

Research focuses on the psychology of trust

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(Medical Xpress)—Coming soon to a bookstore near you—a handbook on the science of reliance. Trust me.

Wright State [psychology professor](#) Tamera Schneider has embarked on a research project designed to investigate existing research on trust, perhaps refine its definition, and throw the spotlight on ways to strengthen trust among employees and soldiers.

"It can help people who need to understand how you can enhance trust, to be able to implement those things more prudently without spinning their wheels, without wasting their time," said Schneider, Ph.D. "If you had more trust, you would be able to be more collaborative. You would be able to be focusing on the group goals and problem solving."

It's not Schneider's first brush with the issue of trust. She has done research on trust in five-person teams whose members with interdependent tasks could only communicate electronically, via chat.

"We were trying to study trust in a more experimental way," she said. "And we didn't get some of the findings we expected based on the literature on trust."

The literature on trust paralleled that on emotional intelligence, which began to get deeper scientific study following publication of psychologist Dan Goleman's bestselling book Emotional Intelligence.

Goleman developed the argument that non-[cognitive skills](#) can matter as

much as IQ for workplace success and leadership effectiveness.

"The idea is that you can have someone with a very high IQ, but they can be dysfunctional," Schneider said. "You can have someone with an [average IQ](#) who can be extremely functional complemented by levels of high emotional intelligence."

And many people believe that [emotional intelligence](#) in a leader is required to develop trust in teams.

Schneider said researchers are trying to better understand what builds trust, its physiological and emotional antecedents and effects, and the outcomes.

She said some research suggests that trust can be enhanced by putting people in a [good mood](#) or by modifying their levels of oxytocin, a hormone that affects brain activity.

"There has been some good research done, but it's a matter of finding out where that is, what it tells us," she said. "It's looking at the literature very deeply. Having a book that's steeped in the literature can really guide that field to have more depth, to ask better questions."

The research is the result of a three-year, \$125,280 grant from SRA International, Inc., a Fairfax, Va.-based company that supports government clients in civilian, defense, health, intelligence, law enforcement and homeland security agencies.

Trust within military ranks can be critical, especially when there are soldiers of different cultures serving together.

"And it's not just that we now have to trust each other; we have technology that we have to trust," she said. "We have unmanned vehicles

that we have to trust. We get so much information from technology, and how do we know to trust that?"

Schneider said the most difficult part of her research, which is just getting started, will be scouring the literature because there is so much of it. The initial focus will be on trust research done in health care and industrial organizational psychology.

"One of the easiest things for us to do will be to take all of these puzzle pieces and come up with this more coherent, current and innovative puzzle of what this trust thing is," she said. "We are already thinking that we're going to have to change the definition of [trust](#) to be more precise. That's something I didn't anticipate. It's become a lot more exciting earlier on than I would have expected."

Provided by Wright State University

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