

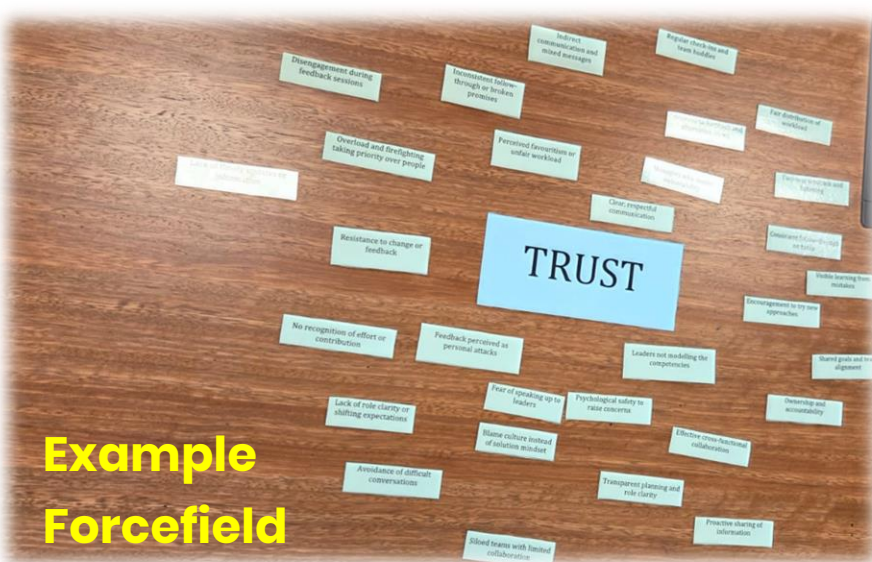
Trust Forcefield

As part of Module 2 for Staff and Module 3 for Leaders; participants explored Trust and, for the Leaders, creating a psychologically safe environment. As part of each programme, we asked participants to consider forces that support and hinder trust in the workplace; the forces we asked participants to work with were gathered from the earlier modules in the Programme.

(Note: while Leaders also explored Psychological Safety, the emphasis of this report will be on trust)

In small groups, Staff and Leaders were asked to weigh up the 'Forces' (those that support and those that hinder trust), which were printed out on card, and to move the cards either closer to, or further away from the central card of trust (see example below). There were five cohorts of staff, split into four smaller groups (a total of 20 'forcefields') and one cohort of Leaders, with five groups.

The forcefield activity offered a clear window into how trust is experienced differently by staff and leaders. While there is alignment on some fundamentals, the perspectives diverge significantly in emphasis.



Staff Insights

For staff, trust is experienced most tangibly at the peer-to-peer level. They highlighted the positive impact of support networks and managers who show genuine care. At the same time, barriers reflected deeper anxieties around personal risk:

- **Supporting forces:**

- Collegiality and teamwork — peers helping each other.
- Approachable managers who listen, act fairly, and show care.
- Transparent communication and clarity of expectations.
- Shared purpose, recognition, and alignment to goals.

- **Hindering forces:**

- Fear of repercussions — being judged, blamed, or penalised.
- Inconsistency in leadership behaviour — “depends on the manager.”
- Lack of follow-through when issues are raised.
- Dominant voices silencing others.

Overall: Trust is strongest horizontally (among colleagues) but fragile vertically (with leadership), often dependent on individual manager behaviour.

Leaders Insights

Leaders tended to frame trust more in terms of systems, clarity, and processes rather than personal emotional risk. They recognised the need for transparency and feedback, but emphasised cultural and structural barriers.

- **Supporting forces:**

- Clarity of roles and expectations, supported by systems.
- Openness to feedback and forums for discussion.
- Demonstrated reliability through meeting commitments.

- **Hindering forces:**

- Perception gaps – decisions misinterpreted as lack of transparency.
- Cultural habits of silence, politeness, and deference to hierarchy.
- Resource pressures such as time and workload.

Overall: Leaders see trust as a product of structural clarity and reliability, with barriers largely external (culture, workload) rather than internal (fear of consequences).

Points of Comparison

The contrast between staff and leader perspectives reveals a trust gap:

- Common ground: Both groups value clarity, consistency, and openness, and both recognise silence as a blocker.
- Staff lens: Trust hinges on *emotional safety* and consistent behaviours.
- Leader lens: Trust hinges on *systems and reliable delivery*.
- Perception gap: Staff view barriers as personal risks (fear of blame, judgement), while leaders view barriers as cultural habits or misunderstandings.
- Location of trust: Staff rely most on peers; leaders believe trust is anchored in leadership reliability and structures.

The findings suggest that leaders may underestimate the emotional risks staff feel when speaking up. Staff want visible assurance that raising issues or contributing ideas will not backfire. Closing this gap requires leaders to actively reduce perceived personal risk, not just reinforce systems and clarity.

Most Impactful Forces

Following the forcefield activity above, each group was asked to highlight the three most impactful forces that hinder and three that support trust. Cohorts put their most impactful forces on the wall for the group to see.

Staff – Most Impactful Forces

Hindering Trust

- Poor communication & lack of clarity – unclear instructions, inconsistent messages, or withheld information erode confidence.
- Favouritism & unequal treatment – perceptions of unfairness or bias in how people are treated undermines psychological safety.
- Overwork & workload pressure – excessive demands create stress and reduce space for open dialogue and collaboration.

Supporting Trust

- Open and respectful communication – clarity, transparency, and the ability to voice opinions safely.
- Collaboration & teamwork – willingness to support one another builds confidence in colleagues.
- Respect & fairness – equal treatment and recognition of effort strengthen trust.

Leaders – Most Impactful Forces

Hindering Trust

- Lack of follow-through / accountability gaps – when promises aren't kept, trust erodes quickly.
- Favouritism / bias – uneven opportunities or perceived preferential treatment damage credibility.
- Micromanagement / control – limiting autonomy signals a lack of confidence in staff, which hinders trust.

Supporting Trust

- Transparency & honesty – being upfront about challenges and decisions builds credibility.
- Consistency of actions & words – leaders modelling what they expect reinforces reliability.
- Empowerment & support – giving staff autonomy and showing belief in their capabilities strengthens trust.

Comparison

Shared Hindrance: Both staff and leaders highlight *favouritism / unequal treatment* as a top barrier. This is a core issue across the organisation.

Different Angles:

- Staff focus on workload pressure and communication gaps.
- Leaders focus on follow-through and micromanagement.

Shared Supports: Both groups see transparency / communication and fairness as central to building trust.

Different Emphasis on Supports:

- Staff value team collaboration.
- Leaders highlight empowerment and consistency.

The forcefield analysis shows clear overlap: both staff and leaders recognise fairness and transparency as non-negotiable foundations for trust. At the same time, staff feel they are given the brunt of workload and unclear communication is prominent, while leaders are more conscious of accountability lapses and micromanagement risks. Importantly, both groups agree that favouritism undermines trust, signalling this as a systemic issue to address. The positive forces, however, provide a pathway forward: clearer communication, consistent behaviours, fair treatment, and empowered collaboration can create the scaffolding for stronger trust across the organisation.

Together, the picture suggests trust is built not only through fair and transparent behaviours but also by addressing the structural pressures staff feel and the behavioural consistency leaders model.

Addressing the Gaps

- **Workload & Pressure (Staff)**
 - Review workload distribution and resourcing.
 - Encourage open conversations about capacity and prioritisation.
 - Train managers in recognising early signs of overload.
- **Communication Gaps (Staff)**
 - Set up regular “clarity checks” in meetings (recap actions, confirm expectations).
 - Use consistent channels for key updates to reduce mixed messaging.
 - Model open Q&A from leaders to show it’s safe to seek clarity.

- **Accountability & Follow-through (Leaders)**

- Establish visible tracking of commitments (what was promised, what was delivered).
- Link accountability to leadership behaviours in performance reviews.
- Encourage leaders to admit when expectations shift or when mistakes are made.

- **Micromanagement (Leaders)**

- Provide coaching on delegation and trust-building.
- Encourage “empowerment moments” where leaders give staff ownership of decisions.
- Build reflection into leadership practice: *Am I enabling, or controlling?*

Areas to Build Upon

- **Fairness / No Favouritism**

- Continue reinforcing equal access to opportunities and recognition.
- Use transparent criteria for task allocation, promotions, and rewards.

- **Communication & Transparency**

- Celebrate examples where openness led to better outcomes.
- Make “speaking out and being heard” a cultural marker of success.

- **Collaboration & Empowerment**

- Create more cross-team projects that allow staff to collaborate directly.
- Leaders to highlight stories of empowered teams achieving results.

- **Consistency of Actions**

- Anchor trust in the idea that *what we say and what we do must match*.



- Train leaders to role-model behaviours, even under pressure.

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