

A veyter publication

Design-in Trust:

Your ultimate power move.

This article is the first in our **Trust-in-Action** series.

It explores the dynamics of trust within organisations and gives senior leaders a fresh, practical look at how trust drives performance; from reducing turnover and sick leave to lifting innovation and execution. We unpack what trust is (and isn't), how it shows up in your organisation and what you can do to deliberately build trust from the bottom up.

2025

...what's next?



Design-in Trust

Trust is a force multiplier, arguably your organisation's most undervalued performance engine.

Without trust, there is no traction

People worry their business leaders are lying.

There's a worrying trend quietly taking hold: trust in institutions, from government to business, is steadily declining.

According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, 68% of people worry that their business leaders purposely mislead others, a 12% increase over the past decade.^[1] One in four employees do not trust their employer, and organisations overestimate their workforce's level of trust by nearly 40%.^[2]

With 2025 and 2026 shaping up to be years of uncertainty, marked by labour shortages and relentless pressure to do more with less, trust is no longer just a "nice to have". It has become a strategic imperative.

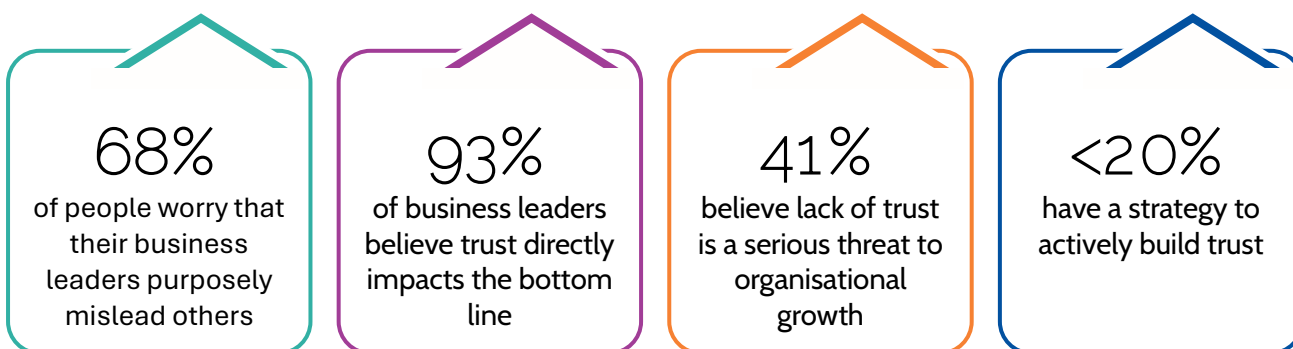
PwC's 2024 Trust Survey found that 93% of business leaders believe trust directly impacts their bottom line and 41% see a lack of trust as a serious threat to organisational growth. Yet fewer than 20% have a strategy to actively build it.^[3]

Trust is the ultimate power move.

Think of trust as the invisible glue that holds teams together. When trust is high, teams move faster, take smarter risks and bounce back more quickly when things go wrong.

But when trust is missing? Everything slows down. Bureaucracy takes over and execution stalls. People play it safe; they stay quiet and focus on self-preservation instead of protecting the mission. Good people leave, and your best ideas die in silence.

As directors, CEOs and operational leaders push for better numbers during volatile times, the organisations that intentionally design-in trust will thrive, while the rest struggle to keep pace, losing their competitive advantage.



Making Sense of Trust as a Living System

*Trust is the invisible glue that holds teams together.
It is the spark that propels high performance.*

Trust is a dynamic, co-created state

At its core, trust can be defined as the confidence and willingness to take a risk on someone because you believe they are capable, honest, fair, and have your back. It is relying on others because you expect them to do the right thing and do it well.

We now understand that trust behaves more like a living human system in your organisation.

It isn't a singular, static construct but a dynamic interplay of what people think, feel, and do. It grows or erodes based on how people lead, how they listen, and how they treat each other in the small moments.

Trust is dynamic and relational, shaped by feedback loops, decision-making patterns and how power and responsibility are distributed.^[4] It requires ongoing investment, and awareness of emotional, ethical, and cognitive dimensions, especially in complex, hybrid, and multi-cultural workplaces.

There are four trust-types

Despite using differing language, current research generally aligns around a set of foundational elements, broadly grouped into four trust-types; competence-based, affective-based, integrity-based and vulnerability-based, as illustrated in the corresponding image.^[4-9]

These types shape how we build, rebuild and sustain trust in today's workplaces. Each trust-type plays a vital role in creating a work environment where people feel competent, safe, valued, respected and motivated.



Experiencing the Trust Dividend

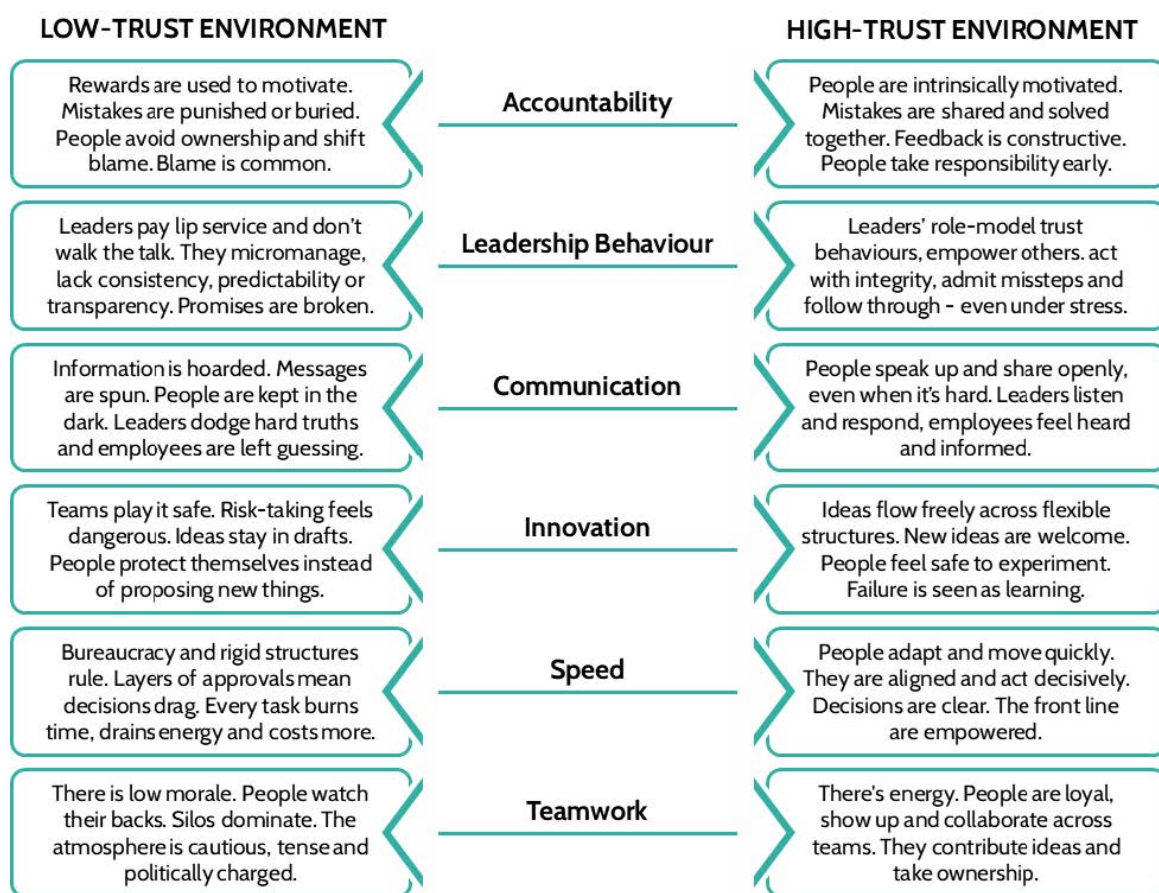
*Every moment you are either building trust or eroding it.
There is no neutral.*

Trust moves fast, bureaucracy does not

In 2006, Stephen Covey published his seminal book, “The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything”, and introduced us to two powerful and enduring concepts that we still use twenty years later:

- **The trust tax:** The hidden surcharge of low trust that organisations pay in delays, politics, withheld effort, lost ideas and missed potential.
- **The trust dividend:** The compounding benefit of high trust delivered through alignment, shared purpose, faster execution, stronger collaboration and more resilience when it counts.^[10]

Understanding these concepts helps us to recognise how trust, or the lack of it, shows up in real life and affects daily behaviours within organisations. Some of these behaviours are illustrated below.



Unpacking the Real-World Impact

If trust feels intangible, try running a business without it.

Why act on trust?

Intuition tells us that trust is a key enabler of commitment and collaboration in the workplace. Now, the data overwhelmingly confirms it: companies with high internal trust consistently outperform their low-trust peers across a range of financial and non-financial metrics.

Trust impacts commitment, job satisfaction and employee tenure.

Employees with high-trust relationships at work reported:

- 76% more engagement
- 50% higher productivity
- 74% less stress
- 40% less burnout
- 13% fewer sick days

Source: P. Zak. (2017). *The Neuroscience of Trust*. HBR.^{[15][16]}

Trust directly fuels motivation, innovation, and resilience.

Actively investing in trust-building significantly improves employee engagement and leads to:

- 50% fewer employees looking for another job
- 260% higher employee motivation to work
- 41% less absenteeism
- 48% greater innovation

Source: Reichheld et al. (2023). *How to build a high-trust workplace*. MIT Sloan.^[2]

Trust at every level of the organisation reduces negative workplace outcomes.

High-trust organisations experience:

- 21% to 51% lower turnover
- 78% lower absenteeism and improved employee wellbeing
- 63% fewer safety incidents
- 58% fewer patient safety incidents
- 18 – 22% boost in productivity and better customer loyalty
- 23% average increase in profitability

Source: Gallup Inc. (2024). *State of the global workplace report*. www.gallup.com.^[17]

We know that trust affects how loyal employees feel, how well they perform and how satisfied they are with their jobs. When employees believe their company is genuinely trustworthy and values-driven, their emotional connection, pride and commitment to the organisation are significantly boosted.

They're more likely to go above and beyond in their roles, ultimately leading to greater job satisfaction and longer job tenure.^{[11][12]} High trust amongst team members also encourages people to collaborate, share ideas and experiences more freely and bring more energy to the table.^{[13][14]}

These stats and facts aren't just interesting, they point to trust as a critical lever for strategic advantage, something directors and leadership teams can no longer afford to overlook.

When trust breaks - illustrations from the real-world

Trust shows up powerfully in moments of crisis and change. From cybersecurity meltdowns to leadership transitions, trust proves itself as a stabiliser and a growth accelerator, as illustrated by the two real-world case studies of Maersk and Uber summarised below.

MAERSK

The Problem Space:

Global shipping giant Maersk was hit by the devastating 'NotPetya' cyberattack in 2017 that crippled global operations and systems.

Trust-in-Action:

Maersk's leadership responded with radical transparency, sharing real-time updates internally and externally, empowering teams to act, and treating recovery as a collective challenge. Their approach exemplified credibility, reliability, and institutional trust.

Outcomes

Their response fuelled trust, enabled a faster, coordinated recovery; rebuilt internal confidence and alignment and boosted their external reputation.

[18]

UBER

The Problem Space:

Under CEO Travis Kalanick, Uber's internal culture was marked by secrecy, fear, silos and toxic competition that resulted in dysfunction and reputational damage. Despite rapid external growth, integrity was compromised, innovation slowed, and psychological safety collapsed.

Trust-in-Action:

After Kalanick's exit, the new executive team began rebuilding trust. They introduced new cultural norms emphasising transparency, ethical leadership and inclusivity. Initiatives also included revising core values and implementing structural reforms.

Outcomes

Gradually, the organisation shifted from a fear-based culture to one grounded in empathy and accountability, improving employee morale and public perception.

[19][20]

Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Action

*Organisations don't experience trust as theory.
They live it through systems, behaviours and experiences.*

Six dimensions for Trust-in-Action

Contrary to popular belief, psychological safety and transparency are not synonymous with trust and acting on them alone is not enough. Trust-building requires simultaneous action across emotional, ethical, and cognitive elements.

To bridge the gap between academic insight and leadership action, **veyter** has developed a practical and powerful blueprint to drive meaningful change. Refreshing the outdated concepts with a more contemporary frame that is grounded in real-world experience, behavioural data and modern trust theory, Trust-in-Action defines six core, intertwined dimensions that organisations amplify collectively for impact.

These dimensions represent actionable and observable signals alongside intentional leadership moves that guide trust-building efforts, from strategy design and executive decision-making to organisational structure and workforce experience.



Our Trust-in-Action blueprint defines six interconnected dimensions:

Integrity: Doing what you say, applying the same rules consistently.

Transparency: Knowing what's really going on and why it matters.

Competency: Showing you're up to the task, with skill and credibility.

Empathy: Demonstrating care, value and respect

Empowerment: Trusting each other to think, decide and lead.

Belonging: Being yourself, inviting others to speak up and show up fully.

Trust-in-Action

blueprint

DIMENSION	LEADERSHIP MOVES THAT MATTER	SIGNALS
INTEGRITY <i>People do what they say and apply the same rules to everyone</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Uphold principles and shared values, don't outsource to HR. ➤ Hold people accountable for honesty and ethical behaviour. ➤ Be consistent in decisions and own them, even the tough ones. ➤ Make follow-through visible and non-negotiable. ➤ Share mistakes and lessons learned publicly. ➤ Apply standards equally, regardless of title or performance. 	<i>Consistency Honesty Predictability Fairness</i>
TRANSPARENCY <i>People know what's really going on and why it matters</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Be real, not perfect. ➤ Share the "why" behind decisions, the context and not just the conclusion. ➤ Implement ecosystems and feedback loops for information flow. ➤ Invite challenging questions and bad news, acknowledge uncertainty. 	<i>Authenticity Clarity Informed-ness</i>
COMPETENCY <i>People believe leaders and teams are up to the task and will deliver</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Prioritise capability in promotions, not just tenure or loyalty. ➤ Invest in leadership development tied to business-critical skills. ➤ Train managers in listening and coaching skills, not just task delegation. ➤ Be honest about limitations, admit unknowns and seek answers. ➤ Back others publicly in high-stakes forums. 	<i>Capability Credibility Confidence Momentum</i>
EMPATHY <i>People feel seen, valued and respected</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Listen actively and be present. ➤ Encourage deeper conversations focused on the person, not just the project. ➤ Pause to recognise emotional cues and situational needs, adjusting your leadership style to respond with care. ➤ Call out disrespect or exclusion immediately - silence signals complicity. 	<i>Humanity Dignity Care Connection</i>
EMPOWERMENT <i>People are trusted to think, decide, lead and problem solve</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Create space and empower people to define and solve problems, especially those closest to the action. ➤ Push decision-making closer to the front line and give the workforce guardrails, not rules and handcuffs. ➤ Back workforce-led innovation with real budget and authority. ➤ Recognise and reward initiative, not just compliance. 	<i>Creativity Ownership Autonomy</i>
BELONGING <i>People speak up, show up, and challenge without fear or penalty</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Make it safe to show up and participate fully and honestly. ➤ Create space for diverse voices and visible moments of inclusion during team rituals, decision making and recognition. ➤ Model vulnerability - admit mistakes, ask for input, show growth. ➤ Acknowledge those who foster a sense of belonging in the business. 	<i>Inclusion Collaboration Psychological safety</i>

Embedding and Sustaining Trust

Trust isn't a side effect of good strategy — it is the strategy.

Operationalise Trust-in-Action

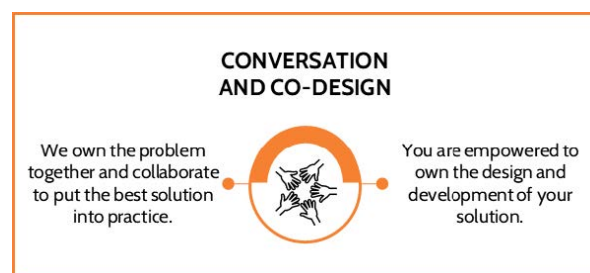
We've all heard it, "culture change is hard" and "building trust takes time". These myths deserve to be challenged. Trust-in-Action doesn't have to be tough or a slow, top-down slog.

Real and immediate shifts in how people work together can quickly, and effectively, cultivate trust from the ground up to create the conditions for organisational alignment, speed, resilience and performance.

One of the most powerful ways to operationalise Trust-in-Action is to embed worker-led problem solving methods into your organisation's DNA.

When the people closest to the daily work lead the charge on diagnosing business challenges and resolving performance barriers, it unlocks and simultaneously activates all six dimensions of Trust-in-Action.

- When leaders and teams follow through on commitments and deliver solutions, they demonstrate **Integrity**, reliability and accountability at every step. Granting teams authority, agency and resource to decide and act also builds the autonomy and confidence required by the **Empowerment** dimensions.
- Involving diverse perspectives fuels **Empathy** by deepening connection and respect for different lived experiences, while workers demonstrate **Transparency** by defining problems, seeking insights and openly discussing challenges, fostering clarity, collaboration and honesty.
- Problem solving sharpens creative and critical thinking, collaboration and facilitation skills, while also fostering a shared purpose that unites people across roles and functions, addressing both the **Competency** and **Belonging** dimensions.



Impact efficiency and effectiveness

There is plenty of evidence to support the positive impacts of workforce-led solutions.

Companies, like Toyota, Google and 3M, that invest in workforce-led innovation, have consistently enjoyed higher operational efficiency, sustained competitive advantage and stronger employee retention.^{[21][22]}

Employee-driven ideas within technology companies are 22% more likely to succeed than top-down directives. Furthermore, organisations that actively listen and act on recommendations from frontline workers are 80% more likely to implement better ways of doing things.^{[23][24]}

In short, worker-led problem solving doesn't just solve problems. It creates a practical, repeatable "impact wave" that ripples through the organisation, establishing a self-reinforcing trust loop and unleashing productivity from the ground up.

Design your strategy around trust-building

Building on the activation of trust from the ground up through worker-led problem solving, the next priority is to design-in trust into your strategy.

There is a real art to effective strategy, and when trust sits at the core, it shifts from being an abstract value or intent to a design principle. It becomes embedded into your organisation's purpose, the way decisions are made, and how systems that govern everyday work are built.

Using courageous questions to confront what's really happening beneath the surface, we can elevate Boardroom and executive leadership team conversations to address trust as a core element of strategy, differentiation and performance.

ELEVATE THE CONVERSATION WITH COURAGEOUS QUESTIONS

At **veyter** we know great strategy starts with bold conversations and courageous questions that get to the heart of purpose and spark real performance.

Unless we confront the often uncomfortable reality of low trust, with a genuine intent to listen and learn, we won't ever reach our full potential.

Asking questions like "How well do we understand where trust is eroding in our business?" and having inclusive conversations at all levels opens the door for Trust-in-Action and also for trust in strategy.

Measure what matters

Tracking trust within your organisation is as important as monitoring any sales metrics, or any other operational key performance indicator. In today's data-driven world, leaders need to move beyond gut feel and use advanced analytics to measure and manage trust as a strategic asset and a serious performance driver.

veyter is developing the Mobius Index – an impact measurement tool designed to assess and monitor Trust-in-Action.

Mapped to the six dimensions highlighted earlier, the Index combines quantitative signals (based on specific observable behaviours) with qualitative insight (through open reflections and pattern analysis).

The Mobius Index will deliver a clear profile of where trust is strong, where it's fractured, and why. It will help design the highest impact leadership moves and approaches to target the specific dimensions and signals within your business that you need to address.

We plan to pilot the Mobius Index with selected partners and teams in 2025 and 2026. If you're interested in helping to shape how trust gets measured and embedded within organisations, contact us -we'd love to build with you!

Start making moves!

For directors, senior executives and leaders, the evidence is clear: investing in trust is a direct investment in business performance. If you're ready to move from good intentions to deliberate design, we are here to help. Meanwhile, you can start with these initial actions:

- 01** **Treat trust as a living system** that is embedded within strategy and system design.
- 02** **Get focused** on the six dimensions of Trust-in-Action and assess your pain points.
- 03** **Set a bold vision** with your directors and senior leaders and have courageous conversations.
- 04** **Be explicit and intentional** by incorporating Trust-in-Action leadership moves.
- 05** **Start small** and run micro-experiments with your workforce – get problem solving!
- 06** **Track the ripple effects** on your business and celebrate the impact of Trust-in-Action.

And finally, bring optimism.

In times of change, optimism sparks momentum. When people believe in the destination and are vested in the process, they will exceed your expectations of what is possible. That is why trust is the engine behind execution, and your most strategic advantage.

We are here to help.

We are here and ready to help you design-in trust into your strategy, systems and feedback loops. We can guide you in how to bring Trust-in-Action to life in your organisation and reap the benefits of worker-led problem solving embedded into your DNA.

Subscribe through our website for the latest news and updates and received a copy of the next instalment of the **Trust-in-Action** series, with insights on trust in the digital age as well as building trust across distributed teams.

So don't be shy! Please email us on contact@veyter.com. We'd also love to hear from you.

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Listed below are the sources and studies referenced throughout this article, providing the research foundation behind key points discussed and offering readers a path to explore the research in more detail.

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About us.

At **veyter**, we love working on complex, sticky problems. We help our clients to navigate business and leadership challenges in a competitive world, using our knowledge in strategy, leadership, risk, sustainability, health and safety.

We are a team of experienced advisors, designers, facilitators and coaches, adept in thinking creatively and problem solving. We build trustworthy relationships; collaborating with you to design and deliver strategy and change programs with measurable outcomes and sustained impact.

We work with various industries, from mining and energy to finance and property. Our clients include multi-national corporations, Australian enterprises and local start-ups. Our breadth of knowledge, diverse experience and interdisciplinary thinking enhances our understanding of each client's specific needs.

We pride ourselves on being flexible and respond quickly to changing needs. Unlike larger consultancies, our smaller size enables us to offer a more personal experience. There is no cookie - cutter approach at **veyter**.

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Reach us at contact@veyter.com

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... what's next?

