

THE TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES TEST
A Belief-changing Tool

TRUTH* OR CONSEQUENCES

* **TRUTH:** Information so deeply BELIEVED that you would act counter to it **ONLY AT GREAT RISK.**

• Rate each of the statements below on the 1-5 scale indicating the degree to which you accept it as a **fundamental truth**.

• For any statement you believe is fundamentally TRUE or fundamentally FALSE, consider the CONSEQUENCES of acting as if it is NOT? **Be sure to list one or two under each statement.**

	1	2	3	4	5
	I DON'T BELIEVE IT.		I BELIEVE IT'S GENERALLY TRUE		I'D ALMOST BET MY LIFE ON IT.
A. The sun is the center of our solar system:	1	2	3	4	5
B. Gravity causes heavy objects to fall towards earth:	1	2	3	4	5
C. Each child has a unique combination of strengths and needs:	1	2	3	4	5
D. A typical "pyramid" organization chart provides an accurate picture of how work actually gets done in most organizations:	1	2	3	4	5
E. Your actions at work are influenced by actions of others in your organization:	1	2	3	4	5
F. Each person you work with has different strengths, limits and experience:	1	2	3	4	5
G. Most people want to feel they are making a difference:	1	2	3	4	5
H. For a parent, <i>their child</i> is the measure of schools' effectiveness:	1	2	3	4	5
I. <i>Teachers</i> can control the effectiveness of their <i>teaching</i> :	1	2	3	4	5

CONSEQUENCES*

*Consequences: ...something following from a set of conditions.

- From your notes on the other side, list the consequences that may follow when people in schools or other organizations act counter to what they fundamentally believe:

- Make another list of the things you feel are “wrong” with schools today. Compare this to your list of consequences of people acting as if their fundamental beliefs were not true.. What do you notice?

ONE FINAL “BELIEF:”

1	2	3	4	5
I DON'T BELIEVE IT.		I BELIEVE IT'S GENERALLY TRUE		I'D ALMOST BET MY LIFE ON IT.

H. Knowing what we now know, we simply can no longer do what we now do:

1	2	3	4	5
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

List CONSEQUENCES of NOT acting on what we now *know* and *believe* about the *true* nature of schools and the people who work in them:

BACKGROUND AND APPLICATION

Originally I created this process as *The Profound Knowledge Test* because in my work with Dr. Deming I found that many people really didn't understand the underlying nature of Deming's concept "Profound Knowledge." When he originally used the term the initial letters were not capitalized. To me he was referring to those deeply held understandings that serve as the lens through which we process experiences and understand them. These were things we seldom thought much about because we just "believed" they were true. Whitehead may have been referring to this when he noted that "civilization advances by extending the number of important operations we can perform *without thinking of them.*"

Correspondingly, in the original *PK* test, I placed an asterisk by the term "Profound Knowledge" and noted that this was defined as "Information so deeply BELIEVED that you would act counter to it ONLY AT GREAT RISK." As you'll note in the present version, that asterisk and definition is applied now to "Truth." In an intermediate version, it was called a "Belief Test."

My primary audiences for this test have been people engaged in the work processes called "schools," but I have also used it with folks who work in other types of organizations. My basic intent has been to help the users surface the most critical of their beliefs that [many times unknowingly] shape the ways they understand what happens in schools.

At times the test has had more than the current seven or so items. I've found however that I don't need lots of examples to create the initial "aha" I seek. To raise the question as to whether -- if we want to improve an organization, -- do we have to first change people's "beliefs," or instead start by providing processes that enable them to act on what they *already* believe?

Here was my reasoning: We've all run into the continuing debate among "change agents" about whether one should try to change beliefs before actions, or vice versa. You can make a case for either approach because it's not an *either-or* situation. They develop interactively from experience, and iteratively feed each other. I chose to bypass the debate altogether by changing the problem.

It seems to me that changed behavior is a lot easier to accept if one already *wants* to do it. If that's true, then the change agent's tasks are different. It now would include -- as prerequisite to any other changes in beliefs or behavior -- provision of *organizational processes* that help people act on what they *already* believe. (Interestingly, Monte Roberts, who has revolutionized the "breaking" of horses by reducing a three-week task to 30 minutes, credits his success to first "finding out what the horse wants to do." He has become known as the "Horse Whisperer," but his book is more appropriately titled -- *The Man Who Listens to Horses.*)

In the next section, I describe how I've been using the "tests" to create that initial recognition that almost every problem schools face today are the *consequence* of not being able to do what we naturally *believe* must be done. Because of the nature of "presentations," I've used this as a stand-alone exercise. While I suppose I should be satisfied just having people come away understanding a problem in a different way, and feel some accomplishment for possibly providing a different theory as to why. Unfortunately, my reference point for "success" is at the *sustainable action* end. My intent is to have

true that they believe IS true [consequences for them and/or their "customers."] The statements are purposefully designed to elicit a grouping of responses at one end or the other. Invariably, most people accept these as fundamental beliefs, or in the case of the statement about organization charts, as a fundamental disbelief.

• The important part of each question, however, is the determination of the consequences of acting as if something is not true that your gut tells you is true -- especially if you do it *every* day. Therefore as they cite them, I list these long-term consequences on a sheet of newsprint. Here's an example of a portion of such a list:

Long-term Consequences of acting as if our core beliefs were not true:

- Children with low self-esteem
- Children without good sense of own strengths and weaknesses
- Drop-outs from a setting that "doesn't care"
- Children seeking a "system" that does acknowledge them-"gangs"

- Lack of motivation
- Demoralized staff
- Mistrust among staff, and between staff and parents
- Work doesn't get done; moves in false directions
- Children and staff learn "how to beat the system"
- Loss of untapped human resources on staff
- Mediocrity
- Problems go unrecognized until its too late
- Frustration
- Destroyed innovation and creativity
- Lack of common purpose
- "Cliques" become only support systems
- Evaluations that blame the people

- After we go through the seven items, we now compare this aggregated list to the previously-developed list of what most people say is wrong with schools or whatever institution we're dealing with. We compare the two lists and raise questions about their similarities, and how much might be due to people not being "free" -- to not have the sustained support to act on their and their organization's intrinsic beliefs and values?

- We also look at the difference between *short-term* consequences of acting counter to your own beliefs, as opposed to *long-term* consequences. This is set up in the first two sample questions. For example, unless one works for NASA there are very few short term consequences of acting as if we didn't believe the sun was at the center of the solar system. In the second question however, both the short and long-term consequences of acting as if "gravity" were not true could put one at risk. We discuss how strategically there may be nothing wrong with taking possibly-negative short-term consequences, IF we know what they are going in, provide compensation for them through other alternatives, and are working on ways to not have to make that choice in the future. We cite examples of how we do this every day as part of living and learning [outside of organizations.]

- My experience with this process is that for many of the test users it takes them to a critical point in learning. Not only has some of their "profound knowledge" been validated, but much of their current organizational mental model has been questioned. Because the latter is not always easy to take, some are on the cusp between *hope* and *hopelessness*.. Some report their "heads hurt." Others want to "go away and think about it."

What seems to work best for me is providing an opportunity for group reflection on the implications of what seems to emerge from this exercise. Then, to focus the discussion on what sort of strategies might enable people to act together on what they *already* believe.

- I'll present briefly below, one such strategy.

Management-by-Belief

In most organizations a gap exists between theory and practice, between planning and action. won't proceed much further with this now because it would go beyond the purpose of this posting. My own experiences as manager and managee [and developer of systems that tried to serve the needs of both at the same time] had left me aware that something was missing to bridge that space between theory-based plans and daily responsive actions.

Over the years I've developed several ways to bridge this gap including an information system driven by the needs of those on the organization's front line rather than those at the "top." Called the *Growth Record*, it has been used in several federal, state and local programs and was recently chosen as one of the resource tools for Peter Senge's Fifth Discipline Fieldbook for Education, *Schools that Learn*. Lately, I have begun to weave it together with the *T or C Test* and an organizational plotboard that provides a different way of understanding and plotting the roles and relationships in an organization without using the false paradigm of a pyramid. I am beginning to refer to it as *belief-based management* [or *management-by-belief*] -- a way to believe into existence the organizations we want.

Because the human mind needs purposeful challenges, this process, like MBO, also focuses on a *discrepancy*. This time, though, it's not a gap between what was done and some future changed state. It's a gap between what we *believe* is true, right, or good, and what we *do* about it in the actions we take every day. Thus it frames the "problem" in the present and provides a way to learn from the immediate past.

Gaps between what we do and what we really want to do, such as those emerging from the *T or C Test*, can provide a "starting point" for an *inside-out* change process that has already-planted roots. This "grounding" also makes it easier to sustain changes when original "champions" leave. It also provides a manageable framework for applying assets-based development approaches such as *appreciative inquiry*.

For me, a strength of this process is that it applies to our organizational actions the underlying, universal principles that drive our personal behavior. Increasingly today, individuals are seeking the longer-lasting satisfaction that comes from connecting actions to more deeply held principles, values, beliefs. Spirituality-in-the-workplace, meditation and other inner-seeking processes seem to address this personal need, and consultants such as Covey have it as the core of their approaches. But our organizations have not yet been able to develop comparable processes for going beneath the "data" their sensing mechanisms gather and to use them in ways that connect meaningfully to the *organization's* beliefs and values.

My hope is that this type of process can provide a feedback loop for data that confirms that we are acting on our beliefs -- even though imperfectly -- so that we can learn how to act even more appropriately next time. One way to think of it would be as belief-based continual improvement that supports building from internal strengths, and makes it easier to measure progress because discrepancies can be addressed as "positive" information.

For a long time I've maintained that most organizations require "unnatural behavior from consenting adults." That there is something wrong with present concepts of organizing human effort [especially in schools] is no secret. The problem, however, may not be with the organization as much as it is with those at the "consenting" end.

To withdraw the "consent" we give unthinkingly everyday to present organizational practices requires not only a "better" organizing theory based on a deeper understanding of people and their purposes, but we also must have sustainable alternatives that match the scope and nature of an organization's work.

Lew Rhodes
Sabu, Inc.
Helping those who must deal with "whole elephants"
814 Lamberton Drive
Silver Spring, MD 20902-3037
Phone/Fax: [301] 649-1296
lewrhodes@aol.com