant empathy and self-compassion* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, United States International University, San Diego, CA.

Branscomb (2011)²⁰ studied the impact of a seven hour training in CC as measured by the self-reports of both participants and an observer identified by participants as being in regular contact with the participant. She found that both participants and observers noted that the participant was more likely to express what they were feeling or wanting without blame, to ask for what they wanted without pressuring and to describe what had happened without criticizing.

The findings of these studies suggest that even relatively brief trainings in CC can make a difference in the communication choices of those receiving the training. This difference in behavior, in the case of the Branscomb study, in particular, has been reported both by participants and persons who are frequently in touch with the participant but did not themselves participate in the training. This lends some further credibility to the findings.

There are additional reports of CC being used and evaluated in educational settings²¹, at a juvenile detention facility²² and in a psychiatric setting^{23,24} but we are not aware of any empirical reports systematically evaluating the impact of CC in a business setting as the present research does.

Collaborative Communication Training Program at Merck

Goals

The following goals were identified for the training:

- Focusing on strengths (what is wanted, what is working) rather than faults or weaknesses and finding win-win solutions
- Maintaining openness to diverse strategies for any given outcome
- Addressing challenges and making decisions based on a partnership model of authenticity and accountability
- Communicating openly and effectively to find common understanding and shared goals
- Creating a culture of team-work, mutuality, inter-dependence and support

²⁰ Branscomb (2011). *Summative evaluation of a workshop in collaborative communication*. M.A. Thesis, Rollins School of Public Health of Emory University.

²¹ Jones, S. (2009). *Traditional education or partnership education: Which educational approach might best prepare students for the future?* Master's Thesis, Communication, San Diego California,. USA. San Diego University.

²² Nash, A. L. (2007). *Case study of Tekoa Institute: Illustration of nonviolent communication training's effect on conflict resolution*. Unpublished Master's thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA.

²³ Riemer, D. & Corwith, D. (2007). Application of core strategies: Reducing seclusion and restraint use. *On the edge: The official newsletter of the International Association of Forensic Nurses*. **13(3)**: 7-10. Retrieved Sept. 20, 2011. Reported a 90 percent reduction in violence.

²⁴ Riemer, D. (2009). Creating sanctuary: Reducing violence in a maximum security forensic psychiatric hospital unit. *On the edge: The official newsletter of the International Association of Forensic Nurses*. **15(1)**. Retrieved Sept. 20, 2011.

- Seeing issues on a global level and valuing the perspective and opinions of everyone equitably, with inclusion and respect
- Building collaborative relationships among Merck organizations and with HCL
- Developing self-awareness and interpersonal skills
- Developing shared leadership and giving effective feedback
- Increasing autonomy and empowerment for greater workplace satisfaction and productivity

The following specific behaviors were identified as ones that would support the above goals:

- Clarify and confirm what is being heard and said to support accuracy and shared understanding
- Speak without judgment or demand
- Make clear, positive and do-able requests
- Give feedback that is generative, pro-active, and desirable to apply
- Make use of appreciation to motivate and foster teamwork and understanding
- Pace conversations to support inclusion and full participation
- Communicate “hard-to-hear” messages with honesty and connection
- Follow through diplomatically and honestly to achieve clear objectives and results
- Problem-solve in a way that fosters honesty, transparency and trust
- Support a culture of team-work, collaboration, and mutual support with responsibility and accountability
- Cross-team building with connections created between user experience and development

Training Components

To accomplish these ends the program included the following components.

Pre-training interviews

One of the two lead trainers called each participant in the training to talk about the training, what was proposed and what the participant hoped to gain from the training. The trainers also asked participants to identify concerns and issues in their work life that they would like to see addressed in or improved as a result of the training. The trainers kept the content of these interviews in mind as they designed and conducted the trainings.

Foundation/immersion training

Participants as a group received five consecutive days of training beginning on a Monday morning and ending on Friday afternoon.

Integration training

Beginning approximately one month after the Foundation training, participants attended training days of 6 hours which were intended to

develop and deepen participants understanding of CC and give them feedback on how they were actually using CC in their lives. There was one such training each month for six months.

Printed materials

Participants received a substantial amount of printed material containing information about the theory and practice of CC. This included both a widely used textbook on CC and a 200-page workbook.

Private coaching sessions by telephone

Participants were able to receive private coaching sessions by telephone with CC trainers. Sixty-minute coaching sessions were offered twice monthly for six months.

Empathy buddies

Each participant was assigned another participant as an “empathy buddy.” The invitation was for the two participants to talk to each other either by phone or in person 30-60 minutes per week. They were encouraged to practice listening empathically to each other’s concerns, as they learned to do in the trainings. They practiced reflecting and empathizing with the concerns, being present to hear and understand their buddy’s experience rather than offering solutions or reassurance.

Training Style

To support active learning, the training sessions included a minimal amount of lecture style presentation or demonstrations; content was largely conveyed through experiential activities and exercises as well as role-plays. After the participants had gained some facility with the skills and perspectives (i.e. after four days of training), the trainers also addressed some of the actual conflicts present among the people at the training. The leaders coached the disputants in a dialogue about the conflict with the aim of increasing mutual understanding and resolving the conflict in a way satisfactory to all. These were called “real-plays.”

Participants

Participants were 23 executives, five to seven from each of four organizations. Three of the organizations are units of Merck: Enterprise Collaboration & Knowledge Management, Enterprise Architecture, and Enterprise Portal Services. The fourth organization, HCL America, is a consulting firm that provides services to Merck.

Eighty percent of the participants were male; twenty percent were female. The age breakdown was 31-40 years old: 35%; 41-50 years old 55%; 55+, 10%.

Qualitative Assessment

Methodology

The qualitative method used was semi-structured interviews conducted both individually and in small groups seven months after the last training session. All interviews were conducted in person at two Merck sites in New Jersey (Rahway and White House Station).

The same two researchers were present at all interviews. Individual interviews were scheduled for up to 60 minutes: the group interviews, which included 4 or 5 persons, were scheduled for up to 90 minutes. With one exception, all persons who participated in the group interview did so after participating in the individual interview. Because of complex travel schedules, only 13 executives participated in the individual interviews; nine of these participated in two small group interviews.

The structure and format for the interviews were based on the methods of Appreciative Inquiry^{25,26} and, secondarily, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy²⁷. Both of these approaches are grounded in storytelling, a common approach in qualitative research because of the richness of the data it yields and the creativity and engagement of the participants that it stimulates. Both emphasize open-ended questions which support the participants and the evaluators learning and growing together through the questions, reflections and dialogues that ensue. Appreciative Inquiry draws particular attention to the values that are important to the interviewee and the organization and consideration of what aspects of the training and the benefits of the training support those values. The premise of the Solution-Focused approach is that understanding past successes and strengths can assist interviewees in determining what they prefer to happen in the future and how they can make that vision happen.

It should be noted that while there is an orientation to attend to what works and what is valued in both approaches, the resulting conversations also provide significant information as to what participants see as the challenges and problematic issues in the current situation. However, the context of looking at what people want to have happen provides an energy and engagement that leads to growth in both organizations and individuals.

²⁵ Cooperrider, David L., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J.M. (2003). *Appreciative inquiry handbook*. Bedford Heights, OH: Lakeshore Publishers.

²⁶ Preskill, H., & Tzavaras, T. T. (2006). *Reframing evaluation through appreciative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

²⁷ Franklin, S., Trepper, T. S., Gingerich, W. J., & McCollum, E. E. (2012). *Solution-focused brief therapy: A handbook of evidence-based practice*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Drawing upon these methodologies we developed a structure for the interview, detailed in Appendix C, which served as a general guide for our questions. The structure invited exploration of stories about peak experiences involving the use of CC, identification of which training elements were experienced as significant, and quantification of any gains experienced. The intention was to characterize and illustrate benefits of the training, to identify aspects of the training that made a positive difference at work, and to clarify aspects that should be developed further or built upon.

Note that, in this report, in quoting from the interviews, we have changed any names mentioned to make the content more anonymous.

Semi-Quantitative Results

Bottom-Line Benefits

The CC training program seems to have had an impact on bottom-line issues such as quality, cost, and efficiency. Although this portion of the study was qualitative, interviewees offered estimates that provided semi-quantitative information on some benefits of the training. Quantified estimates offered by the various interviewees are summarized in Table 1, and are discussed in what follows. Each row in the table reflects a different interviewee.

Although individuals framed the speedups in a variety of ways, and two interviewees did not offer any quantitative estimates, **all interviewees reported increases in efficiency as a result of their CC training.**

Software defects reduced

The period after CC training was initiated coincided with a period in which the number of software defects associated with new software releases “declined drastically.” “The number of defects that required a code change... there was a time when there were 75 code fixes required. This release we did seven.” This **reduction in significant defects by over 90 percent** was attributed to “lots of factors,” so it is unclear how much of the improvement to attribute to the use of CC. Yet CC was seen as a significant factor, in part because key interventions that were instrumental in the improvement, such as a Six Sigma quality management project, were said to have arisen as a result of conversations that were enabled by the use of CC.

- “We used to feel like ‘Okay, we have gotten the work done. Now let’s be quiet about it. Let’s just keep going on.’ Next release, it was the same thing. But

now, we see that level of connection and the need to do something about issues."

Table 1. Semi-quantitative estimated improvements

Metric	Estimated ²⁸ Improvement	Qualifiers	Notes
Time to resolve issues	~90-94% reduction	Unknown if typical	8-12 hours reduced to 45 minutes. Number of people involved reduced.
Time to resolve issues	67-75% reduction		"if something were to take us three or four weeks to resolve, it would be resolved in a week."
Time to achieve mutual understanding	67-75% reduction		"three or four times less interaction"
Time to resolve issues	67% reduction		
Time to resolve issues	70% reduction	With those trained in CC.	"60% of day" spent on such issues.
	50% reduction	With those untrained.	
Overall efficiency (calculated)	60-140% increase		
Time to resolve issues	≥ 50% reduction		
Time to resolve certain issues	100% reduction		"It would remain unresolved, for the most part"
Time to resolve issues	≥ 50% reduction	"Even doing it with people that don't know what I'm doing"	
Time to resolve certain issues	100% reduction		Prior to the training certain issues were never addressed and now these problems are being worked out
Off-shore costs	75% reduction		
Meetings to address issue.	50-67% reduction		"A decision that might take two to three meetings, you might be able to get it done in one meeting."
Time people spend at meetings (calculated)	70-80% reduction	Based on 40% fewer people to address issue	"previously you needed five people to make a decision, and now three are needed"
Time to resolve issues	23-29% reduction²⁹	"Where people are open to it."	"Extreme" example: two week impasse resolved in a fifteen minute conversation
Overall personal efficiency	15% increase		"15% increase in efficiency just by being able to handle the conflict more efficiently. And just feeling a little bit better about myself."
Time: "concept to design to implementation to use"	≥ 50% reduction	Working with off-shore team	

²⁸ Plain-text estimated improvements are literal numbers offered by interviewee. *Italicized numbers are inferences computed based on numbers offered by interviewee.*

²⁹ Interviewee-reported 30-40% increase in efficiency has been translated to 23-29% reduction in time.

Reduced off-shore development costs

Major cost improvements were reported in relation to work done by off-shore teams. One interviewee offered, “We’ve now **reduced the cost probably by four-fold** (so if it was \$4, now it’s \$1).” This was seen as being largely a result of abandoning an ineffective strategy of “ratcheting up the pressure” to try to get the off-shore team to conform to fixed ideas about how they ought to be doing things, and instead empowering them to “figure things out.”

- “Instead of forcing the development team to change what they were doing, we backed off a little bit, agreed to start using things more out of the box, and then do user testing afterwards. We also agreed to let the development team decide how *they* would lower the cost as opposed to telling them how to do it... They’ve done some of the things we suggested, and they’ve done other things that we never even thought of. Like they came up with the idea that we needed to have one vendor as opposed to five vendors because that was creating a lot of conflict.” This shift in relating to the off-shore team involved the CC practice of “listening more to their point of view. I guess I had the confidence and the patience to kind of back off and let them go the route that they were going.”

Accelerated development cycle

One interviewee estimated that, in working to develop software, both the “communication loop” with the off-shore team and the time from “concept to design to implementation to use” have “easily” been **reduced by 50 percent**.

Issue resolution accelerated or enabled

Many interviewees reported that that amount of time to resolve a given issue has been reduced. This takes the form of fewer meetings, fewer messages and phone calls, and more efficient conversations.

- “Things that used to take us **six or seven phone calls**, an email string this long, is now an email that’s this long and maybe **two to three phone calls**. There are times that stuff used to just drag on forever. Especially with the email strings, I’ll be the first one to say, ‘Okay, enough with the email string, let’s get on a conference call. Let’s talk it through. Let’s work our Collaborative Communication and let’s figure this thing out.’ It’s interesting—on the surface, it takes a long time to do this right. But then you start peeling back the onion, and you realize, ‘Wow, it’s actually saving us time’ in less meetings, less emails, and definitely, with the people who have read from the same playbook, more efficient conversations.”

“One third as long as it would have taken previously. I can’t remember a meeting now or an issue that included the other two thirds that used to be commonplace. They’re cut off immediately. It frees you up to do what you were hired to do.”

- “A decision that might take **two to three meetings**, you might be able to get it done in **one meeting**.”
- “The clients think they’re communicating effectively, and telling us what it is they want, but we’re not hearing what they’re saying. So, obviously there’s a disconnect. Instead of us just numbly just taking a note and leaving, we’re pushing back and asking questions, challenging. You get everything out on the table at that session rather than continuing.”

“If something were to take us three or four weeks to resolve, it would be resolved in a week.”

- “You’re talking things where it might have taken actual total time **8 hours, 12 hours**, you’re talking it is **resolved in 45 minutes**.”
- “I find that **a phone call replaces twenty emails**.”

Some interviewees reported that issues are resolved most quickly when working with others who have been through CC training. Three people spoke to the issue of working with those untrained in CC: Two said in such cases they experienced time reductions of “about **50 percent**” and “easily at least **50 percent**” even though “I’m usually using it with someone who doesn’t realize what I’m doing”; one person found that “there are some that I’ve not yet gotten any of this to work with,” but “in the cases where people are open to it and it is working, I would say we’re probably getting a **30 to 40 percent** efficiency gain.” So, experience around this issue seemed to depend on the individual. For those who did not qualify their speedup estimates, it is not known to what extent they were working with others trained or untrained in CC.

One interviewee saw CC as being less about speeding up the resolution of issues, and more a matter of resolving issues at all.

- “**A change from never resolved to resolved.** We had situations that I didn’t think we were ever going to get resolved. Constantly getting escalated to VP’s, upper-level management, conflict going on, arguments, people yelling at each other. To now, we work through our problems. It goes from two camps that can’t come together, and we get an unsuccessful outcome, to two camps that come together, and we get something that’s seventy-five percent of what we wanted. It’s not about things are going better. It’s actually about **things weren’t going at all, and now they’re going**. And what you see is just continuous improvement.”

Another interviewee also reported that chronically unresolved issues are now getting resolved:

- “It would lead to an inter-team conflict. The team would never tend to connect. It would be more of a really formal way of interacting, with the team always talking about why certain things are not being done. There used to be

a sense of fear as to, 'I don't know how it's going to go—are they going to pull out a lot of issues that we've been doing wrong?' It would **remain unresolved**, for the most part. [Now], we see a conflict, and the immediate response is 'We definitely need to talk about this, and let's find a time.' The teams have worked together to find a solution. **These situations are transformed.**"

Issues resolved with fewer people

There were reports that fewer people are needed to make a decision.

- You have created an environment where you don't need everybody to make a call because the other person, who you just have to inform, they know that this will be done in a professional manner. When you reach out to people and say, 'I'm comfortable with that decision,' and 'Here is where we arrived at together,' that brings in the trust and the environment where a smaller set of people can make larger decisions. **Previously you needed five people to make a decision, and now three are needed.**"
- "Where we might have had **10 or 15 people** involved in email exchanges, we've been able to curtail it, get some key players in the room. You're down to less people—actually **4 to 5 people**—addressing it, who are the core players that we need involved in this. So you gain some productivity because you're not including some people that don't need to be actually involved. It's significant."

Note that the person estimating a reduction in number of people from 5 to 3 also estimated a reduction in meetings from 2 or 3 to 1. If one assumes meeting lengths did not change, one may infer that **average staff time in related meetings was reduced by 70 to 80 percent.**³⁰

Overall efficiency improved: explicit

One person offered information concerning overall efficiency.

- "I could probably give myself maybe a **15% increase in efficiency** just in the way I handle, just by being able to respond to the conflict more efficiently. And just feeling a little bit better about myself. [And] maybe I'm putting in more effort." (Note that this estimate of overall increase in efficiency came from the interviewee with the lowest estimate, 30-40%, for the increased efficiency in issue resolution.)

Note that the estimates of off-shore development costs being reduced by a factor of four, or off-shore development cycle times being reduced by at least 50% could be interpreted as **300% or 100% increases** in overall efficiency, respectively.

³⁰ If there are half or one third as many meetings and 3/5 as many people are involved, there are $3/10=0.3$ or $3/15=0.2$ times as many people-meetings, a 70% or 80% reduction.

Overall efficiency improved: inferred from issue resolution acceleration

In principle, one could deduce an increase in overall efficiency by knowing how much faster issues are resolved and what percentage of time is spent resolving issues.

- An interviewee who estimated a 50-70% reduction in time to resolve issues estimated 60% of their day is “spent on communication and working through issues.” Putting these two pieces of information together, one can infer a **60-140% increase in overall efficiency.**³¹

Other interviewees reported speed-ups in issue resolution, but did not estimate what fraction of the time they spent resolving issues.

Table 2 shows how the computed increase in overall efficiency varies depending on the estimated reduction in time for the resolution of issues and the amount of time spent resolving issues.³² A 25% reduction approximates the smallest reduction estimated by any interviewee.³³ Some interviewees implied effective time reductions even greater than 75%, when they talked about fewer people being needed to resolve an issue or issues being resolved that wouldn’t have been resolved at all previously.

Although it is not known what percentage of the time was typically spent resolving issues (or being delayed or performing unnecessary work as a result of issues being unresolved), Table 2 indicates that if any substantial portion of the time is spent in this way, one can infer substantial increases in overall efficiency.

Table 2. Increase in overall efficiency based on reduction in issue resolution time

RESOLVING ISSUES	Time Reduction (%)			
	25	50	67	75
% Time	% Increase in Overall Efficiency			
5	1.7	5	10	15
10	3.3	10	20	30
20	7	20	40	60
40	13	40	80	120
60	20	60	120	180
80	27	80	160	240
100	33	100	200	300

Most interviewees reported issue resolution time reduction of at least 50 percent, and it seems likely the many executives might spend from 10-80 percent of their time communicating and resolving issues—so the portion of the table

³¹ Overall efficiency is computed using the formulas derived in Appendix A.1.

³² This table was also computed using the formulas derived in Appendix A.1.

³³ One interviewee estimated a 30-40% improvement in issue resolution efficiency, which may be computed to correspond to a 23-29% reduction in resolution time.

corresponding to these values has been highlighted (in green) as an area where we might speculate that a “typical” experience might be found.

Limitations to the model offered by Table 2 include:

- Table 2 assumes a binary speed-up model, in which activities are sped up either not at all, or by a fixed amount. In reality, the amount of speed-up undoubtedly varies with different circumstances. A more realistic calculation of overall increase in efficiency would involve computing a weighted average by integrating [percent increases in efficiency] times [the probability that that increase in efficiency is being experienced at any given time].
- Table 2 reflects only increases in efficiency associated with faster issue resolution. It does not take into account gains associated with things like “feeling better” or “putting in more effort” and fewer people needed to resolve issues which had been mentioned as contributing to increased productivity.

Investment Payback Period

Insofar as CC training increases overall efficiency, this efficiency boost offers a mechanism for CC to explicitly pay back the costs (monetary outlays plus staff time costs) invested in training. In Appendix A, based on the outlays associated with the particular training being reported on, we compute that the investment payback period in months, P , is

$$P = 101/Z$$

where Z is the percent increase in overall efficiency as a result of CC training. Based on the percent increase in overall efficiency displayed in Table 2 we can construct Table 3, a table of investment payback periods as a function of issue resolution time reduction and percent time spent resolving issues.

Table 3. Investment payback period based on reduction in issue resolution time

RESOLVING ISSUES	Time Reduction (%)			
	25	50	67	75
% Time	Months to Pay Back Investment			
5	61	20	10	6.7
10	30	10	5.1	3.4
20	15	5.1	2.5	1.7
40	7.5	2.5	1.3	0.8
60	5.0	1.7	0.8	0.6
80	3.8	1.3	0.6	0.4
100	3.0	1.0	0.5	0.3

Based on this table, if one experiences the speedups reported by most interviewees and if these speedups apply to a significant fraction of staff time, then the investment would have been **paid back in less than a year**, potentially much less.

This is subject to the same limitations as Table 2, in that a binary speed-up is assumed (either zero, or the indicated speed-up), and factors other than faster issue resolution that increase productivity are not taken into account.

For the interviewee who reported only modest gains in issue resolution speed and estimated a 15 percent boost in overall personal productivity, this efficiency increase would correspond to a **6.7 month** payback period.

For the interviewee who estimated a 50-70% reduction in time to resolve issues and 60% of their day is spent on this sort of activity, the computed efficiency increase would correspond to a **0.7 to 1.7 month** payback period.

Also not taken into account in Table 2 or in the calculations based on individual efficiency:

- Those who were trained but not interviewed (about half of those trained) might have had a different experience, with possibly smaller boosts in efficiency, resulting in a **longer payback period**. In the extreme case, in which those not interviewed experienced no benefit from CC training, the overall payback period would be about double what was computed by considering only the speed-ups reported by those who were interviewed. Under many scenarios, the payback period could still be less than a year.
- Staff not trained may have had their efficiency boosted to some degree. This would be expected to apply to those who were involved in resolving issues with those who were trained, or who would be impacted by delays in those issues being resolved. This effect might be expected to multiply the benefit, resulting in a **shorter payback period**.
- Payback period estimates do not reflect improvements in the quality of outcomes, staff well-being, or less quantifiable benefits which might be regarded as significant. Taking these into account might result in a **shorter payback period**.

The estimates regarding off-shore development costs being reduced by a factor of four, or development cycle times being halved, suggest 75% or 50% reductions in overall time spent as a team, nominally corresponding to investment payback periods of **0.3 or 1.0 month**. However, in this case it is clear that (1) not everyone trained was involved in this work and (2) off-shore team members not trained were also made more productive. These factors would need to be taken into account to derive a true payback period.

It is possible that the off-shore development context may have been particularly ripe for improvement, insofar as the challenges of communicating across the globe and across cultures tend to create extra inefficiencies, which the use of CC may have been able to address.

The estimates about overall performance of the off-shore development effort, particularly the four-fold cost reduction estimate, are likely to reflect a more holistic view of the impact of CC than is captured by considering only speed-ups in issue resolution. It seems plausible that CC is leading to **not only faster decisions, but better decisions**, so that decisions strategically impact overall performance in significant ways. This is consistent with what interviewees said about both software defect reduction and overall cost improvements.

One may wonder how long benefits might be expected to continue. The boost in productivity would appear to be a function of skills learned by individuals, synergies that occur when team members have been bonded by the training and have a shared understanding of the skills, and a managerial environment that supports the use of the skills. Whether individual skills deepen or degrade with time will likely depend both on individual's commitment to ongoing use of the skills and the continuation of an environment where peers and management support the use of these skills. Provided the later are present (which would involve buy-in by leadership, and training of new staff brought on board), **one might expect the increased productivity and associated returns on investment to be ongoing.**

Qualitative Benefits

The interviews surfaced numerous benefits the interviewees were experiencing for themselves and for their teams. In what follows, we summarize primary themes that we heard, regarding benefits.

To provide some structure to our enumeration of benefits, we group the benefits according to whether we perceived them as being most closely related to the Task, Relationship, or Personal dimension. How one classifies a particular finding is highly dependent on what focuses on as one reads what is being reported. So, the classification is subjective, and not to be taken as the only valid classification. Each benefit to a significant extent relates to all three dimensions.

Task Dimension

Decisions stick

Many interviewees reported that in the past it was common for decisions to be revisited again and again. This seemed to be associated with:

- *Lack of safety and openness*: people didn't feel safe to say that they didn't agree with a decision, so nominally agreed, then did something else or expressed their misgivings later. (Some interviewees labeled this as "passive-aggressive.")

- *Lack of inclusion:* stakeholders weren't involved or weren't directly informed in a timely fashion;
- *Lack of clarity:* people came away from meetings with different understandings of what was said and what was agreed;

CC reportedly helped change each of these problem patterns, creating more safety/trust, openness, inclusion and clarity.

Some comments about behavior associated with a lack of safety/openness:

- "I think that there are a lot of challenges at work, and most of them are people challenges. These are all very smart people, they can solve a problem, but I think it's the ability to work together that causes most of the challenge, to be honest. You know, being able to have an open dialogue. I think going back and giving people the tools around how to express themselves to your face, versus indirectly you get out of a passive-aggressive pattern. You'll hear, 'We were in that meeting and everyone seemed to agree,' and then two weeks later somebody will say, 'Oh, well that person wrote back to so-and-so and they think that this is completely redundant.' And you're like; 'Wait a minute, we just had that meeting and we thought we were all in agreement and that we would be connected, and now they're saying that it's redundant? Well, why didn't they voice that in the meeting?' That happens all the time. It's amazing how often that happens."
- "You talk to people a couple years ago, they always said Merck was a nice culture. They want to please; they want to make sure.... But when you walk out of the room, people express, 'I'm not going to do that; I'm going to do something different.' So I think people are coming to the table, having that shared reality to be able to express truly how they feel, feel comfortable expressing that, and that we're not having to re-address things multiple times. And that's where I think we get the productivity gain."

With regard to problems with inclusion and clarity:

- Churning was said to happen when "in a complex environment you make some decisions on behalf of somebody else because you have to move forward" and, while the norm is to inform people, sometimes not everyone gets informed and someone ends up saying, "I was not aware. This is not what I meant" and there is pushback to change the decision, but if you try to change it then "people will try to push back with, 'Hey, I don't agree'" and then "you have to then again reprocess it" and then you're told you've got to talk to someone else, and so on.

With CC, the churn has been greatly reduced, because "the stakeholders were involved," there is trust, "there was so much clarity among the people at the meeting" and "everybody's on the same page." "We didn't see anybody come

back and say, 'Hey this didn't happen,' or, 'I was not informed.'"

"The communications was more collaborative in nature, making sure that we took an extra care, to make sure that everyone that needs to be informed is informed. There are no fall-outs. They are not trying to hide anything."

Alignment

CC was said to support getting people aligned with one another in support of shared goals, so that their activities synergize rather than interfere.

- "I think it just helped in getting people aligned to the goals. I think it does wonders for alignment.

"It's getting all the wood behind the arrow. That's my favorite saying. You can get into a room and have a meeting, and the only conclusion is another meeting, and when you're leaving the meeting, you know that he heard something else, and she heard something else, and all the wood's not behind the arrow. If you want win-win, you can't splinter."

Key information gets surfaced

We heard stories about how CC helped interviewees surface information that transformed their understanding of what was going on and created opportunities to move beyond impasse.

- "We had a recent one where we were walking through a product and a peer was challenging the usability; from his point of view it was terrible. By slowing it down we actually found out that he was using a different browser that wasn't approved and there was nothing wrong with the usability. And yet I think if I'd challenged him, that would have never come out, but instead I started to probe and ask questions and try to understand. And it kind of redirects the energy."
- "There was the time when it could have gone two ways because I was already stressed; I could have said, 'What do you mean you don't have time? It's your job!' But I asked him, 'What do you need to prepare for a meeting like that? Can you tell me?' And then he said, 'Oh! I have to go through all those numbers, find where all the differences are. I have to go line by line. I need to process that data before I can go talk to them.' It was great I asked that question because then I said, 'I have already done that. I have everything. I can give it to you. All you need to do is take that information and describe it.' He said, 'Oh, I didn't know that you'd already done it.' If the right question is not asked and the conversation takes a different route, it's so difficult to bring it back.
- "There were needs that came up about resources. The other group was resource constrained and was concerned about moving in a direction where they were resource constrained. So we were able to say, 'Well, what if we

helped provide some additional resources to get there? What if we partnered with you? This wasn't one of your major priorities. If we helped out with some resources, would we get there?' That was an example that had never really come up. Earlier, it had always come up as, 'It's not our priority.' The question was why wasn't it your priority? Once we found out there was a resource constraint we were able to get to a better place because of that clarity."

Conversations stay on track

CC was reported as helping to hear what the speaker meant to say without going off track.

- "One is what happens basically almost every day now, where I'm just saying, 'I just want to make sure I understand what you were saying.' And what I'm finding is that oftentimes the sender didn't really want to impact me the way that I've received it. And I've found that that really is one of the keys to this thing working is that we slow everybody down and make sure that we're giving this conversation the respect it deserves."

More efficient communication

Although many interviewees talked about "slowing down" as a key to success, they also reported that using CC yields better results quicker, and that with practice conversations themselves get quicker.

- "It really gets you to finding mutual solutions quicker."
- "And it seems like the conversations actually over time get quicker. I think that's the hidden sauce here—the golden nugget. Everybody will say, 'It takes so long to do it the right way,' but if you stick with it, and especially if you have people that have read the same playbook, it actually makes you more efficient in your communication. That's not easy to see in the beginning."

Relationship Dimension

People feel heard

CC was reported to help people feel heard, in a way that often changed the conversation. The primary tool supporting this was that of reflecting back to people the essential meaning of what one heard them say.³⁴

- "For people to know they're being heard, I think is important."
- "Recently we were learning how to use reflection, and we were asked to go home and use it. A participant came back and shared a story with us. She

³⁴ The "empathic reflections" encouraged by CC incorporate features that can make this practice more impactful than the "active listening" taught in some other communication models.

said she was having an argument with her husband, and she used reflection, and he broke down and started crying and said, 'This is the first time in our relationship that I feel like you actually heard me.'"

- "I find most of the situations I get in where there's conflict, the other person doesn't feel like they've been heard. I find that I'm the one talking and I'm probably, probably not being effective. Most of the situations where I've got into conflict in a conversation, once I take the time to do reflection, the dynamics of the conversation change."

Tension gets defused

Interviewees reported that CC offered the means to defuse tension in meetings and make rapid progress.

- "There was a big contentious moment in one of the meetings and Tim was kind of the lead. He kind of orchestrates a lot of the work that goes on. And there were a couple of issues, one that I was having actually, about a requirement that wasn't being met correctly. Tim very adeptly controlled the conversation. Got everyone to give him the floor and then reflected back to me what I said, and took a guess at what the need was and he was right, and he took it all the way through the model and he did it very elegantly. It wasn't awkward, it was just flawless execution and I've seen him do it subsequently as well. But, 'Wow! He's got this thing down, and it worked!' It took the energy level out of the conversation immediately. And it brought clarity to the situation and it brought a resolution."
- "You make progress, especially in situations that have been intense. There was a stalemate that was two weeks running on a project that really didn't have two weeks to spare. And so I finally punted, I said, 'Okay Yessenia, I need your help.' And she came in and it took three minutes.

"It moves things forward. You come into one of those disagreements where people they're just talking at each other. They're saying what they're not happy with. They're making judgments left and right. But if you get in and you start actually getting it down to the bare essentials of 'what do you need, what do you need.' Can it be there's something you're both going after here but you're both looking at it very differently? Once you get that smoothed out, you can potentially put them all on a path to resolution, and ultimately, to actually doing what it is that needs to get done."

Confidence and skills to address conflict

Interviewees report CC has given them the confidence and skills to address conflict and work things out.

- "During the conversations you had a confidence that we'll be able to work this out because the tools exist."

- "It's given me some tools to deal with triggering situations. An argument at home that might turn into one of those back and forth shooting verbal daggers at each other, just arguing over something. And really taking the time to just stop, take inventory of what's going on and really get down to understanding why people are frustrated and what's going on for them. What are they not getting? It's given me the strength to deal with those situations that would otherwise spiral out of control. I'm no saint, right. Sometimes the triggers are just too hot and it just escalates. But other times I do take a step back, and forcing myself to have the patience and measured reaction almost builds some resiliency back, during that situation and maybe for the next couple ones. Because I realize that there is another path than just yelling back. I think that helps."
- "I've found myself much more willing to break open a difficult relationship, sort of lean into the conflict a little bit more than I usually would have—either skirting around it, trying to talk about the tactical piece, and not talk about the elephant in the room. But now I'm much more willing to just crack it open and figure it out so you can actually get the real stuff done. And do it that much better. That's worked for me, that's given me, you know, it's just a change in perspective I have. I find myself more inclined to just go, you know, go open that up, It might look horrible right now, but just go through it.'

Trust

Trust was frequently mentioned as something that CC contributed to building, in a variety of ways.

- "I would say that it's a way to start to look at situations without judgment, and it provides you the ability to have doable or actionable requests. It provides the ability to have a shared understanding and develop mutual trust."
- One factor said to contribute to trust was "open and transparent dialog—transparent in that you're not worried about levels, or you're not scared about the what the rest of management is thinking about the outcome."

Training together contributed to trust:

- "One of the experiences we have is allowing more trust, we've got teams that work together, and we don't always agree with each other. But I think during the time of our training when we were working very closely, we were breaking down a lot of those gaps, which are very unproductive."

Offering a sense of genuine caring was cited as a factor in creating trust:

- "People come to me if they want to talk, and one of the things that has helped me through this process is reaching out to them. Create that door of saying, 'I know this must be difficult for you, and I know this is a hard circumstance.'

How are you doing?" and reaching out to them first. That creates that sense of we care about you. And they'll come back the next time when they maybe don't feel so comfortable, and we can address it earlier in the process than maybe them trying to just deal with it themselves."

An example of the type of trust created:

- "One of my really talented individuals on my team decided to take another job out side the company. He quit Merck. It was a terrible time. I depended on him for a lot of things and he decided to leave. And what, to me, was really rewarding was that he came to me before he made the decision and he said, 'You know, I probably shouldn't do this, but I'm coming to you in two capacities; I'm coming to you as my boss, to let you know that this is coming' (which he really didn't need to do) and he's coming to me as a friend to get some guidance about whether or not it's the right decision. So, I took that really positively, because he trusted me."

Support when things get tough

One interviewee talked about CC making a difference when layoffs were occurring:

- "What was helpful is, as we had to eliminate certain positions and people were leaving the company, recognizing that it was not only difficult for the people leaving the company, but it was difficult for the colleagues that knew and worked with them every single day—understanding their needs, too, through some of this. That was very impactful, and I think having some of this training to be able to work with those folks as well as the people leaving the company, I think, was critical. It provided more support to people. We wanted to handle each person with care."

Support for dealing with diversity and multiple cultures

At least three interviewees said they saw CC helping work with diversity and with people from different cultures.

- "I think it actually helps bring together people of different cultures, different ideologies, different thinking. I think investing the time and the money and the effort to bring these skills to bear on your population better equips people that have different ways of dealing with problems, different ways of making decisions, different events in their lives that are driving certain behaviors. It gives you an awareness of the community that you are working in and with that you didn't have prior."

Personal Dimension

Ease in self-expression

Interviewees talked about how CC made it easier to express themselves.

- "For me actually, trusting that if I use Collaborative Communication, no matter how difficult the conversation is, I can get my needs out on the table and I'm going to be able to get some sort of an outcome will be positive. And, I'm much more willing to have conversations that maybe I wouldn't have had

in the past, with upper level executives about things. Because I feel like I'm equipped with tools now, to put difficult things out there in a way that I can be heard, that won't be perceived as negative, but rather wanting information."

- "Especially in situations that have been tense at times, we are able to come back to using those basic skill sets and get that clarity in a more streamlined fashion. We might say 'I don't necessarily agree with it because maybe I don't understand it. Help me understand what's happening.' It makes the workplace more productive with more connection. People are having respect for other people's opinions, and it's okay to express your opinion and feel comfortable along the way."
- "I have actually seen some of my direct reports that have gone through the training feel comfortable coming back and expressing where they have some concerns. Where they might have historically just said, 'Okay, I'll get through it, I'll figure it out,' they actually feel very comfortable saying, 'You know, I'm not comfortable. I have some anxiety.' What's nice about that is we open the door to have the conversation."

Some expressed that CC's encouragement to create space for feelings to be expressed contributed to people's ability to express themselves:

- "If you think about feelings, I mean, the words that we use for feelings can get touchy-feely, but they're really just expressing what we've kind of kept inside. I think it's been helpful to kind of get it out there."

Flexibility

CC was reported to support flexibility:

- "I find a lot of times that the value of NVC for me isn't necessarily that it changes the person that I'm in conflict with, but it actually causes me to actually slow down a little bit and look at the situation a little bit more closely and then be open to alternate approaches."

Safety to take risks

An interviewee spoke about the role of trust in empowering people to take risks.

- "That they are empowered is because we can be more productive overall because they're starting to make decisions, feel comfortable with their decisions.

"I was thinking about this the other day as related to a soccer analogy. My son plays soccer. He's on defense. He's very good at positioning and strategically looking at what's happening with the play. But his new coach has asked him to be more aggressive – you know, attacking the ball. And reaching out with his old coach, we were talking about it, and he said, 'You

know, one of the things that happened is that your son had a trust in me as a coach that he could take the risk, go after the ball, and know if he didn't make it, it was okay, and that next time, he'll recover and do what's right.' He said, 'He's feeling a hesitation with this new coach. He doesn't have that sense of trust. He doesn't want to jump out and take that risk.'

"And that's the same thing when we look at the collaborative skills is recognizing to our staffs that, 'Take that risk, and it's okay if you don't succeed because you took a risk. We understood that that was a risk you were going to take, and that's fine because then the next time you take that risk, it's going to work. Maybe that first time you might fumble.' I think that was critical to realize that it's okay to take a little bit out of your comfort zone and take a risk with certain things you're doing."

In regard to how CC supports trust and safety to take risks:

- "It's the openness. To be honest from my perspective, too, knowing that they're going to come to me when they're uncomfortable, they're going to come to me when they're excited. But they feel that empowerment to move forward and that it doesn't have to be they have to run everything as a leader through me – that they can go ahead and do that, and it's okay. They're trusting me because they know I support them in some of the decisions that they make. I think it's bi-directional trust, and that connection, that relationship. And I think [CC] helping to express our feelings fosters that stronger trust."

Motivation and trust via appreciation

Offering appreciation and celebrating successes is encouraged by CC. Some interviewees reported that a training exercise demonstrating the effect of this made a strong impression.

- "It really came across as, 'Elliot, tell me about the things that really make you happy to know Janice. Let Janice hear those things.' People were like, 'Wow! I didn't know you felt that way.' It couldn't be contrived; I mean, you know, you've got four other people or three other people listening to what you're saying, and they're going to know. So it was all honest. It's amazing; if people know that, that that's how you think about them, what that does for the workplace, the work environment. It makes it a great place to come. You jump out of bed; you can't wait to get there."

Outside the training, appreciation was reported to promote happiness, motivation, and make it easier to share when there is a problem.

- "He received a really awesome note on a very senior level, and he passed it down to the whole team, too, so they can really feel like, 'Wow! That's nice!' And they feel like they made a difference. I think it made them happy. It drives that continued dedication on an intense project. The team works 24 by 7—not one individual works 24 by 7, but the team does. [The appreciation] keeps people going, it keeps people connected, it keeps people motivated,

and it builds that transparency and trust they're able to actually bring problems forward as opposed to struggling with it so long that you can't fix it. And that's an important thing."

Improved work-life balance

One interviewee spoke of how CC led to more satisfying time management:

- "Every quarter, we used to at least work four weekends on an average. In the past one year, we have not worked a single weekend."

Engagement

Several interviewees said that CC helped with engagement—and that having higher-ups also using CC makes a big difference in this.

- "It certainly helps with engagement. I think that employees feel more connected and engaged with that [type of] dialogue. I think that's a big thing around here. People don't feel engaged, or people are concerned. I think it's more effective top down. So, if the same kind of dialogue and interaction is going on with the senior people in the company, then I think that kind of trickles down [with] a feeling of engagement."
- "But yeah! If we see that behavior starting from above, then I think people feel more engaged when it is happening there and you see it and it's demonstrated. I could have an interaction with a subordinate of mine, but I don't think it's as effective as if it was coming from two levels above."

Regarding the impact of including feelings in conversation:

- "People aren't usually expressing themselves in that way in the work place, and this adds a certain level of engagement, a sharing component, collaboration that doesn't normally exist."

Connection to others was said to support engagement:

- "Maybe I'm just putting in more effort, because I feel more connected, more devoted to someone. Maybe someone is asking me for something, and I really understand why they need it, so I really *want* to do it for them. Whereas, prior I might not. [Other] people [are] that way too. People are more willing to go the extra mile for somebody."

Enjoyment of work

CC offers tools for letting go of seeing others as enemies, and for seeing their humanity. In addition to creating space for collaboration, one interviewee reported this helping them be excited about work.

- "I think you're relieved about human nature. I think we talked about it in the training that rather than those people are evil, it's those people are humans trying to serve the same type of needs as you are as a human. You know people aren't evil. You feel better about the outcome and feel better about

humanity, and it's a lot easier to get excited about your work when you realize you're all pulling in different ways for the common good."

One interviewee reported that the meaning of work has shifted.

- "You think about work in a different way. Previously, it's just a job. Now it's not just a job; it's about enjoying what you're doing. It's like, why are you doing things? Is it just for money? No, it's not anymore. It's more of a satisfaction. And you start appreciating other people; other people start appreciating you."

Perspectives Offered

What others notice

Interviewees reported having others notice the effects of their use of CC.

- "There's some people in a group that we talk to on a regular basis in our organization, and they would notice, you know, 'Well, you're kind of talking a little differently. You're behaving a little differently. Could you give me a little insight into it? Why? What's going on?' And they would kind of try to dig out a little bit more of how could it help them, too. And you get feedback in meetings, too, like, 'Geez, I really like the way you handled that situation. You really broke it down.' You can resolve conflict easier, maybe; that was something that happened. Or you're really able to help focus on the needs you're both driving for as opposed to just going round and round."
- "[My colleague] goes, 'I used to really enjoy watching you. You were really entertaining,' he said. "But now, I actually enjoy working with you!"
- "I've had people approach me and go, 'What was that?' which is really kind of fun because I can tell them about it. Nine times out of ten, they don't believe me; they think I'm full of it. You know, 'That's not how you did that!' 'It is. That's what I did.' It's magic!"

Organizations that need Collaborative Communication

- "If the project is working on very short time-to-market kind of parameters, the organization cannot afford to lose time on solving situations that could have been dealt with through Collaborative Communication."

Some indicators that CC would be helpful:

- "A diverse work force."
- "A tendency to be passive-aggressive."
- "A global company with multiple cultures."
- "Anyone going through major change."
- "Transformation."

Experience of Collaborative Communication

- “Absolutely impactful, absolutely something that’s been value added.”
- “I really value the understanding of others that it brings to me.”
- “It’s basically building people, building relationship, building an employee base who works based on trust and collaboration, and reducing the conflict within the organization, because conflict is not going to give you a solution for anything.”
- “You feel empowered knowing that you know more than somebody else would have known. It gives you, at least, an ability to relate why something has happened, influence it sometimes, so that gives you happiness. More than happiness, I would say that this whole model puts you more at ease.”
- “When you think that people care about you, you care about others. As a team, we need to get some things done, and everyone is willing to get that done.”
- “It’s just much easier to do things in a collaborative manner than it is to always be suspicious that people are doing things underhandedly, or that there are other agendas, or that they don’t trust you. Having the conversations is difficult sometimes, but, you know, there’s a light at the tunnel. The behaviors change, the atmosphere changes, it’s just a different environment, it’s a nicer place to be.”

Experience of the training

- “We’re not doing some theoretical training off by itself. We’re actually bringing real problems to the training. So it’s actually productive in that it actually helps us to resolve some of the issues.”
- “This isn’t just one of those training classes where you learn something and then you can just say you learned it then you never really practiced it. This is something you have the opportunity to practice all the time.”
- “I think I’ve been through training like seven times now—the base training, you know? [The trainer] keeps saying, ‘Are you bored with this? And I keep saying, ‘No.’ You go back to the basic technique, and you watch somebody break it down to try to teach somebody who’s never done it before, and you go, ‘Whoa! I never saw that before! That’s amazing.’”

Expanding use by Merck

- “Wouldn’t that be incredible if every single new employee was giving NVC training? If that was a part of your onboarding at Merck? And the beautiful thing about it is, you’re not just benefiting the corporation—you’re benefiting the people and their families too and the people around them.”
- “Well I think obviously the benefit would be for our partners. It would help bridge the gap when negotiating with our partners. I would like our competitors, however, to avoid it!”
- “I really think that if you could get in at the executive level, there’s some real fruits to be had. Boy! If you could ever get them to sit down and go through this, I think that would really have a major impact. And I think it would trickle down. I’d like to say that a groundswell could happen—that all of us mid-level managers or slightly-higher-than-that guys can get it going—but I’m finding that it’s only going to happen where you’ve actually embraced it as an organization.

“So, if you could get it up at the executive level where they touch all the organizations, and they realize that this is going to impact engagement scores, things like that—I think the fruits would be unbelievable. Unbelievable!”

What others should know

We asked interviewees what those considering training their organizations in CC might want to know about it.

- “Less conflict, more collaboration, less frustration, more productive, happier employees.”
- “These are skills that, in the corporate world, if you’re not developing them in your people, you’re not going to be successful. There are other ways of developing these skills—not as comprehensive though. When I worked [elsewhere], we did a lot of work with the Seven Habits, Covey—active listening, right? That was only one aspect of it. And so for me, I don’t know how you could be effective as a corporation if you don’t develop these kind of skills with people. You’re basically selling your shareholders, and then your company, short if you’re not developing these sorts of skills in your executives, in your employees. We talk a lot about soft skills and how important they are. This is one of the only tools—I don’t even know if I could call it a tool—that actually gives you a way to develop it. There’s a path to develop these skills in a way that we can use them and feel effective.”
- “I draw a parallel to Aikido. When you watch Aikido it doesn’t look real. So a lot of people question the effectiveness of the art. If you’re an experienced Aikidoka, you know it works. It’s kind of scary how powerful it is. And I think NVC is similar, it seems so simple. You know, ‘What’s this, how’s that

going to work?' And when you try to explain it to executives, the quality of empathy and how this works, for whatever reason, it's really hard to get executives in the corporation to understand the value. It's almost like they have to experience it before they buy into it. Once they experience it, [it's] incredible."

- "This is a different type of skill, which helps a person, irrespective of technology, irrespective of status, irrespective of which customer you are working for. It's a generic, wide, universal skill. So what ever you have learned is going to stay with you."
- "If there's an organization looking to take a look at this, you're going to have to get over the weird factor, because it's very different to what people do around here. Give it a chance, be open-minded about it, and enjoy it."
- "At the end of the day we are all here to do our job, and we all have to work together to do that job, and we can either make it easy to come to work or we can make it hard to come to work. And I think investing the time and the money and the effort to bring these skills to bear on your population better equips people to have different ways of dealing with problems, different ways of making decisions.

"I've seen the quality of deliverables improve. I've seen the conversations change to be more productive and fruitful. There is a bonding now on that team that doesn't exist on other teams. And that's all good. Would I recommend that people invest the time? Yes, I strongly urge people to do that."

- "It's an ongoing experience. I mean, we can't just be trained once and expect that we're going to understand and be able to make it a part of what we do.

"From an executive-level perspective, the investment is worth it. So yes, there's some time, and over time, they're going to be pulling away folks from their normal course of business. But overall, it's going to make them more productive. You're cutting time which might have been elapsed time and frustration time and not making people productive. They want to be able to enjoy what they do when they come to work. This will really help, help with that, and help build relationships. It really builds a foundational component that is worth the investment."

- "The results seem to come really quickly. I mean, you don't have to put a team through nine months of NVC training to get value. We literally saw the value with the development team and our team within days."

- “I was thinking about Collaborative Communication, and it’s almost like every time you try, you really never fail. It’s almost if you don’t try it, you’re failing.”
- “When someone speaks about an issue, the team hears it. There’s no need to even distribute or talk about it. It starts getting done the minute the point is out. It just works like a well-oiled machine. And stakeholders feel it.”

Impact of Training Elements

Interviewees noted certain elements of the training program as having had a significant impact for them.

Real-plays

There were at least six comments about the power of “real-plays” (sometimes referred to as role-plays) where actual problems and conflicts were worked out in the training with coaches. These were said to have produced the biggest shifts and greatest breakthroughs in the training. They brought out the “big moose on the table” (previously unacknowledged big issues), and offered support in understanding underlying needs of people in different areas of the organization—understandings that helped make for better interactions going forward.

- “A big win is this idea of real-plays—that while you’re in the training, if you put the right people in the training together, you can actually work on conflicts and resolve problems as a part of the training.”
- “When we first started Collaborative Communication, there was a lot of tension among the three or four groups, and what was really valuable, what stood out were some breakthrough moments during the training... during our role plays...

“There were a couple of people who, once they got into the interaction, were trying to use the tools and addressing some of the challenges we face. So I think that was probably the biggest shift. Otherwise, intellectually you could hear it, you could look at the materials that were handed out—you *could* treat it as another training opportunity with ideas that you might think are similar to active listening and other types of training people have had through their corporate history.

“I think the way I would remember it was just people happy saying, ‘Wow, this is great,’ after what we *saw* which was people challenging each other within the constructs of the tool—like actually saying things to each other that we wish had been brought out in the open and just never would have been... So that was the breakthrough, you know... finally getting at *what do you care about? what’s driving you?* and releasing some of that tension. And people who would have just gone like this [gesture] found they enjoyed their conversation together and could come closer together.”

Coaching

Comments about the coaching element of the training were highly positive. Various participants said that coaching was invaluable; it made the training real, kept them fresh and sustained them over time. It was also said that coaching had a lasting effect; helping them think in a different way, understand their own and others needs, work through conflict, and receive support with goals. Two participants expressed a desire for the coaching when they needed it instead of at fixed times.

- “For me personally, it was the coaching that sustained me, to take the small steps to leverage the foundational work. Because without it I don’t think I would know how to navigate through.”
- “The biggest thing, from my perspective, that I got from my coach was really a sounding board, and someone who does a lot of reflection back to me and makes me think, ‘Well, did I really say that? Is that really what I meant?’ and a lot of role-play, because I’m in a lot of situations where there is a lot of conflict or challenges, and I need to be prepared for what’s going to be coming my way.”

Practice

Practice was a major theme in the comments about what made the training successful. Lab exercises were cited as a vehicle for learning to slow conversations down and building reflection skills. Several participants used the concept of building muscle memory in developing collaborative communication tools, such as reflection, empathy, self-empathy, and appreciation. Just as with learning to drive a car or to do Aikido, practice is exhausting at first. Progress, however, comes in leaps and jumps and eventually it becomes second nature. Sometimes even seeing and recovering from “mistakes” is an important part of practice.

- “If you learn how to drive to drive a car in a standard, you’ve got the clutch, you got the accelerator, the brake, you’re steering, the car’s going all over the place. You know, whoever’s teaching you how to drive is sitting in the passenger seat half dying. And then when you get the muscle memory, so you don’t have to think about shifting anymore, you don’t have to think about steering, the car goes where you want it to go. All of a sudden it becomes much easier. I think NVC’s the same way. There’s a whole bunch of skills and these skills have to be developed. And if you can’t do them, then you can’t put them together to use them. And it takes—you actually have to rewire your brain to actually do those things.”
- “Using the tools, practicing them was good. I believe that there are a lot of capable people who took the training who believed they could do things relatively easily, and then—when you actually practice it during the training—I think you suddenly realize [laugh] with other people watching you, it’s not quite working as well as you imagined it! So, another good thing about the training is the tools were effective, but also the need to practice,

and if you fail at it, or if something doesn't quite go the way you thought, that's okay. That's expected, you know. You don't do it right the first time."

Exercises

Interviewees reported some of the training exercises as memorably helping them to really "get" key ideas.

- "It was that one exercise where we made somebody leave the room. He would come in, and he would have to follow the instructions: And we would say, 'Don't sit down. Don't smile. Don't do this, don't do that,' instead of telling the person exactly what you want to do, and it was an unbelievable eye-opener for me. And I noticed in coaching basketball how many times I would say, 'You're not running back on defense. Don't take that shot,' instead of, 'Hey, let's hustle back on defense. Let's look for a better shot after a couple passes,' or something like that. Just the positive spin, really, you can tell that the kids are a little perkier when they receive the instruction."
- "Words really have power! You could [see], when you start saying a couple of choice words to people, their reaction. You just see that they blush, they smile, their dimples come out. It's amazing. If people know that, that that's how you think about them—what that does for the work environment. It's what words can do to people, negatively or positively. I think that was probably the most eye-opening session for me."

Trainer modeling and humanity

Trainer modeling of how to do things, how the skills looked like when they're integrated into one's way of doing things, was helpful—and it was also helpful when trainers ran into challenges.

- "I remember once a trainer was really upset because a role play that she modeled didn't go well, and the feedback I gave her was, "No! You humanize this stuff. When we watch somebody who's as experienced as you, struggle with this, but actually work their way through things, it gives us hope that we can do it." So I found that in the training, some of the most valuable moments were actually when things didn't go well—when you actually could see how somebody works their way through a situation that didn't go well."

Shared experience

There was broad agreement among those interviewed that having the teams come together in a shared experience was one of the most powerful aspects of the training. Comments reflected that taking the training together built understanding, appreciation, and negotiating skills among disparate groups and individuals. This, in turn, increased effectiveness and productivity among the teams involved and greater enjoyment of work. The shared experience increased the impact of the training by building relationships, having collaborative communication tools held in

common, peer pressure, role-modeled behavior, and a safe way to address long-standing conflicts.

- “It’s probably the best team-building exercise I’ve ever taken anybody through. Just through the way you do the training, you end up becoming vulnerable, exposing yourself in a way that doesn’t happen through other sorts of team-building exercises, and it actually creates a sense of team so that people have a shared experience that can help them as a group work together better.”
- “[In my] first training, I didn’t think that the population was quite right. We didn’t have enough players from all sides of the issues that we were facing at a time. The group that was selected for the second time around—it was perfect. Through the training, you really get to know those people. So, I’d love to see other groups around here do that. So we can all be conversing about the same drivers, as to why we’re actually saying no to certain things. I thought the second training was an order of magnitude more effective than the first one.”
- “There’s something about unplugging from work, sharing personal stories, and learning new skills that really did make a fundamental change in how we operate. I think it has rewired some of us... [from] a lot of ‘us versus them,’ and now it’s certainly a lot more cohesive project team.”

Higher-up presence

Four of the interviewees spoke of value of having the leadership presence. The leadership presence demonstrated that the training was important, gave others an opportunity to hear them speak freely, and built a better sense of working with them as a team.

- “I thought that also made a difference when your leadership is there, commits to being there. That’s important because if it’s important for him to be there, and he’s there, that’s why you’re there. That made probably the biggest personal impact in the end.”
- “We are working much better as a team rather than based on the hierarchy.”

Sticky phrases from the training

There were certain phrases in the training that people say have stuck with them and helped them deal with things that came up subsequently. These “sticky” phrases included:

- “*Imagine you were a video camera*” to distinguish judgments and assumptions from objective observations;
- “*Assume positive intent*” to get past enemy images;

- *“Scary honesty”* supporting willingness to speak up, or remember the positive effects of saying “no”;
- *“There’s more than one way to meet a need”* reminding participants of other possibilities;
- *“Prioritize connection”* instead of seeking immediate, and potentially less satisfying, solutions;
- *“You are always at choice”* as a reminder of how one’s choices can make a difference.

Empathy buddies

Experiences with empathy buddies varied. Several people described how empathy buddies provided a safe context to move through frustrating situations and how getting to know their buddies better improved work relations. Others described trust and availability challenges they had with empathy buddies in contrast to their coaches. One interviewee used empathy buddies, not to work out difficulties, but to share successes and failures and to catch up.

- “It was actually very useful to come in and be able to talk to somebody about, ‘I’m frustrated with a situation, and I want to share it with you without there being any consequences.’”
- “My issue [with an empathy buddy] was sometimes with trust and sometimes availability. I was much more comfortable with my coach than my empathy buddy. When you’re with a coach, you have certain amount of time, so you tend to set up the meetings and plan it better compared to the empathy buddy.”
- “A person from another organization who is my empathy buddy really reached out to me to establish a relationship. I think what that helped us do is when times got tough or when we had confusing information about what direction to go, we had that relationship to rely on.”

Quantitative Assessment

Methodology

Three quantitative instruments were created for this research to provide multiple windows on the impact of the training. Data from these instruments was collected at three points in time: prior to the beginning of the training (PRE-TEST), three months after the beginning of the training (MID-TEST) and a month after the training was completed (POST-TEST). All of these instruments were administered through an online survey website; all data was confidential and the results were available only to the researchers.

Needs Met Instrument

The content of this instrument is shown in Table 4. The specific needs³⁵ that were included were drawn from those frequently mentioned by participants in the pre-training interviews as important to them and their colleagues at work and as key elements of the ethos at Merck.

Table 4. Needs met inventory

NEEDS MET Inventory						
When you think of your work with the One Merck team, how often are the following needs met for you by actions engaged in by you or others on the team?						
	Never or Almost never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Most of The time	Always or Almost always
Openness						
Courage						
Accountability						
Clarity						
Appreciation						
Inclusion						
Learning						
Meaning						
Choice						
Collaboration						
Support						
Vision						

³⁵ Three of the needs listed in the instrument might not be viewed as universal human needs by many CC trainers, specifically courage, accountability, and collaboration. They would probably be viewed as strategies highly valued in Western culture as ways of meeting universal needs, possibly needs of meaning, purpose, effectiveness and/or partnership. However, they were included because our assessment interviews revealed them as values central and highly valued by most persons in the Merck environment.

Behavior Inventory

The content of the BEHAVIOR Inventory is shown in the following table, Table 5. The behaviors that we chose to include in the inventory were chosen to reflect closely to goals of the training program, as described earlier in this report.

Table 5. Behavior inventory

BEHAVIOR INVENTORY		
Using the scale below, indicate in the first column how frequently you demonstrate the following behaviors. In the second column indicate how frequently the One Merck team demonstrates the same behaviors.		
1 = Never or almost never	4 = Often	
2 = Rarely	5 = Most of the time	
3 = Sometimes	6 = Always or almost always	
Address differences of opinion and move a project forward in a way that's mutually satisfying for everyone	Self _____	Team _____
Search for solutions that are satisfying for everyone involved	Self _____	Team _____
Restate or reframe suggestions or ideas when they don't seem to be taken into account.	Self _____	Team _____
Ask clarifying questions if someone makes a statement that seems confusing or off-point	Self _____	Team _____
Address tension when relationships are strained.	Self _____	Team _____
Express dissenting opinions when it might benefit the project.	Self _____	Team _____
Seek strategies for everyone to get the help and support they need, including yourself.	Self _____	Team _____
Offer appreciation that focuses on behavior you want to continue.	Self _____	Team _____
Shares unpleasant news in a way that makes it easy for others to receive it.	Self _____	Team _____
Create opportunities for everyone on the team to receive recognition and appreciation.	Self _____	Team _____
Ask someone to repeat what they heard you say if you're uncertain that they understood you.	Self _____	Team _____
Set objectives with time lines to support improved performance.	Self _____	Team _____
Address unkept agreements.	Self _____	Team _____
Initiate and support steps that foster buy-in and accountability from team members.	Self _____	Team _____
Ask for observable facts when you hear someone generalize or state a judgment.	Self _____	Team _____
Find out what matters to someone who is upset before responding or advising.	Self _____	Team _____
Interrupt others to support clarity and efficiency.	Self _____	Team _____
Give feedback that is free of criticism, judgment or blame.	Self _____	Team _____

Vignette Inventory

The third instrument that was created was a series of vignettes or hypothetical scenarios that could occur at the workplace. These were constructed based upon the results of the pre-training interviews with the executives; the content of the vignettes was drawn from the executives' descriptions of common challenges that they faced with supervisors, peers, direct reports and clients. The potentially challenging interaction was described briefly and the participant was asked to type what they might be likely to say in response. For example, two vignettes were:³⁶

- You manager says, "I know you want me to attend that meeting today but I am on a deadline." What would you say?
- Your direct report says "We just spent 60 minutes on this and the only thing that's come out of this meeting is that we need another meeting." What would you say?

Quantitative Results

Needs Met Inventory

The mean response of the participants to the question asking how often needs are met for them by actions engaged in by themselves or others on their teams is shown in Figure 1.³⁷ For every one of the needs there was a statistically significant increase from *pre-test* to *mid-test* and from *pre-test* to *post-test* in the rating of how often their needs were met. The order in which the needs are listed from left to right on the horizontal axis is from the need which showed the greatest change from *pre-test* to *post-test* to the need which showed the least change from *pre-test* to *post-test*. The change from *mid-test* to *post-test* was significant for all of the needs except *appreciation, meaning, choice* and *inclusion*; for these needs there was no reliable change from *mid-test* to *post-test*.

It appears that the impact of the training on the ratings of needs met was particularly strong during the first three months, the period from *pre-test* to *mid-test*. However, during the second three months of training the impact was maintained and continued to grow on most of the measures.

³⁶ The full set of vignettes is detailed in Appendix D.

³⁷ All findings reported here were statistically reliable at the level of $p < .05$ or lower. Details of all statistical analyses are shown in Appendix B.