



ACTIVE TRUST

Research Summary

Today's workplace can feel uncertain for both employees and leaders. Constant change, shifting expectations, and the growing role of AI means your people are looking to you not just for direction, but for reassurance and stability. Trust matters more than ever, and while employees want leaders who communicate openly and make fair decisions, they also need leaders who can help them feel safe and supported when work feels unpredictable.

Takeaway: Trust is not something earned once and assumed to last. It's active and built through consistent habits that help employees feel supported and confident in the future. Leaders are the first in line to build active trust. How they handle challenges and uncertainty sets the tone for how their employees will adapt to change and disruption.

- Trust becomes stronger when leaders consistently practice six key behaviors: being transparent, reliable, and accountable, exercising thoughtful judgement, creating a psychologically safe place to work, and genuinely caring about employees as people.
- When employees experience these behaviors, they are more likely to feel connected to the organization, believe in its direction, and do great work.
- For people leaders, that means building trust in everyday moments—explaining the “why” behind decisions, following through on commitments, encouraging honest conversations, and recognizing effort in meaningful ways.
- Frequent, personalized recognition can strengthen trust by helping employees feel not only seen and valued, but secure.

Employees with a strong sense of active trust have improved odds of:

6x

Promoting the organization

13x

Staying with the organization

14x

Adapting well to change

Leaders have a significant impact on an employee’s sense of active trust:

LEADER BEHAVIORS	IMPACT ON ODDS OF ACTIVE TRUST
I have the support I need from my direct leader to do my job	13x
My leader is a strong advocate for my development	16x
My leader connects the purpose of my work with my values	16x
Leaders take responsibility for actions and consequences	18x
I’m encouraged by my leader to innovate	14x



→ Get all the data and insights on Active Trust in the Global Culture Report



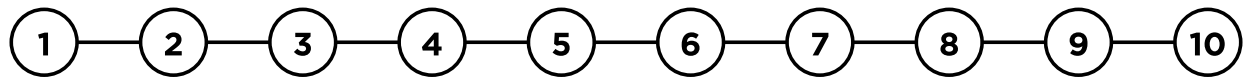
ACTIVE TRUST

Leadership Self-Assessment

On the next page, there are five pairs of statements describing contrasting leadership behaviors related to Active Trust. Select the number within each range that best reflects how your employees would rank your day-to-day leadership behaviors.

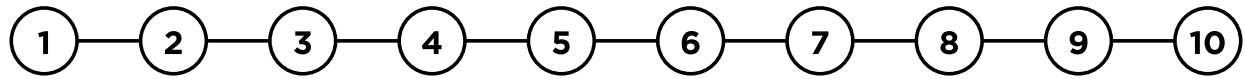
If your employees would strongly agree with the statement on the left, select a number closer to 1. If they would strongly agree with the statement on the right, select a number closer to 10. Select the number that best represents their overall perception of your day-to-day leadership behavior.

Active Trust Leadership Self-Assessment



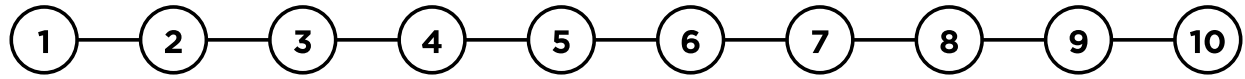
Withholds information
or provides little context
for decisions

Is transparent about
decisions, challenges, and
organizational changes



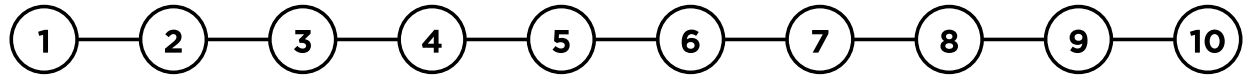
Fails to follow through
consistently on commitments

Consistently follows through on
commitments and promises



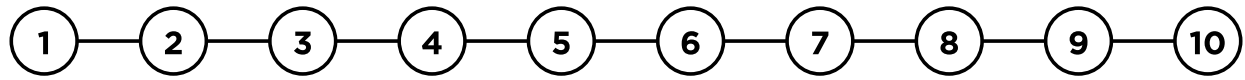
Avoids responsibility
when mistakes occur

Takes accountability for
decisions, actions, and
outcomes



Creates an environment where
employees hesitate to voice
concerns or disagreements

Creates safe spaces for
employees to speak honestly
and challenge ideas



Makes decisions that leave
employees questioning whether
they are valued as people

Demonstrates genuine care
and concern for employees as
people, not just workers

INTERPRETING YOUR RESULTS

After completing the assessment, add all five numbers to get your total score out of 50. Your score reflects how your direct reports are likely to experience your leadership behaviors.

45—50 | Role Model

You consistently demonstrate behaviors that help employees grow, feel valued, trust leadership, and contribute ideas. Your challenge is to sustain your strengths and help others develop similar capabilities.

25—34 | Opportunity for Growth

Employees may experience mixed signals. Your intentions may be positive, but your day-to-day actions may not consistently reinforce the desired behavior. Focused attention in this area can significantly improve the employee experience.

35—44 | Strong Foundation

Employees likely experience you positively in this area most of the time. However, certain situations, competing priorities, or inconsistencies may prevent these behaviors from becoming a defining leadership strength.

< 25 | Immediate Development Priority

Employees may frequently experience behaviors that limit engagement, trust, innovation, or development. Improving in this area is likely to have a meaningful impact on team performance, wellbeing, and culture.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

**Which of my scores most closely reflect the leader I aspire to be?
Which specific behaviors contribute to those strengths?**

Which area received my lowest score? Which daily leadership behaviors might explain that result?

**Which leadership behavior would my team most want me to improve?
What makes that behavior important to them?**

What is one behavior I could stop, start, or strengthen over the next 30 days that would have the greatest positive impact on my team's sense of trust?



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Exercise 1: Start/Stop/Strengthen

What might you **START** doing to build active trust on your team? What should you **STOP** doing so you can truly amplify your team’s potential? How might you **STRENGTHEN** areas where there is opportunity to be even more effective? Think through each of these and make a plan for how you will take action this month, this quarter, and this year.

START: Acknowledging mistakes and uncertainty. Let them know if you don’t have all the answers. Admit to mistakes and clearly state the corrective actions being taken. Thank employees for raising issues and ask for their help in solving challenges.

START: Holding regular one-to-one meetings that address projects as well as workload, wellbeing, and development. Take action when employees give feedback. Provide regular, personalized recognition for their efforts and accomplishments, big and small.

STOP: Withholding information and making decisions behind closed doors. Hiding context and reasoning, or only communicating after a decision has been made, erodes trust. Ask for employee input, answer questions, and communicate often during major changes.

STOP: Treating employees as resources to deliver outcomes. Ignoring workload sustainability and early warning signs of burnout will lead to overwork, stress, and disengagement. Take action and reprioritize work or provide additional resources when employees are overwhelmed.

STRENGTHEN: Accountability and transparency. As a leader, model ownership. Don’t just talk about employee issues and suggestions, follow through with action. Have a place where employees can see which concerns and ideas were brought up and the response from leaders.

STRENGTHEN: Safety and reliability. Publicly recognize employees who promote open dialogue and challenge thinking. Take action on what you promise. Turn best practices into “team operating agreements” and regularly recognize employees who consistently follow through.



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Exercise 2: Guided Reflection

Before a key decision or conversation, ask:

Transparency

Have I explained *why*?

Reliability

Am I doing what I said I would do?

Accountability

Am I owning the outcome?

Judgement

Am I clear about what is informing my decision or action?

Safety

Have I invited honest input from everyone?

Care

Am I demonstrating genuine care for my people?



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Exercise 3: Put It Into Practice

Review this scenario during your next team meeting. As you work through the discussion questions, make sure your team knows that you welcome their thoughts. Take notes so you can reflect on their feedback, make a plan, and then follow up. This demonstrates trust and accountability. After the meeting, set aside some time to work through the Leader Self-Reflection questions on your own.

Mark has always admired and respected Caroline as a leader. She's competent, skilled, and understands the details of the day-to-day work on the manufacturing floor. Yet lately he finds his trust—in the work, the systems, the company leadership—is beginning to falter. Change is happening fast at the company. It seems that every day there is a new program to learn, a new process to implement. Communication and transparency about upcoming changes are inconsistent—things just happen without notice. On top of everything, AI has taken over parts of his work, and while it's freed up some of his time, it's made him worry about the future of his role. With all the uncertainty and disruption, Mark no longer feels like he can “just trust the system,” and that includes Caroline.

TEAM DISCUSSION

How can Caroline establish trust with Mark and the team when changes across the company are happening fast?

How can greater transparency from Caroline and senior leadership improve trust with her team and with Mark?

What steps can Caroline take to help Mark and the team feel more secure in their roles, and how might this impact their sense of trust?

LEADER SELF-REFLECTION

What does change look like at your organization and how is it impacting employees' sense of security and trust?

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What do you do during times of disruption and uncertainty to build trust with your people?

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Write down four things you can do to build trust with your team during a period of rapid change.

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