

Leading with trust

A strategic guide
for building
resilient and
future-ready
organizations

SKANSKA



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Designing for trust: How to build psychologically safe organizations

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When I was fifteen, I received a scholarship to Denmark and spent a year living there. In the early 2000s, it was a huge difference: a real cultural shock for me as a Hungarian teenager. What struck me most was the level of trust that ran through every layer of society - how people left baby strollers outside cafés, how public institutions operated with openness and transparency, and how a simple word or handshake was enough to move things forward. It was not just personal kindness; it was systemic, a shared social consensus that trust was something precious that everyone needed to treasure and protect from harm.

Years later, when I read Francis Fukuyama's Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity, I recognized the same insight in his central idea: societies where trust extends beyond family and close circles can build stronger institutions, innovate more freely, and create lasting prosperity. Trust, he wrote, is not a soft virtue but a vital form of social capital. I am proud that with WeAreOpen, we can now explore this topic in depth and publish a practical guide to help companies create environments where trust, openness, and inclusion become everyday reality.

Nóra Várady,
CEO,
WeAreOpen



Leading with trust feels more essential than ever as leaders steer through a faster, more complex and less predictable world where people rightly expect autonomy, clarity and fairness. This report lays out how trust operates - vertically between leaders and teams, horizontally among peers, and collectively across the whole organization - and shows why deliberately building those dimensions is the most practical route to stronger performance and resilience.

Trust isn't a soft extra; it holds accountability steady, lets decision-making move closer to the people doing the work, and unlocks the creativity teams need to adapt. In practice that means leading with transparency, steady consistency and genuine care, while using verified data and clear systems where they matter most. We are proud to have partnered with WeAreOpen on this white paper - together we can turn these ideas into everyday habits that make workplaces healthier, more inclusive and better prepared for the future.

Aurelia Luca,
Executive Vice President Operations Hungary &
Romania,
Skanska Commercial Development Europe



Trust is one of the most fundamental pillars of social and organizational life. Without it, existence within relationships, organizations, or leadership becomes a very isolating experience. When we trust each other and lead with trust, we unlock and multiply the potential within our teams and organizations. This doesn't only foster higher levels of psychological safety, but also leads to tangible, measurable outcomes.

Trust is not an abstract concept. It shows up in our everyday behavior, in how we communicate or make decisions and it is a quality that must be nurtured intentionally, because it rarely evolves on its own. This whitepaper offers insights to support that conscious process of building trust - helping leaders, teams, and organizations strengthen one of their most essential foundations.

Zsuzsanna Garaj,
Consulting Psychologist,
Researcher,
WeAreOpen



Introduction

Many leaders, organizational developers, and researchers are preoccupied with a central question: **what makes employees truly, intrinsically motivated to follow their leaders, collaborate, and openly share their ideas - not because they have to, but because they genuinely want to?**

While the answer can be approached from many angles, **at the core lies trust.** It is the invisible force shaping nearly every interaction, from personal relationships to organizational and global business dynamics. Trust determines whether people feel safe to cooperate, exchange information, and take meaningful risks together. In leadership, it serves as the foundation of influence and credibility, defining whether employees feel empowered to engage, grow, and innovate.

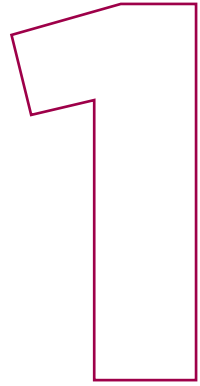
Understanding what builds or undermines trust is therefore crucial for creating authentic relationships and achieving lasting success in an increasingly complex world. The good news is that trust isn't abstract or elusive - it's something **leaders can intentionally foster** every day **through consistency, transparency, and empathy.**

This whitepaper offers a practical guide for leaders and organizations - clarifying the **key dimensions and enablers of trust-based leadership**, and highlighting the strategic and business advantages of embedding trust into everyday leadership practice. Throughout the paper, we've also included **insights from leaders for whom trust is a key part of their leadership agenda.** You'll find their interviews highlighted in dedicated boxes across the sections.

For over a decade, **WeAreOpen** has been promoting inclusive and psychologically safe workplaces in Hungary and internationally. With 1,100 manifesto signatory companies and over 100 partners, we are one of Europe's largest business communities driving inclusion and openness. We regularly publish knowledge materials that are available at <https://www.nyitottakvagyunk.hu/en/case-studies-and-reports>.

If you're committed to building an inclusive and psychologically safe workplace and would like support along the way, feel free to reach out to WeAreOpen at info@nyitottakvagyunk.hu or visit www.weareopen.hu





A new leadership reality:

The trust imperative

Trust has always been the cornerstone of human societies - the invisible social glue that holds relationships, communities, and entire social systems together¹. It is what allows people to cooperate and build something greater than themselves. Throughout history, trust has enabled progress - from small groups collaborating for survival to complex global economies built on shared belief in fairness, reliability, and integrity.

Yet in 2025, trust faces new challenges. The world today moves faster than ever - more volatile, more complex, and far less predictable. Economic shifts, rising geopolitical tensions, coupled with rapid technological change are redefining how we lead, collaborate, and connect.

The global workforce is redefining its expectations of employers, prioritizing greater autonomy, empowerment, flexibility, and mobility. At the same time, the volatility of the economic environment is weighing heavily on CEOs' outlook and confidence in the future. **Recent research shows a sharp decline in executive optimism amid ongoing uncertainty.** In a September 2025 poll, CEOs rated current business conditions much lower than earlier in the year, and many have since scaled back their expectations for 2026².

The **2025 Edelman Trust Barometer** - a widely known global survey - **titled this year's report "Trust and the Crisis of Grievance"**³. Among 33,000 respondents across 28 countries, the report reveals growing employee concerns about job security - driven by globalization, economic instability, and rapid technological change. The sharpest increases are in fears of foreign competitors and offshoring, while looming recession remains the top worry overall (63%). **Technology-related anxieties are also rising, with 58% worried about the expanding role of automation and insufficient training to keep up.** Overall, more than half of employees now see each of these forces as a threat to their job security, signaling growing global insecurity.

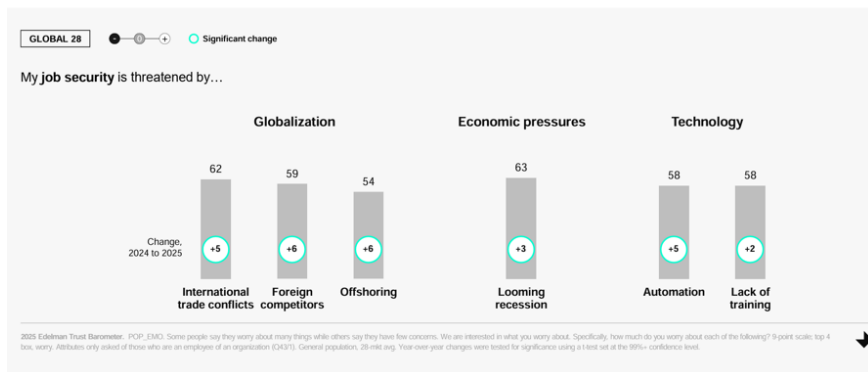
¹ [Leviathan, or, The matter, forme, & power of a common-wealth ecclesiasticall and civill, Thomas Hobbes, 1885](#)

² [CEOs Cut 2026 Outlook In September Poll As Economic Uncertainty Persists, Chief Executive, September, 2025](#)

³ [2025 Edelman Trust Barometer](#)

Globalization, Economic, and Technology Fears Worsen Job Insecurity

Percent of employees who worry



Source: [2025 Edelman Trust Barometer](#)

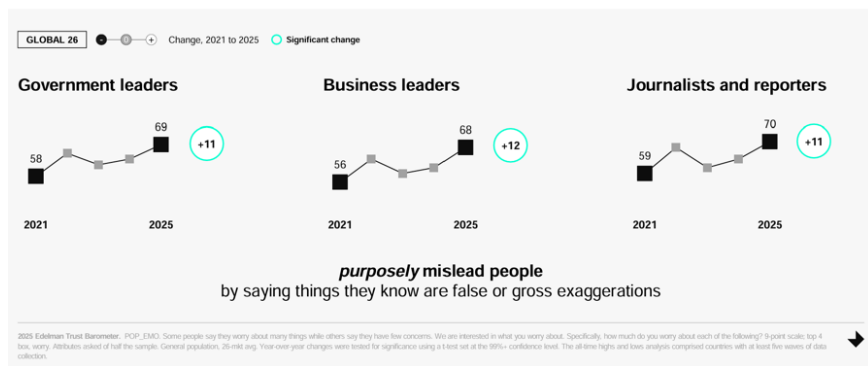
Another striking finding - and one that reflects the current global climate - is that **fears of being deliberately misled are at an all-time high**. According to the data, 69% of people worry about being misinformed by government leaders, 68% by business leaders, and 70% by journalists and reporters. This points to a deepening global crisis of trust across politics, business, and media.

2025 Edelman Trust Barometer

P. 10

Fear That Leaders Lie to Us at All-Time High

Percent who worry



Source: [2025 Edelman Trust Barometer](#)

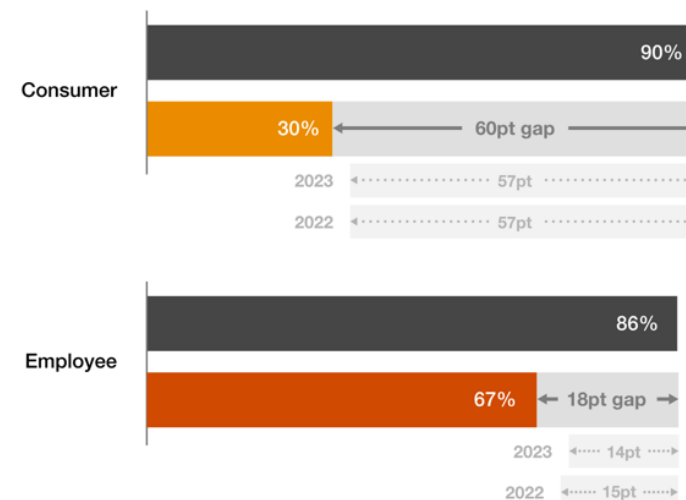
Interestingly, in this growing climate of distrust, a **PwC study⁴** found that **business leaders consistently overestimate the level of trust employees and consumers place in them** – and the gap is widening. While 90% of executives believe their companies are highly trusted by customers, only 30% of consumers agree. This widening 60% gap underscores a **deepening disconnect between how organizations perceive trust and how it is experienced in reality**.

Employees tend to trust businesses more than consumers do - yet a significant and widening gap remains. **While 86% of business executives believe employee trust in their organization is high, only 67% of employees agree**. This 18% gap marks an increase from previous years, signaling that even internal trust is becoming harder to sustain.

Trust gap widens for both consumers and employees



Consumer % 'highly trust' companies
Employee % 'highly trust' employer
Business exec % 'highly trusted'



Source: [Trust in US Business Survey: PwC, March, 2024](#)

⁴ [Trust in US Business Survey: PwC, March, 2024](#)

Beyond these trends, **global employee engagement slipped from 23% to 21% in 2024**, according to **Gallup**⁵. This marks only the second decline in the past 12 years, the last being during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The economic cost is high - Gallup estimates that lost productivity due to falling engagement drained US \$438 billion from the world economy in a single year. This decline is not only a matter of motivation, but of trust - when employees feel disconnected, unheard, or uncertain about leadership decisions, engagement and performance inevitably suffer.

It's clear that in 2025, leadership has become more complex and demanding than before. **According to McKinsey, a decade ago CEOs and top teams typically concentrated on four or five critical issues at a time - today, that number has doubled**⁶.

In such an environment, stability is fleeting, making the ability to build and sustain trust a leader's most valuable asset. New leadership strategies must therefore be grounded in accountability, empowerment, and reliability.

⁵ [State of the Global Workplace Report - Gallup, 2025](#)

⁶ [The art of 21st-century leadership: From succession planning to building a leadership factory, McKinsey, October, 2024](#)

Leader insights



Aurelia Luca

Executive Vice President
Operations Hungary & Romania
Skanska Commercial
Development Europe

What does leading with trust personally mean to you as a leader?

For me, leading with trust starts from a very simple place - respect. Respect for people's judgment, their expertise, and the energy and motivation they bring to their work. I've learned over the years that when you lead with trust, you don't need to control every detail; you create the space for people to step up, to try, to learn, and to grow. At the same time, I believe trust is not given blindly but built through consistency, clarity, and fairness.

From your perspective, why has trust become such a critical factor in leadership today, and how do you see it influencing your organization's and team's performance?

I think trust has always mattered, but today it's no longer optional - it's the foundation everything else stands on. The world has become too complex, too fast-paced for any leader to have all the answers. People need to feel that they're part of something where their voice matters and their contribution makes a real difference. When there's trust, communication becomes honest, feedback flows naturally, and teams are not afraid to take initiative or make decisions. It creates a culture where people feel safe to experiment and, at the same time, accountable for results. In my experience, performance and trust are deeply connected - one doesn't exist without the other.

What advice would you give to other leaders who want to strengthen trust within their teams?

Trust doesn't just happen. It's something we build - patiently, intentionally, through our daily actions and the way we show up for people. I have recently been part of a great team coaching session with my SLT colleagues on exactly this topic and I very much resonated with one conclusion that was mentioned there: "trust grows strongest when three elements come together: character, competence, and compassion."

Just to explain what this means - character is about doing the right thing, even when it's uncomfortable or inconvenient. It's the quiet strength that people feel when they know you stand by your principles. Competence is about delivering on what you promise, again and again, so that reliability becomes second nature. And compassion is about showing genuine care for people - not just for the results they bring, but for who they are. When these three qualities are fueled by authenticity, trust becomes almost effortless. But authenticity, to me, as I said already, isn't about "just being yourself." It's about aligning how you show up with who you truly are - leading from self-awareness, not from fear or ego.



Trust as a strategic advantage

As we can see, the less predictable the world becomes, the more essential trust is. **Today, trust in leadership is no longer viewed as a “soft” concept but as a proven, research-backed driver of organizational and business success.**

A high level of trust fosters stronger collaboration by lowering the perceived risks of working together. When employees trust their colleagues and leaders, **they are more willing to share information, exchange ideas, and take interpersonal risks** – such as voicing their opinions or relying on others’ input. This openness enhances both individual and team performance, building a more cohesive, motivating, and effective work environment⁷.

Research by Paul M. Zak, founding director of the Center for Neuroeconomics Studies at Claremont Graduate University, reveals that **employees working in high-trust organizations are 76% more engaged and 50% more productive.** They also experience **60% greater job satisfaction, feel 70% more aligned with their organization’s purpose, and report 66% stronger relationships with their colleagues**⁸.

According to Deloitte’s study, employees who trust their employers are 260% more motivated and 50% less likely to leave. Trust also drives customer loyalty, with 88% of customers who trust a brand willing to repurchase. Overall, trusted companies can outperform peers by up to 400% in market value⁹. The **2023 Edelman Trust Barometer**¹⁰ also found that **trust has become the leading factor behind both employee retention and customer loyalty.**

Organizational trust also plays a key role in **employee well-being.** When employees trust their organization, they are more likely to engage with workplace well-being programs and feel supported, even during times of crisis or uncertainty. In turn, this trust fosters higher morale, resilience, and better overall organizational outcomes¹¹.

Trust generates benefits at the macro level as well. A **World Bank study** examined 29 market economies over a ten-year period, found that a **10% rise in trust in an environment was associated with a 0.8% increase in per capita income growth**¹².

⁷ [Teamwork: What Must Go Right/What Can Go Wrong](#), Carl Larson & Frank M.J. LaFasto

⁸ [The Neuroscience of Trust](#), Harvard Business Review, February, 2017

⁹ [Challenging the orthodoxies of brand trust](#) | Deloitte Insights, January, 2023

¹⁰ [2023 Edelman Trust Barometer](#)

¹¹ [Organizational Trust Leads to Positive Employee and Organizational Outcomes – Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 2024](#)

¹² [Does Social Capital Have an Economic Payoff? A Cross-Country Investigation](#), The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 1997

Leader insights



Tomáš Fabian

Executive Vice President
Operations Czech Republic and
Legal
Skanska Commercial
Development Europe

How would you personally define what it means to you to lead with trust?

Leading with trust means creating honest, two-way relationships where openness and vulnerability are normal practices. Trust is earned through consistent, visible actions - even when no one is watching. The higher up you are in the organization, the greater your visibility becomes, and with it, the responsibility for your daily actions grows. This responsibility goes beyond any formal job description, it's simply what organizations and employees expect from their leaders. When leaders are approachable and genuine, they invite reciprocal openness and stronger personal connections across the team.

What's one habit or mindset shift you wish more leaders would adopt to strengthen trust?

Be deliberate about being present - physically and mentally. Prioritize regular, predictable time with your team and be consistent in behavior and follow-through. Small acts of reliability and everyday empathy create predictability, and predictability is the foundation of trust.

Can you share a moment when transparency, reliability, or empathy directly strengthened trust within your team or organization?

One example is our "lesson learned" sessions after completing complex processes. During these meetings, the extended project team is encouraged to openly share both positive and negative experiences. While sometimes there's hesitation to hold these discussions immediately, leaders must emphasize their importance and ensure they happen without delay.

These sessions help the team gain clarity and mutual understanding by addressing assumptions about actions - both mine and others'. Through honest dialogue, we identify real improvements for future projects. This practice fosters trust by creating a safe space for openness and continuous learning, benefiting individuals, the team, and leadership alike.

What advice would you give to other leaders who want to strengthen trust within their teams?

Make a conscious decision to invest time in relationships and be willing to show vulnerability first. Trust grows from deliberate practice, and once it's there, everything else becomes easier.

Societal and stakeholder trust in organizations

When we talk about leading with trust, it's important to remember that individual leaders operate within the broader context of their organization. **Their decisions, behaviors, and interactions are all interconnected** – often in subtle, hierarchical ways – **creating a complex leadership ecosystem**. Seen from the outside, it is **this collective pattern** of leadership that shapes the organization's reliability and credibility, **ultimately defining how it is perceived and trusted by others**.

Managers often assume that enhancing a company's reputation is the job of marketing, PR, or brand-monitoring firms. In reality, reputation is the result of fair and transparent processes in how a company engages with its stakeholders - customers, employees, investors, and society at large.

To meet standards of fairness and integrity, companies carry three core types of responsibility¹³:

- **Economically**, people rely on them to create and deliver value
- **Legally**, they are expected to uphold not only the letter but also the spirit of the law
- **Ethically**, society looks to them to pursue moral goals, using moral means and driven by moral intent

¹³ [The Trust Crisis, Harvard Business Review, July, 2019](#)

What this means in practice differs across stakeholder groups:

STAKEHOLDER	ECONOMIC PROMISE	LEGAL PROMISE	ETHICAL PROMISE
Customers	To provide products and services that enhance their lives	To follow consumer protection laws and industry regulations	- To make good on commitments - To disclose risks - To remediate mistakes made or harm done
Employees	To provide a livelihood (pay, benefits, training, opportunity)	To follow labor, antidiscrimination, and workplace safety laws	- To provide safe work conditions and job security - To treat everyone fairly
Investors	- To provide returns - To manage risk	- To fulfill fiduciary duties - To disclose material information	- To oversee employees' conduct - To abstain from insider trading and self-dealing
Society	- To offer employment and economic development - To fulfill important needs	- To follow local and federal laws - To work with regulators	- To protect public health, the environment, and the local community - To set industry standards

Source: [The Trust Crisis, Harvard Business Review, July, 2019](#)

While trust must be earned across all stakeholder groups, one of **the most critical relationships where it takes shape is between an organization and its employees**. Fairness plays a powerful role in shaping employee trust. People are highly sensitive to whether they are being treated with justice and respect – and **when fairness is missing, it often leads to frustration, disengagement, and ultimately, turnover**. Yet fairness goes beyond outcomes – it's about the process behind decisions, the way people are treated, and the transparency of communication. This is the essence of **organizational justice** – the foundation on which trust and commitment are built.

The four types of organizational justice¹⁴:

1. Distributive justice - is the outcome fair?

This dimension concerns the fairness of outcomes - e.g. how pay, promotions, bonuses, or workload are distributed.

Example: Two employees close to one another in performance receive different bonuses. If one feels their bonus was unfair compared to their peer's, distributive justice is perceived to be lacking. Organizations can strengthen distributive justice by maintaining clear, transparent systems where rewards and compensation are based on merit and measurable performance.

2. Procedural justice - is the process fair?

This relates to the fairness of the decision-making processes - consistency, neutrality, transparency, and the opportunity to have input.

Example: A company is conducting layoffs due to budget cuts. Employees will perceive the decision as fairer if the company uses clear, objective criteria (e.g., performance history) rather than arbitrary or biased reasoning. Providing employees with a chance to voice concerns or seek clarification further reinforces procedural justice.

3. Interpersonal justice - am I treated with respect?

This deals with how people are treated when decisions are implemented - respect, dignity, politeness in interactions.

Example: A manager gives constructive yet critical feedback with empathy, listens actively, and acknowledges the employee's feelings instead of bluntly delivering criticism.

4. Informational justice - was I given enough information?

This centers on the fairness of communication - whether explanations are honest, transparent, timely, and sufficiently detailed.

Example: When policy changes are made, leaders explain the rationale clearly, share the reasoning, and answer questions, rather than leaving employees in the dark.

Ultimately, trust at the organizational level is built and sustained through systems that embody fairness, transparency, and accountability – **yet it comes to life through the actions of individual leaders**. While structures and policies set the stage, it is leaders' everyday choices, communication, and behavior that translate these principles into lived experience.

¹⁴ [Organizational Justice: Typology, Antecedents and Consequences, Encyclopedia, 2022](#)

Leader insights



Kinga Rohrböck

Managing Director,
Hintalovon Child Rights
Foundation

What has most shaped or inspired you as a leader?

As a mother of four, I often draw from my family life in my leadership journey. As leaders, it's our role to set the example and create an environment where mistakes are acceptable, successes are celebrated, and people feel valued, much like in a family. I truly believe that a leader cannot bring anything other than who they authentically are - otherwise, they become disconnected from themselves.

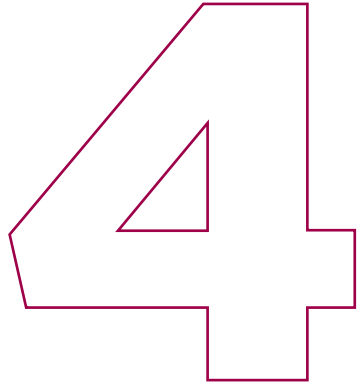
Now that my children are grown, leading the Hintalovon Foundation marks a new and deeply meaningful chapter in my life. As an independent organization dedicated to child rights, our entire team is driven by the organization's mission and purpose. At Hintalovon, transparency and trust is built into the very structure of how we operate. Transparency is something we uphold consistently - both toward our colleagues and across our wider network and board. As a team, we regularly sit down to discuss our strategic directions openly, ensuring that everyone understands the reasoning behind decisions.

Can you share a moment when transparency, reliability and empathy strengthened trust within your team or organization?

In early 2025, the civil sector in Hungary faced a highly uncertain and, in many ways, threatening situation due to proposed legislative changes. Our carefully planned strategy was suddenly overturned, and the organization's very survival was at stake. In response, we formed a six-member leadership group and created a safe, trusting space to put all our dilemmas on the table. It was an absurdly difficult situation: we had to decide whether to stay silent or take a public stand for our mission and values. We chose the latter - and what helped me most was not having to face it alone. We were in it together as a team. At the same time, we offered supervision to our staff, kept them fully informed, and made it clear that saying "no" - for example, to joining fundraising campaigns - was perfectly acceptable. Trusting in a positive outcome, and in each other, was essential throughout this period.

What advice would you give to other leaders who want to strengthen trust within their teams?

If I were to give advice to leaders about building trust, it would be this: pay close attention to the alignment between your words and actions - and always keep your promises. Don't be afraid to ask questions or seek guidance from those with more experience. It's okay to say, "I don't know, but I'll look into it," and it's okay to make mistakes. What truly matters is transparency, authenticity, and patience - because trust doesn't appear overnight. It's built slowly, through consistent effort, every single day.



Societal and stakeholder trust in organizations

Trust in organizations operates along **three key dimensions: vertical, horizontal, and collective.**

- **Vertical trust** refers to the mutual confidence between leaders and employees - encompassing both upward trust and downward trust.
- **Horizontal trust** describes the trust shared among peers and colleagues at the same hierarchical level, enabling open collaboration and mutual support.
- **Collective trust** extends beyond individual relationships - it reflects the shared belief in the integrity, fairness, and reliability of the organization as a whole, forming the foundation for cohesive, high-performing teams and a resilient organizational culture.

These dimensions are **deeply interconnected and continuously shape one another.** Trust flows through every layer of an organization: when leaders and employees trust each other, it strengthens collaboration among peers, which in turn reinforces collective confidence in the organization as a whole. None of these forms can fully exist in isolation – together, they create the living fabric of a truly trust-based culture.

4.1. Building vertical trust: Mutual confidence between leaders and employees

Interpersonal trust is the willingness to be vulnerable to others' actions, based on the belief that they intend well and will treat us fairly. In a more pointed definition, trust can be described as "an individual's calculated exposure to the risk of harm from the actions of an influential other"¹⁵. In leadership, this means that a leader's actions, tone, and consistency directly influence how safe others feel to rely on them and to take risks in their presence. It's important to keep in mind that trust doesn't emerge from policies, procedures, or checklists - it grows from the space leaders create for genuine human connection.

The development of trust is fundamentally shaped by two key factors: the trustor (the one who places trust) and the trustee (the one who is trusted). A leader can act as both trustor and trustee, since vertical trust operates in two directions¹⁶:

- **Upward trust** – reflecting how team members perceive the trustworthiness of their leaders
- **Downward trust** – referring to how leaders perceive the trustworthiness of their employees

When employees lack trust in their supervisors, their motivation and performance often decline. Likewise, leaders who struggle to trust their teams can unintentionally limit their growth and creativity, preventing people from performing to their full potential. That's why **leaders must be intentional about nurturing trust in both directions** – earning their team's confidence while also learning to place trust in their people.

¹⁵ [A Meta-Analysis of Factors Affecting Trust in Human-Robot Interaction, Human Factors: The Journal of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society, 2011](#)

¹⁶ [How and why humans trust: A meta-analysis and elaborated model - PMC, Frontiers in Psychology, March, 2023](#)

The Two Directions of Trust in Leadership



4.1.1. Strengthening upward trust

Research consistently shows that **when team members have confidence in their leaders, teams deliver stronger results**. For example, studies of NCAA basketball teams found that those who deeply trusted their coaches consistently outperformed those with lower trust levels¹⁷.

The following factors play a crucial role in building upward trust:

- **Professional competence** is a fundamental pillar of trust in leadership. People place confidence in leaders who demonstrate expertise, sound judgment, and the ability to deliver results.

Leaders can build competence-based trust by staying informed and developing key skills. They don't need deep expertise in each and every area, but should have a clear overview of their field and show strength in broader skills like decision-making and stakeholder management - while trusting their team's expertise.

- **Legitimacy** is another critical foundation of trust in leadership. Leaders must be seen as having earned their position through merit, fairness, and genuine capability. Without this perception of rightful authority, their credibility weakens, and stakeholders become less inclined to follow their direction.

Over time, competence becomes one of the most powerful ways for leaders to build and reinforce their legitimacy - showing through consistent performance that their credibility is both earned and trustworthy¹⁸.

- **Behavioral integrity** refers to the alignment between a leader's words and actions. It is crucial because when leaders consistently act in line with their stated values and commitments, they build credibility and trust. When a gap appears between what they say and what they do, trust quickly erodes.

This erosion of trust can directly undermine profitability. A study of Holiday Inns asked employees to rate, on a five-point scale, how closely their managers' words matched their actions. The results showed that for every 0.8 point increase in trust in managers, annual profits rose by 2.5% of revenues - roughly \$250,000 per hotel¹⁹. No other single aspect of managerial behavior had such a significant impact on financial performance.

- **Reliability** is one of the most visible and measurable foundations of trust in leadership. When leaders consistently follow through on their promises, meet deadlines, and act predictably even under pressure, they signal dependability and integrity²⁰. Over time, this consistency helps employees know they can rely on their leader's words and actions, creating a stable environment where trust can thrive.
- **Warmth** - traits such as friendliness, empathy, and trustworthiness - plays a crucial role in how people develop trust in their leaders, as research consistently shows²¹. Warmth is judged quickly and leaves a strong emotional impression, and leaders who convey it are seen as more trustworthy and approachable. This fosters cooperation and loyalty - something competence alone cannot achieve.
- **Authenticity** - when leaders show up as their true selves, acknowledging their strengths, weaknesses, and even vulnerabilities - creates an atmosphere of honesty and psychological safety that encourages others to do the same. Research, including recent McKinsey insights, shows that leaders who embrace authenticity foster stronger engagement, loyalty, and collaboration - because people are far more willing to trust someone who is real than someone who simply appears flawless²².

¹⁹ [The High Cost of Lost Trust, Harvard Business Review, September, 2002](#)

²⁰ [How and why humans trust: A meta-analysis and elaborated model - PMC, Frontiers in Psychology, March, 2023](#)

²¹ [The dynamics of warmth and competence judgments, and their outcomes in organizations, Research in Organizational Behavior, 2011](#)

²² [How leaders can tap the power of vulnerability, McKinsey, November, 2024](#)

¹⁷ [Trust in leadership and team performance: Evidence from NCAA basketball, Journal of Applied Psychology, 2000](#)

¹⁸ [Leading with Trust, Harvard Business Review, July, 2019](#)

- **Closeness and perceived similarity** between a leader and their team play a powerful role in shaping trust. When employees feel that their leader shares their values, goals, and perspectives, they are more likely to view that leader as relatable and trustworthy.

Building this connection begins with language and behavior - using “we” instead of “I” fosters a sense of shared purpose, while showing genuine interest in team members’ experiences and perspectives deepens relational closeness. Leaders who actively create common ground foster belonging, collaboration, and deeper trust across their teams²³.

- **Being a trust-giver** means that when leaders show confidence in their teams and delegate responsibility, they strengthen the trust they receive in return. This reciprocal dynamic reinforces both sides’ willingness to be open and dependable - turning trust into a self-sustaining cycle that fuels collaboration and engagement²⁴.
- **Employee engagement, commitment and self-efficacy** were all positively correlated with trust in leaders, suggesting that individuals who are more confident, proactive, and involved tend to place greater trust in their superiors²⁵. Leaders can strengthen engagement and self-efficacy by empowering employees to take initiative, recognizing their contributions, and providing opportunities for growth.

²³ [The Decision to Trust, Harvard Business Review, September, 2006](#)

²⁴ [How and why humans trust: A meta-analysis and elaborated model - PMC, Frontiers in Psychology, March, 2023](#)

²⁵ [How and why humans trust: A meta-analysis and elaborated model - PMC, Frontiers in Psychology, March, 2023](#)

4.1.2. Strengthening downward trust

While employees’ trust in their leader is essential, it is just as important for leaders to place trust in their teams. Downward trust reflects this ability - the leader’s willingness to rely on their employees’ competence and integrity. Although the team’s reliability naturally shapes this fragile, reciprocal process, leaders must consciously observe their own trust patterns and work on them when needed to build stronger, more balanced relationships.

The following factors play a crucial role in building downward trust:

- **Empowering leadership**, instead of micromanagement. Excessive control and monitoring often stem from a leader’s high need for certainty and low level of trust. While some managers believe this style ensures safety and productivity, it usually produces the opposite effect.

A leader’s inability to let go of control communicates mistrust, which in turn breeds mistrust in return - creating a downward spiral of insecurity and counterproductivity. Teams thrive when leaders replace control with clarity and empowerment, set shared goals, and trust people to deliver²⁶.

- **Psychological security** - which is not the same as psychological safety - also plays a key role in shaping a leader’s ability to trust their team. When leaders themselves feel psychologically secure - meaning they have stable self-esteem, confidence in their abilities, and a clear sense of self - they are less likely to respond to uncertainty with control or authoritarianism. Instead, they tend to favor democratic, participative leadership, which invites collaboration and empowers team members. By contrast, psychological insecurity often leads to micromanagement and autocratic tendencies, eroding trust and autonomy within teams²⁷.

²⁶ [Understanding the Counterproductive Effects of Micromanagement in Leadership Using the Lenses of Subordinate’s Employees, International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, November, 2023](#)

²⁷ [Psychological insecurity and leadership styles, The handbook of personal security, 2015](#)

Leaders can strengthen their psychological security through self-awareness and continuous personal development. Reflecting on one's triggers, seeking honest feedback, and practicing emotional regulation help build stability and confidence under pressure. Coaching, therapy, or mindfulness-based approaches can also support leaders in developing a clearer sense of self and greater inner balance.

- **Growth mindset** helps leaders trust their teams more deeply, as they believe in the potential for learning and development - both in themselves and in others²⁸. Instead of assuming that abilities are fixed, leaders with a growth mindset see every challenge as an opportunity for growth, which naturally leads them to delegate more, empower others, and create space for experimentation.

Developing a growth mindset requires conscious practice and self-awareness. Leaders can strengthen it by embracing curiosity, taking responsibility for their growth, and reframing failure as a necessary step toward mastery. Stepping outside the comfort zone, focusing on effort as much as outcomes, and challenging one's ego and limiting beliefs help cultivate resilience, openness, and a genuine belief in continuous development - both for themselves and their teams²⁹.

- **Social intelligence** enables leaders to understand and respond to the emotional and interpersonal dynamics within their teams, which is fundamental for building trust. This awareness helps them create psychologically safe environments where team members feel valued, heard, and supported. When people sense that their leader genuinely understands and respects them, they are more likely to reciprocate that trust³⁰.

Leaders can develop social intelligence by actively practicing empathy, attentive listening, and perspective-taking in their daily interactions. Seeking honest feedback, observing group dynamics, and reflecting on the emotional impact of their words and actions all help deepen this awareness.

4.2. Building horizontal trust: Mutual confidence and collaboration among peers

When upward and downward trust function well within an organization, they naturally strengthen horizontal trust - the trust shared among team members. Consistent, transparent leadership models trustworthy behavior, while employees who feel trusted are more likely to extend that same trust to their peers³¹.

4.2.1. The link and difference between trust and psychological safety

To truly deepen horizontal trust, leaders also should consciously focus on strengthening psychological safety within their teams. Psychological safety has long been recognized as a cornerstone of successful workplaces - enabling teams to collaborate effectively, make better decisions, learn faster, stay motivated, and drive innovation³². According to a recent McKinsey survey, 89% of employees consider psychological safety a critical element of a healthy, high-performing work environment³³.

When discussing horizontal trust within organizations, it is inevitable to address the concept of psychological safety, as the two are closely interconnected. **Yet, there is a subtle but important distinction between trust and psychological safety.**

Psychological safety goes beyond trust. While trust means believing in someone's competence and good intentions, psychological safety is about feeling free to show our authentic selves - to speak up, admit mistakes, or ask for help without

28 [Growth Mindset vs. Fixed Mindset: What's the Difference?, Harvard Business School, March, 2022](#)

29 [The Value Of A Growth Mindset, And How To Develop One, Forbes, December, 2021](#)

30 [Social Intelligence and the Biology of Leadership, Harvard Business Review, September, 2008](#)

31 [Transformational leadership and horizontal trust as antecedents of team performance in the healthcare context, Anales de Psicologia, 2017](#)

32 [10 Red Flags That Psychological Safety Is Lacking In Your Workplace, Forbes, June, 2021](#)

33 [The importance of psychological safety in the workplace, McKinsey](#)

fear of judgment. **We may fully trust a colleague’s abilities, yet still hesitate to show vulnerability - and that’s precisely where psychological safety begins.**

It might seem intuitive to assume that when trust exists between leaders and team members, a psychologically safe environment naturally follows - but that’s not entirely the case.

When psychological safety is strong, people feel safe to make mistakes, ask for help, or take risks - knowing others will support them rather than judge them. Trust, by contrast, is more individual: it’s the belief that others are competent, reliable, and act with integrity. This personal trust, over time, helps build the collective sense of psychological safety within the team³⁴.

In short, **trust is personal, while psychological safety is collective** – and both are essential foundations of effective, resilient teams.



34 [The Difference Between Trust And Psychological Safety, Psych Safety, November, 2020](#)

We explored the concept of psychological safety in more depth in WeAreOpen’s **“Designing for trust: How to build psychologically safe organizations” whitepaper³⁵**, which introduces the framework and offers practical recommendations for strengthening the four levels of psychological safety. These levels - outlined below - provide a step-by-step approach to building a culture where people feel safe, valued, and empowered to contribute.

STAGE	WHAT IT MEANS	ROLE OF TRUST
1. Inclusion Safety	Feeling accepted and belonging to the group	Trust that I won't be excluded or judged for who I am belonging to the group
2. Learner Safety	Freedom to ask questions, experiment, and make mistakes	Trust that errors will be treated as part of learning, not punished
3. Contributor Safety	Confidence to share ideas, skills, and input	Trust that my contributions will be valued and not ignored or exploited
4. Challenger Safety	Permission to challenge the status quo and voice dissent	Deep trust that I can speak up without fear of retaliation and that leadership is open to change

35 [Designing for trust: How to build psychologically safe organizations, WeAreOpen, 2025](#)

4.3. Building collective trust

Leaders play a crucial role in building and sustaining trust across the organization. Beyond individual relationships, trust needs to be embedded in the company culture to enable effective collaboration and lasting performance. Leaders can strengthen a culture of trust by modeling transparency, fairness, and accountability in their daily actions. Open communication and empowering teams with autonomy help employees feel respected and included, making trust a shared organizational norm rather than an individual trait.

4.3.1. Trust as the starting point of team performance

A well-functioning team is the clearest expression of collective trust in action. **Patrick Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team model**³⁶ illustrates that **trust is the foundation of team success** – the essential first layer upon which collaboration, accountability, and collective results are built. Without trust, even the most skilled teams struggle to reach their full potential.

The model is often visualized as a **pyramid with trust forming its base**. Without a solid foundation of trust, the pyramid collapses: teams avoid healthy conflict, struggle with commitment, evade accountability, and ultimately lose sight of collective results. In Lencioni's model, trust is the cornerstone that holds the entire structure together.

THE LENCIONI MODEL



Source: [AddyOsmani.com - Debugging teams with the Lencioni Model, 2022](https://addyosmani.com/debugging-teams-with-the-lencioni-model/)

This model provides leaders with a practical framework for understanding team dynamics and uncovering the root causes of dysfunction. **By assessing each layer of the pyramid, it helps identify where improvement is needed to build stronger, more effective teams.** Crucially, the model emphasizes that no step can be skipped – trust at the base must be established first, as it supports every other element of team success.

³⁶ [The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable, Lencioni, Patrick M., 2002](#)

Each level can be examined through reflective questions to assess the current state of the team and determine the need for intervention:

LEVEL	REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS
Trust Absence of Trust	• Do team members feel safe to admit mistakes or weaknesses? • Are they willing to ask for help or offer support to others? • Do they openly share relevant information, or do they hold back out of fear? • Do they hide vulnerabilities or avoid feedback? • Do they feel safe to disagree or express uncertainty in front of others?
Conflict Fear of Conflict	• Are team members able to challenge one another's ideas respectfully and productively? • Do team discussions lead to real decisions or end in avoidance? • Are there issues we repeatedly circle around but never address directly? • Do people feel safe to respectfully express disagreement with leaders or peers?
Commitment Lack of Commitment	• Do teams leave meetings with clear, shared decisions and priorities? • Do team members support collective decisions once they are made, even if they initially disagreed? • Are there signs of passive resistance or lack of follow-through after meetings? • Do teams revisit the same topics because decisions weren't clear the first time? Do unclear responsibility, ownership, or communication gaps contribute to this pattern? • Do team members understand how their individual tasks contribute to broader objectives?
Accountability Avoidance of Accountability	• Are performance issues addressed quickly and fairly? • Are similar issues and problems handled consistently across the team? • Do leaders balance empathy with clear expectations when addressing low performance? • How comfortable are team members giving and receiving constructive feedback? • Do leaders regularly acknowledge positive contributions as well, not just mistakes?
Results Inattention to results	• Are leaders clear on what "success" looks like for the team as a whole? • Does everyone know how their role contributes to the team's collective success? • Are individual objectives aligned with the team's broader mission? • Are promotions, rewards, or recognition systems encouraging collaboration or competition? • Are team metrics visible and regularly reviewed? Are KPIs, milestones, and outcomes discussed openly in meetings?

Leader insights



Beatrix Bedő

Co-Founder, CFO Mentor
Impact Hub Budapest

How has trust - in others and in yourself - shaped your journey as a leader?

After nearly two decades in senior leadership, I reached a point of burn-out that transformed both my professional direction and my sense of self. Becoming an entrepreneur became an act of freedom and renewal, allowing me to take ownership of my own decisions. Today, I run Impact Hub Budapest, my third venture - a co-working space and a foundation that supports emerging and purpose-driven businesses. Our main mission is to help companies understand and be able to respond positively to today's social challenges. My core driver has always been creating value, and I've always preferred working in teams rather than alone.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a real test of trust and resilience. During the lockdown, we had to close our offices for four months, and I had to place enormous trust in the future and in a positive outcome. But I didn't give up, because I truly believe spaces like this are needed - that human connection in presence moves things forward.

Eventually, things took a turn for the better. Over time, two of my former employees became my business partners - I offered them ownership shares, which I see as one of the highest forms of trust. We're now bringing in a third co-owner, and once again, mutual trust is at the heart of this decision. In our organization, trust is the glue that holds everything together. We work in the spirit of holacracy, embedding its principles into our daily operations - with trust at the core of how decisions are made and responsibilities are shared. This strong internal trust extends to our broader community as well. Now, everything feels in the right place - the people, the purpose, and the trust that connects it all.

Can you share a moment when transparency, reliability and empathy strengthened trust within your team or organization?

There was a very personal moment when the importance of trust became especially tangible for me. I had to step away from work for several months due to health reasons - a planned but challenging period for the organization. Yet everything ran smoothly because I could fully trust my team to lead in my absence.

It was a deeply meaningful experience that taught me a lot and filled me with gratitude. When I returned, many of the new processes they had developed remained in place. The fact that this period went so smoothly, and that we were able to bridge the challenges caused by the leader's absence so effectively, is a clear sign that trust not only strengthens relationships but also builds organizational resilience.

Trust-based leadership in the future of work

In 2025 and beyond, trust-based leadership will be more essential than ever. The so-called **VUCA world**³⁷ – defined by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity – **has proven not to be a temporary state but a lasting reality**. Organizations can no longer rely on rigid, multi-year strategic plans, instead, they must cultivate adaptability, resilience, and the capacity for continuous rethinking and renewal. In this environment, trust becomes the vital connective tissue that enables agility - allowing teams to collaborate fluidly, make decentralized decisions, and respond to change with both speed and confidence.

Let's explore the **key trends shaping the future of work** – and why trust will remain the foundation for thriving in it.

5.1. Building trust in tech-driven environments

Artificial intelligence and automation have long been reshaping how organizations operate - but with their rapid and extensive expansion, they are now also redefining the very foundations of trust, which is evolving beyond human relationships. As AI becomes more embedded in decision-making, the cornerstones of trust - transparency, ethics, and human oversight - become even more critical.

³⁷ [VUCA](#)

Building confidence in AI systems is no longer just a technical issue - it's an organizational, ethical, and psychological one. Here are some of the **main challenges when it comes to building trust in AI**³⁸:

TRUST CHALLENGE

Lack of transparency and explainability

Many AI systems function as black boxes, producing outcomes that are difficult to interpret or trace. When users can't understand how or why a decision is made, it undermines their confidence in the system's reliability and fairness.

Threats to human autonomy and dignity

Automation can make employees feel that their decision-making power, judgment, or human value is being replaced or diminished. This perceived loss of agency can trigger resistance and reduce willingness to collaborate with AI tools.

Data privacy and ethical concerns

AI depends on vast amounts of data, raising concerns about who controls it, how it's used, and whether biases or misuse occur. Fear of surveillance or unethical data handling can erode trust across the organization.

Lack of fairness

Algorithmic bias³⁹ remains one of the most critical challenges. When training data or models reflect social inequalities, certain groups may experience discrimination - damaging both individual trust and organizational credibility.

Overtrust and miscalibrated confidence

Mistrust is not the only risk - overtrust can be equally problematic. When people rely too heavily on AI outputs without questioning their validity or limits, it can lead to poor decision-making and unintended consequences.

LEADERSHIP APPROACH

Communicate with transparency and clarity

Explain how and why AI is being used - what decisions it supports, what data it relies on, and what its limitations are. Clear, honest communication reduces fear and speculation while reinforcing confidence in leadership integrity.

Keep humans in the loop

Ensure that AI systems enhance rather than replace human judgment. Maintain meaningful oversight for critical decisions and empower employees to question or override automated outputs when necessary.

Ensure transparent and ethical data use

Leaders can address this fear by building transparency and accountability into every stage of AI use - clearly communicating how data is collected, stored, and applied. Establishing ethical guidelines, ensuring human oversight, and inviting employee input on data-related decisions help create a sense of control and fairness.

Design for fairness and accountability

Implement regular audits for bias, transparency, and data governance. Define clear accountability structures that specify who is responsible when AI-driven processes go wrong and how to address them.

Encourage critical thinking

Encouraging healthy skepticism helps teams collaborate more effectively with technology and build a more balanced, informed sense of trust. Research shows that as people interact more frequently with AI, they tend to apply human-like social rules and behaviors to these systems - a phenomenon known as *ethopoeia*⁴⁰. As AI continues to evolve from a mere tool to a perceived teammate, this human tendency will deepen, making it even more important for leaders to promote awareness in human-machine collaboration.

5.2. Leading connected teams in a hybrid world

Remote and hybrid work will stay with us. This expectation is fueled by employee preferences for flexibility, evidence of sustained or improved productivity in remote setups, and the competitive imperative to offer attractive work arrangements⁴¹. It's already clear that distance challenges visibility, a sense of belonging, and ultimately, trust. Research shows, however, that **when trust is intentionally cultivated in these settings, it significantly enhances team cohesion, communication, and overall work experience** - even across physical and geographical boundaries⁴².

TRUST CHALLENGE

The visibility gap

In remote setups, work becomes less visible. Leaders who previously assessed performance through presence may struggle to recognize effort and results. This lack of visibility can lead to misjudged assumptions about engagement or productivity, quietly eroding trust.

Declining relational connection

Without informal "coffee machine" interactions, emotional bonds and social trust weaken over time. Teams lose the casual moments that build empathy and psychological safety.

Misalignment over time

Remote teams can drift - priorities blur, norms fade, and misunderstandings multiply. Without regular alignment, even high-performing teams risk losing clarity and focus.

Uneven communication dynamics

Hybrid work often creates an invisible divide between those in the office and those working remotely. In-office employees naturally benefit from spontaneous hallway conversations, quick updates, and casual face time with leaders - while remote colleagues may feel excluded or less informed. This "proximity bias" can undermine trust, equal opportunity, and collaboration over time.

LEADERSHIP APPROACH

Build trust through outcome-based evaluation

To close the visibility gap, leaders must redefine how performance and reliability are assessed and focus on clear goals, measurable outcomes, and transparent expectations.

Rebuilding connection through intentional interaction

Leaders who are working with remote or hybrid teams should intentionally design moments of connection into the team's rhythm. This can mean starting meetings with brief personal check-ins or organizing occasional social gatherings. Encouraging authentic, non-task-related interactions helps rebuild empathy and belonging.

Realign teams through regular "Relaunches"

To prevent misalignment, leaders should schedule regular team "relaunches" - structured sessions every 6-8 weeks to revisit priorities, clarify roles, and refresh working norms⁴³. These conversations help reset focus, address friction early, and renew commitment to shared goals.

Establish intentional communication norms

Ultimately, communication equity is a leadership responsibility. Establishing intentional communication norms promote inclusion and visibility for everyone. This means ensuring that key discussions happen in shared digital spaces rather than informal office chats, and that hybrid meetings are structured so remote participants have equal access and voice. Rotating meeting facilitation, using collaborative tools (like shared documents or asynchronous updates), and explicitly inviting input from remote team members can all help level the playing field.

38 [Trust in AI: progress, challenges, and future directions | Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, Nature, November, 2024](#)

39 [What Is Algorithmic Bias? | IBM](#)

40 [Machines and Mindlessness: Social Responses to Computers, Journal of Social Issues, 2002](#)

41 [Survey: Remote Work Isn't Going Away — and Executives Know It, Harvard Business Review, August, 2023](#)

42 [Trust lessons from coronavirus, SmartBrief, 2020](#)

43 [Author Talks: Tsedal Neeley on why remote work is here to stay—and how to get it right, McKinsey, April, 2021](#)

5.3. Growing need for resilience and emotional trust in leadership

Effective leadership behaviors and styles have been studied for decades. Their evolution reflects the economic, socio-political, and cultural context of each era, continually adapting in search of the most effective approaches to bring out the best in teams. For 2025 and beyond, uncertainty and rapid change have become - and will remain - defining features of the world of work. In this environment, **employees increasingly seek leaders who offer not only strategic direction but also emotional grounding and psychological safety.** Emotional trust - the belief that leaders genuinely care - is emerging as one of the most powerful predictors of engagement and retention in times of constant change.

In line with this, **modern leadership thinking also has increasingly shifted toward more human-centered and morally grounded models⁴⁴.** These approaches emphasize trust, integrity, transparency, and a genuine commitment to serving others. They reflect a growing understanding that lasting influence cannot rely on authority alone - it must be built on credibility, shared values, and, above all, mutual trust between leaders and their teams.

The following section **highlights the key principles of modern leadership styles** that can help leaders consciously shape their approach. In practice, leaders rarely commit to a single style - these models serve rather as guiding perspectives.

⁴⁴ [The evolution of leadership: Past insights, present trends, and future directions.](#)
[Journal of Business Research](#), January, 2025

By integrating their core elements, leadership can evolve from a reactive mindset into a deliberate, strategic practice.

Ethical leadership

- Placing the organization's ethical climate at the center of leadership focus
- Modeling fairness, integrity, and moral behavior
- Integrating sustainability and social responsibility into organizational strategy and decision-making
- Promoting diversity, inclusion, and fairness as non-negotiable ethical priorities
- Ensuring transparency and accountability across supply chains and stakeholder relationships

Inclusive leadership

- Creating an environment where every employee feels valued, respected, and included
- Actively seeking diverse perspectives and ensuring all voices are heard in decision-making
- Recognizing and addressing bias to promote fairness and equal opportunity
- Encouraging collaboration and open dialogue built on mutual respect
- Empowering people to contribute their unique strengths to shared goals

Collaborative leadership

- Building trust-based networks within and beyond the organization
- Encouraging cross-functional teamwork and breaking down organizational silos
- Promoting open dialogue, transparency, and knowledge sharing across teams
- Leveraging collective intelligence to drive innovation and solve complex problems
- Aligning collaboration around shared goals to achieve sustainable, long-term growth

Adaptive leadership

- Embracing change with agility and openness to new ideas
- Fostering a culture of trust and strengthening psychological safety that makes experimentation and risk-taking safe
- Encouraging continuous learning and adaptability
- Empowering teams to make decisions and take initiative amid uncertainty
- Challenging outdated assumptions and rethinking strategies for evolving contexts

Human-centered leadership

- Prioritizing empathy, emotional intelligence, and genuine care for employees' well-being
- Creating meaningful connections between individual purpose and organizational goals
- Recognizing that mental health and psychological safety are essential for performance
- Empowering people by listening actively and responding with empathy and transparency

Summary

As volatility and complexity continue to reshape how organizations operate, trust functions as both an **anchor and an accelerator** – anchoring teams in shared values and psychological safety, while accelerating innovation, adaptability, and continuous learning. The direction is clear – employees are increasingly seeking leaders who not only provide direction but also emotional grounding, empathy, and authenticity.

The future of leadership will belong to those who can **lead with both competence and compassion** – combining strategic clarity with emotional intelligence, consistency with openness, and results with integrity.

What you can do now:

While building trust takes time and consistency, there are practical steps every leader can start implementing today to foster a culture of confidence and connection – not an exhaustive list, but a meaningful starting point.

1. Lead with transparency and authenticity

Communicate clearly and openly about decisions, challenges, and changes – even when the answers are not yet final. Authentic leadership also means showing up as a real person – acknowledging mistakes, giving credit generously, and expressing empathy during difficult moments. Transparency without humanity can feel cold, authenticity adds warmth and relatability that strengthen trust across all levels of the organization.

2. Model behavioral integrity

Ensure that your words and actions align – people quickly notice even small gaps between what is promised and what is done. Inconsistencies erode trust faster than major mistakes handled openly and honestly. Over time, trust grows not from flawless execution, but from visible reliability: doing what you say you'll do, and addressing issues directly when you can't.

3. Empower instead of control

Replace micromanagement with autonomy and clarity. Excessive control signals mistrust and stifles creativity, while empowerment builds confidence and ownership. When leaders set clear goals and trust people to deliver, they create motivation, accountability, and often performance that exceeds expectations.

4. Create psychological safety

Encourage questions, mistakes, and dissenting opinions without fear of punishment. When people feel safe to speak up, admit errors, or challenge ideas, collaboration and innovation naturally thrive. Make curiosity and learning visible norms - celebrate experimentation and treat setbacks as opportunities for growth.

5. Invest in relationships

Take time to build genuine connections and mutual understanding within teams - trust grows through empathy and everyday interactions. When leaders show real interest in people's experiences and challenges, it strengthens belonging, openness, and collaboration.

6. Recognize and repair breaches

When trust is broken, acknowledge it quickly and work transparently to rebuild it. Avoiding or minimizing the issue only deepens the damage. Accountability and honest communication restore respect and signal integrity. Admitting mistakes and outlining concrete steps for improvement show that trust is valued - and that relationships matter more than ego or perfection.

These steps may appear simple, yet when practiced consistently, they redefine how people experience leadership. Building trust is not a one-time initiative - it is a daily practice that shapes the culture, credibility, and long-term resilience of every organization.

About WeAreOpen

WeAreOpen is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting companies in building open and psychologically safe workplace cultures. Partnering with us gives your organization access to industry-leading solutions that drive real, measurable results. As a partner, you'll position your company as a leader in inclusive practices, enhancing talent retention, innovation, and business success. Companies with advanced inclusion strategies see up to a 30% increase in innovation and performance⁴⁵.

WeAreOpen Membership

- Brand visibility: Participate in our annual Open Campaign on TV, in print and online, promoting workplace inclusivity across Hungary. Feature your logo on our website and white papers, boosting reputation and employer branding.
- Exclusive events: Network with leaders at our invitation-only events and white paper kick-offs, where the latest trends are shared.
- Expert guidance: Leverage our best practices and strategies tailored to your needs.

WeAreOpen Services

- Inclusivity Audit: Evaluate your current inclusivity efforts with our comprehensive audit and receive an actionable roadmap.
- Employee Survey: Measure employee perceptions of diversity and adjust strategies based on data-driven insights.
- Employee Resource Group facilitation: Support your inclusivity champions with expert facilitation to boost engagement, enhance employee satisfaction, and ultimately improve business performance.
- Workshops & Talks: Strengthen your company culture through expert-led workshops and talks, including our highly sought-after Unconscious Bias Workshop.

Let's build an inclusive future together.
Contact us and learn more at www.weareopen.hu

⁴⁵ [Insights | Russell Reynolds Associates](#)

