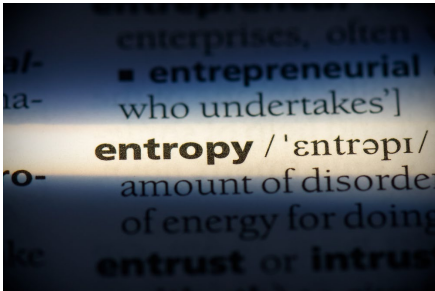


Leadership Barometer 173 Entropy

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There is a spooky property in thermodynamics called Entropy. In this article, I will reveal my struggle to understand the concept of Entropy. Then, I will relate the mystery to some ideas about trust between people.

My Bachelor's degree was in Mechanical Engineering, and my Master's degree was in Chemical Engineering. I took my share of thermodynamics and physics courses in college. The concept of Entropy always puzzled me. I could deal with the concept mathematically in equations, but I never understood the essence well.

The classic definition

For starters, let's look at the classic definition. We define Entropy as the degree of disorder, uncertainty, or randomness in a system. I can relate to this concept as my office frequently has a problem with too much "Entropy."

The scientific definition

Scientifically, Entropy is a thermodynamic quantity representing the unavailability of a system's thermal energy for conversion into mechanical work. The more disorder or uncertainty, the less work can be done.

This seems like spooky stuff to me. Why would scientists define something as the lack of something else? In trying to measure the Entropy of trust between people, we can see a glimmer of useful meaning.

Defining trust

Just trying to pin down a single definition of trust is difficult. It is situational, and I have read hundreds of definitions of trust in my life. Charles Feltman gave a helpful definition as, "*choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person's actions.*" In other words, to experience real trust, we give up control.

Mutual trust is also like a lubricant that lowers the amount of stress or effort required to get work done.

People only want to give up control if they trust the people they are giving it to. As we give up control and choose to make something valuable to us vulnerable to other people, trust emerges. That is where I begin to see a parallel between the concepts of Trust and Entropy.

I cannot send you a box full of Entropy, because it is defined by the lack of order. But I can send you a box of trust by relinquishing my control over you. That conundrum is exactly the problem that many organizations faced during COVID-19.

Trust during COVID 19

Since so many people were working remotely, many managers felt the need to regain control of how employees worked. By clinging desperately to the need for control, they were destroying trust big time. They put in tracking systems or other means to check up on the workers. I believe that is a root cause of the Great Resignation and the concept of quiet quitting today. People don't like to be treated as if they are untrustworthy.

To increase Entropy, you need to increase the unavailability for energy to be converted to real work. To increase the level of trust, you need to demonstrate more trust in others. You must be willing to give up more control to increase trust.

Conclusion

I hope these ideas are helpful in some way. I have always found the concept of Entropy to be confusing. You have to think in reverse, and my brain has trouble with that. The concept of trust is easier for me to understand. To increase the amount of trust you experience, learn to give more of it away.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations