CIPD

Trust and psychological safety

An evidence review

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Trust and psychological safety: An evidence review

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1 Introduction

Why trust and psychological safety?

It's often commented that trust is an essential ingredient for healthy and sustainable organisations. It's also observed that trust is precarious during uncertain economic times and that corporate scandals undermine trust seriously and rapidly.

Trust is important because organisations are social entities, based on human interactions and reliant on teamwork, coordination, communication and collaboration. Success depends on how well colleagues work together, which depends on team environment and the strength of interpersonal connections. Central to these dynamics are the extent to which team members can rely on each other and feel comfortable sharing their ideas, admitting mistakes or disagreeing constructively.

Trust and the related construct of psychological safety have captured the attention of HR professionals and business leaders. But they are by no means a popular fad. They are also supported by a strong body of research as concepts that stack up and can be measured, and in practical terms, are a foundation of healthy and sustainable high-performing teams.

It may be a simplification to say that there is a crisis of trust, but there are clearly challenges. For example, polling data from Gallup indicates that in the US, trust in key institutions – such as corporations, banks, government, newspapers and organised religion – is low or in decline.[1] One of the best-known voices on trust is the Edelman Trust Barometer, although it is worth noting that its international comparisons have faced claims of bias.[2]

Focus of the review

For employers to build trust and psychological safety, they need to understand how they work. This evidence review aims to answer the following questions:

- What are trust and psychological safety?
- Why are trust and psychological safety important?
- What drives trust and psychological safety?
- How can we measure trust and psychological safety?

An evidence-based approach

We live in an age of information overload, in which it is easy to be swayed by the latest fads or received wisdom. Effective decision-making can be difficult – it requires us to critically question our assumptions, not be biased by anecdotes and avoid cherry-picking the evidence that confirms our world view. Evidence-based practice gives well-established approaches to help with this. Hard proof is elusive, but we can identify the best available evidence, including the most promising options, to achieve our desired outcomes. Employers and HR professionals need to take note of this if they are to identify best bets for action.

This evidence review summarises the best available scientific research on psychological safety and intra-organisational trust, providing insights and practical recommendations. It is based on two rapid evidence assessments (REAs), a shortened form of a systematic review, so can be considered a reliable summary of the strongest research in the area. To read about our methodology and technical aspects of the studies on which this report is based, see the accompanying scientific summaries available on the CIPD website.

We also present insights and expertise from a group of leading people professionals, who joined a roundtable discussion on the evidence review.

2 What are trust and psychological safety?

The construct of psychological safety was first introduced in 1965 by Edgar Schein and Warren Bennis and has gained widespread popularity over the past two decades, notably through the work of Harvard professor Amy Edmondson. It refers to how people perceive potential threats or rewards when they take interpersonal risks at work. In a psychologically safe work environment, people tend to be less defensive and focus on accomplishing team goals and preventing problems, instead of just protecting themselves. They feel at ease offering original ideas, sharing different viewpoints, asking questions or admitting mistakes, knowing that they won't face punishment or ridicule from their colleagues.

As one of our HR leaders commented, it is important to see psychological safety as supporting quality interactions within teams:

> *"Psychological safety is an absence of fear but also about understanding that people might have a completely different point of view to you and it's okay for them to express that. That is quite important for the future of our organisations. As we become more diverse, it's more and more likely that people might not agree with everyone on every issue."* **Kerri-Ann O'Neill, Chief People Officer, Ofcom**

Psychological safety is related to trust, but these two concepts have a different focus and are not interchangeable. They can be seen as different sides of the same coin – trust focuses on one's view of other people's character and behaviour, and psychological safety focuses on one's own actions. Trust represents a person's openness to expose themselves to others, demonstrating

their willingness to give the other individual (or party) the benefit of the doubt. Psychological safety captures how much a person believes that others will give them the benefit of the doubt when they take risks. Moreover, psychological safety is usually seen as a dynamic *within groups*, with team members contributing to and sharing similar perceptions of it (that is, an *intra-group* dynamic), whereas trust generally relates to interactions between two individuals or parties (that is, an *inter-group* dynamic).

There are different ways of thinking about trust. First, trust can manifest at various levels within organisations, spanning from individual interactions to team dynamics, departmental relationships, and even broader connections involving stakeholders like customers and investors. As one of our HR leaders commented, trust is multidirectional:

> *"How do you support someone to build trust within the business, but also the flipside – how do they trust the business themselves? There's kind of a duality in that. It's not just about recruiting someone, but the first three to six months in a business, it's about how the people start to trust that person in their abilities and how they feel trusted."* **Gareth Neale, Head of Human Resources, Crimson Hotels**

Additionally, trust within an organisation can be categorised based on the nature of the relationship between the trustor and trustee, whether it's horizontal, such as among peers and colleagues, or vertical, as in the relationship between a leader and subordinates. Lastly, trust can either stem from emotional connections and feelings (known as affect-based trust) or from perceptions of reliability, competence or motivation (referred to as cognitive-based trust). These factors can be influenced by various things, including perceptions of leader behaviour:

> *"[Trust in senior leaders] needs to be supported by other leadership levels in the business because an employee [...] will only see snippets of what those senior leaders do and there needs to be some context to support that. So if, for example, [the leaders are] only presenting good news messages, but [employees] can hear the bad news is going on, it doesn't make them look authentic."*
> **Heidi Khoshtaghaza, Group HR Director, Bellway Homes Limited**

3 Why are trust and psychological safety important?

Trust and psychological safety are linked to a wide range of positive outcomes. These include individual attitudes, team behaviours and environment, and overall performance. Below we consider each of these in turn and look at the contexts in which trust and psychological safety are especially important.

Table 1: Outcomes related to trust and psychological safety (effect sizes)

Outcome		Factor	
		Psychological safety	Trust
Individual attitudes	Satisfaction	●●●○○	n/a
	Commitment	●●●○○	n/a
	Engagement	●●●○○	n/a
	(Low) turnover	●●●○○	n/a
Team dynamics	Information-sharing	●●●○○	●●●●●
	Cohesion	●●●●○	●●●●●
	Satisfaction	n/a	●●●●●
	Commitment	n/a	●●●●●
	Co-worker support	●●●○○	n/a
Learning and development	Team learning	n/a	●●●●●
Performance	Task performance	●●●○○	●●●○○
	Contextual performance	●●●○○	●●●●○
	Innovative performance	●●●○○	●●●○○

Notes: Effect sizes indicate positive influence on the specified outcomes. We interpret statistics using a standard rule of thumb: ●●●●● very large; ●●●●○ large, anybody can easily see the difference; ●●●○○ moderate, visible to the naked eye of an expert or careful observer; ●●○○○ small, the difference probably needs to be measured to be detected; ●○○○○ very small. n/a: effect sizes not available. For more detail, see the accompanying scientific summary.

Individual attitudes

Psychologically safe work environments have a very clear positive impact on employee attitudes. People tend to feel more satisfied with their jobs, are more likely to be committed and engaged in their work, and to take initiative. They are also more likely to feel empowered and motivated to fulfil their roles, strive to contribute to their team and the organisation, and stay with the organisation longer. The specific impact of trust on individual attitudes is less clear. However, scientific research shows that trusting others is linked to increased risk-taking and reduced counterproductive work behaviours (for example, unethical behaviour and bullying).

Team dynamics

The positive effects of trust and psychological safety extend to team dynamics. Both play crucial roles in fostering learning behaviours within teams. Team members who have trust and feel the team is a safe place are more likely to share information and support each other. They also show stronger cohesion, as well as team satisfaction and commitment.

Performance

Finally, the presence of trust and psychological safety is linked to improved performance outcomes, both for individuals and teams. This includes a person's direct contribution to organisational results, such as fulfilling job-specific tasks (referred to as task performance). It also includes behaviours that may not directly impact organisational performance but contribute to the organisational, social and psychological environment (for example, going the extra mile, adhering to organisational rules and policies, and helping colleagues – known as contextual performance). Trust also plays a role in fostering innovative behaviours, like the development of new products or the presentation of innovative ideas (referred to as innovative performance). Conversely, in an environment of counterproductive behaviours, such as making threats, disregarding safety procedures, arriving late or being absent, this is less likely to occur.

"We did a lot of work on trust and [... saw positive impacts on] the productivity and ... performance of the business ... as a result of the trusting relationship. You saved time because you didn't have to think 'Am I writing this email in the right way?' It's just, 'I'm gonna say how it is, this is my intention.' [This] created that sort of dialogue and you could physically see an increase in the performance of the business because we were wasting less time." **Sue Swanborough, Group HR Director, Aquila Food Group Holdings**

When is trust especially important?

In certain contexts, the role of trust and psychological safety is particularly important. For example, teams with a learning orientation only truly experience team learning when psychological safety is high. The same counts for certain leadership styles, including empowering and transformational leadership. These styles lead to positive outcomes (including innovation, proactive behaviour, constructive voice, organisational citizenship behaviour, occupational safety), but only when employees perceive their organisation or team as a place where they can express themselves without fear – in other words, when they feel psychologically safe.

Trust becomes especially important when interpersonal connections are weaker, such as in virtual teams or teams formed for a relatively short duration. Building trust should be a particular focus of establishing virtual or hybrid teams (see our evidence review on *Developing effective virtual teams* for more).

Trust also becomes crucial where team members heavily depend on each other, for example when they bring diverse specialised knowledge and skills that complement each other and when teams need to make group decisions. Managers should also pay close attention to trust when there is strong competition among team members, groups or departments, or when people are working to different performance goals that potentially clash. For example, when multiple departments compete for ownership of a particular project, a lack of trust may impede information-sharing or collaboration and hinder project success.

Trust and psychological safety are especially important in contexts where human error can have devastating consequences: in healthcare, for instance, where correct drug administration can be a life-or-death matter, or in aviation, where checks and precautions are crucial for safety. In such high-stakes environments, it is essential that people can speak up, report errors early and ask for help, so problems are found and fixed quickly.

Psychological safety and trust can also be especially important during organisational change. In a world that is constantly changing, and where the future is uncertain, trust in leadership and confidence in the organisation's chosen direction is key to the success of transformational initiatives. During times of change, people may feel exposed and vulnerable. They may grapple with more mistakes, and their skills and knowledge gaps become more evident. In an environment that encourages open communication, where people can admit their lack of understanding and ask for support, it is easier to overcome challenges and adapt quickly to the changes.

"I cannot think of anything that's ... more important than trust in terms of a company's culture: what it's like to work there, how people feel about each other and particularly the trust that people have for leaders." **Andrea Wareham, non-executive director and former Chief People Officer, Pret A Manger**

> **Recommendations for practice**
>
> - Aim to strengthen trust and psychological safety throughout your organisation for individuals, teams and departments. Encourage curiosity. Avoid punishing questions and mistakes. Instead, embrace them, where possible, as valuable learning opportunities.
> - Explain the importance of trust and psychological safety as factors that enhance team learning and team performance.
>
> Pay particular attention to building trust and psychological safety in these contexts:
>
> - remote or virtual work settings, where social connections tend to be weaker
> - industries or functions where decision-making is a high-stakes affair
> - if there's a conflict of interest in highly competitive environments.

4 What drives trust and psychological safety?

Trust and psychological safety play an important role in individual, team and organisational outcomes. To strengthen them, it is helpful to grasp how they work.

Several factors foster trust and psychological safety within teams and organisations. In broad terms, these can be grouped as:

- organisational climate
- leadership and people management
- fairness and conflict management
- team tenure
- personal characteristics.

Below we discuss these areas in turn.

Organisational climate

'Organisational climate' is closely related to the concept of 'culture' but is more specific and actionable. It refers to collective views of an organisation's policies, practices and procedures, and is another element supporting psychological safety.

Particularly relevant is the concept of *trust climate*. Trust climate refers to how people perceive their organisation's policies, practices and procedures in terms of their impact on trust. However, it is worth noting that trust climate is not a very well-established construct and the evidence supporting it is weak (compared with other dimensions of organisational climate).

Also linked to psychological safety is diversity and inclusion climate. In a favourable diversity or inclusion climate, employees believe that their organisation treats everyone with respect and offers equal opportunities for career growth, and they are more likely to feel that it's a safe environment in which to take appropriate risks.

Our evidence review on organisational culture and climate explores the difference between these concepts and why we recommend a particular focus on climates. It also looks at the evidence on other organisational climates related to trust and psychological safety, in particular inclusion climate.

Recommendations for practice

- Communicate and promote the values that sit behind psychological safety and trust, such as the importance of focusing on team goals, jointly owning and solving problems, taking interpersonal risks, admitting mistakes and not being defensive.

- Communicate the organisation's efforts, goals and accomplishments regarding diversity and inclusion, and back up with interventions (eg diversity training).

Leadership and people management

Leaders and line managers play a central role in fostering psychological safety. When they give autonomy, share power or encourage participative decision-making, team members feel empowered to speak up and suggest improvements.

Leaders are responsible for defining targets for their teams, although as we explore in our evidence review on performance management, goals can focus on very different things with different effects. To reinforce psychological safety, leaders should focus not only on performance targets, but also on goals that prioritise mastery – that is, individuals' development of advanced skills and job capabilities. Performance-oriented goals are still important, but when working on new tasks or problems that are complex or not well structured, mastery goals play a distinct role. They encourage employees to see challenges as opportunities for personal and professional growth, rather than an evaluation or judgement. This perspective fosters an environment in which employees feel at ease speaking up without fear of negative consequences.

More broadly, studies show the influence of how team members perceive their leaders, in several different ways. Leaders being regarded as 'authentic' (for example, self-aware, responsive to feedback and non-manipulative), benevolent, ethical, humble, supportive or trustworthy builds psychological safety within a team and the organisation. The same counts for leaders perceived as non-judgemental, empathetic and respectful listeners. And, not surprisingly, leaders being perceived as abusive, untrustworthy or psychopathic undermines psychological safety. Some felt that leaders have to work harder at this today than before:

What drives trust and psychological safety?

"A number of years ago because somebody was in a senior role they would automatically gain trust and respect due to their level of authority. A number of younger people have less trust and confidence in institutions and the government, so they are looking to their organisations to provide this. So that leadership and management capability is becoming much more important now."

Heidi Khoshtaghaza, Group HR Director, Bellway Homes

Recommendations for practice

Business leaders and people managers play a central role in fostering trust and psychological safety in their teams, both in their own behaviours and in those they encourage among others. People professionals should support them to:

- Involve people in the decisions that matter to them or where they can add value.

- Give work autonomy: allow employees to organise their work in the way that works best for them. This can include letting them set their own deadlines and schedule or deciding whether to work from the office or remotely, as well as the methods and approaches they apply in their work.

- Focus on the progress that teams are making towards the goals. Embrace mistakes as a natural part of the process and emphasise learning.

- Pay full attention when team members speak, showing empathy and understanding. Avoid interrupting, jumping to conclusions or passing judgement when listening to others.

- Ask for and offer constructive feedback.

- Lead by example, sharing mistakes and uncertainties with the team.

Fairness, respect and conflict management

Another factor that shapes trust and psychological safety is how employee relationships are handled as well as employees' past interactions with their managers. When people feel their managers treat them fairly, they tend to speak up with confidence, sharing suggestions, concerns or knowledge, whereas negative or problematic relationships with managers make this less likely.

Relatedly, the way conflicts are handled within a team is also influential. Managers who use a cooperative conflict management style, which involves concern, respect and open communication, align with supportive leadership, organisational justice and participative decision-making. These factors are key to building trust, which encourages employees to express their thoughts and opinions openly. For more information, see our guide on bullying and workplace conflict and our evidence review on bullying and incivility.

> *"People are very scared about delivering bad news. Leaders are because [...] they think it's [going to] make them unpopular. [...] I think actually it breeds high trust, if you deliver it honestly, in a way that shows care and compassion and you're solutions-focused."* **Andrea Wareham, non-executive director and former Chief People Officer, Pret A Manger**

Recommendations for practice

- Think about fairness or justice not only in terms of outcomes, but also perceptions and processes. Ensure that processes and decision-making are transparent and seen to be fair.

- Ensure that every employee feels respected and treated with dignity. This includes making sure policies are fair, easy to understand, and available to everyone they affect.

- Be aware of and make efforts to mitigate biases you may have, like favouring those similar to you or those who make a positive overall impression ('halo effect').

- When managing conflict, make sure that all parties involved have a chance to share their standpoints and arguments.

Tenure and team-building

Psychological safety varies with the stage of team development. Typically, new teams tend to have positive dynamics due to a 'new group' identity that fosters favourable perceptions of the members and strong trust. However, after this initial stage, as team members start working towards common goals and get to know each other more fully, they are more likely to experience differences in values, ideas or working styles, and potentially there are clashes. The conflicts that can arise tend to lower psychological safety. However, when the team is effectively managed, with time these challenges are overcome, resulting in a stronger team. Thus, long-tenured teams benefit from deep understanding and established norms, resulting in greater psychological safety.

See our evidence review on high-performing teams for more.

Recommendations for practice

- Ensure leaders are aware of the stage of development of their teams and understand some of the likely dynamics and needs.

- Support team members throughout all stages of their collaboration, particularly when they are establishing effective working relationships and during conflict resolution.

- Implement team-building initiatives to strengthen emotional connections and perceptions of reliability and competence among team members, as well as with team leaders.

Personal characteristics

How do personal characteristics or individual differences affect trust and psychological safety? In the case of trust, the evidence about antecedents is generally less clear. But in general, two clear factors that stand out are trust propensity and trustworthiness.

Trust propensity describes how naturally trusting someone is of others. For example, whether they are cynical, gullible, or realistic yet inclined to give the benefit of the doubt. It is a characteristic of the *trustor* (the person doing the trusting). Trust propensity is seen as a personality trait that forms early in life and stays relatively stable throughout adulthood.

Trustworthiness is based on judgements of a *trustee* – that is, the person who is or isn't trusted. It has three elements: assessment of a person's **ability** (skills and expertise), **integrity** (adherence to ethical standards) and **benevolence** (a genuine intent to act in the best interest of others). In practical terms, ability is often the most visible and easiest to develop, but integrity and benevolence are just as important. Trust occurs when all three of these elements are present. It is worth mentioning that the three aspects of trustworthiness have been found to predict trust at all levels within an organisation.

> *"You need to make sure that when you become a leader, there's nothing that you've done in your past that's going to make people worry about your integrity or your benevolence."* **Andrea Wareham, non-executive director and former Chief People Officer, Pret A Manger**

Although trust propensity and trustworthiness can be measured reliably and are important in shaping trust and psychological safety in organisations, measuring trustworthiness can be contentious and may not be appropriate. We discuss this further in the following section.

> **Recommendations for practice**
>
> - Focus leadership development activity on the importance of integrity and benevolence as well as competence and ability. Prompt senior leaders to set expectations of these throughout the organisation, but especially for managers.
>
> - Managers should also be aware that people's trust propensity varies naturally, so some will need to see more evidence of trustworthiness than others before they feel psychologically safe. As such, managers may help some team members by giving particular emphasis to the benevolence of their intentions or the integrity of decision-making.

5 How to measure trust and psychological safety

An integral part of designing management interventions is ensuring that they address a pressing need (for example, genuinely low levels of trust) and, as they are implemented, it is important to evaluate their effectiveness (for example, assessing how much they strengthen trust in practice). Both require measurement. Trust and psychological safety can be easily and reliably measured, giving valuable data and insight into the climate of trust in an organisation, business unit or team.

Below, we share scales recommended for assessing psychological safety and trust. These scales are tested for reliability and validity and are free to incorporate into employee surveys. The choice of measures should be guided by your specific interests – that is, which aspects of trust or psychological safety you want to understand. It is recommended to use the full scale and to keep the core wording. Depending on your needs, individual items could be used, and the wording could be tailored slightly to fit the context, but stick to the original as far as possible. Making changes to the original scale reduces its validity and reliability, meaning that it's less likely you are measuring what you want to measure and that you are measuring it consistently.

See the scientific summary for the complete versions of the scales. Our evidence review on _People performance_ has more on measuring employee outcomes in a valid and reliable manner.

Psychological safety

HR professionals can measure the level of psychological safety in a team or organisation with Amy Edmonson's *psychological safety scale*.[3] Some examples of items are:

- *Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.*
- *It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help. (reverse-scored item)*
- *Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilised.*

Trust and trustworthiness

Various trust measurement scales can assess trust at different levels: organisation, team and individual. What unit of analysis is measured is determined by the specific question wording (for instance, 'people in this organisation' versus 'our team members') and the level at which data is aggregated. Noteworthy examples are shown below.

The *McAllister scale* measures two facets of trust: cognition- and affect-based. Examples of items include:

Cognition-based trust:

- *This person approaches his/her job with professionalism and dedication.*
- *Given this person's track record, I see no reason to doubt his/her competence and preparation for the job.*

Affect-based trust:

- *We have a sharing relationship. We can both freely share our ideas, feelings, and hopes.*
- *I can talk freely to this individual about difficulties I am having at work and know that (s)he would want to listen.*

Mayer's scale not only measures trust but also evaluates trust propensity, along with the three trustworthiness components: ability, integrity, benevolence. Items include:

Trust:

- *I would be willing to let top management have complete control over my future in this company.*
- *I really wish I had a good way to keep an eye on top management. (reverse-scored item)*

Trust propensity:

- *One should be very cautious with strangers.*
- *Most people can be counted on to do what they say they will do.*
- *Most adults are competent at their jobs.*

Ability:

- *Top management is very capable of performing its job.*
- *Top management is known to be successful at the things it tries to do.*

Integrity:

- *Top management tries hard to be fair in dealings with others.*
- *Top management's actions and behaviours are not very consistent. (reverse-scored item)*

Benevolence:

- *My needs and desires are very important to top management.*
- *Top management would not knowingly do anything to hurt me.*

The *Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire* (COPSOQ II) was designed as part of a survey investigating the psychological and social aspects of the workplace for Danish employees. One of the subscales it includes focuses on trust between peers (horizontal trust), management and employees (vertical trust):

Vertical trust

- *Does the management trust the employees to do their work well?*
- *Can you trust the information that comes from the management?*

Horizontal trust

- *Do the employees withhold information from each other?*
- *Do the employees in general trust each other?*

COPSOQ II offers different versions tailored to specific targets: a short version for companies, a medium version for advisory purposes, and a long version for scientific purposes. The short version includes items about vertical trust, but not about horizontal trust.

Issues with measuring trustworthiness

One note of caution is that measuring an individual's trustworthiness (specifically the aspects of integrity and benevolence) is a much more sensitive question than assessing an overall climate of trust or psychological safety in a group. It can be highly contentious, especially when the assessment has consequences for managerial decisions, such as selection for a job or performance evaluation, and can understandably make people feel uneasy:

> *"In my previous organisation … we included [candidate trustworthiness] in the recruitment criteria and it was the one that was never scored. … People felt very uncomfortable with doing that, so [we] actually backed off from doing that."*

Sue Swanborough, Group HR Director, Aquila Food Group Holdings

"To use [trustworthiness measures] as a recruitment tool … you would need to triangulate that data [… in a way that would feel] safe to rely on. … So I feel quite uncomfortable using that in recruitment."

Helen Dutta, Director of Governance and HR, DACS

In short, although the research shows that trustworthiness is an important influence on trust climate and psychological safety and can be measured reliably, it may not be appropriate to do so. This is a decision for stakeholders and people professionals to make, drawing on their professional expertise and judgement. To some extent it will depend on context – for example, trustworthiness may be so important in some jobs that it does warrant assessment in selection; and it may be more acceptable to measure someone's trustworthiness to support their learning and development than to inform management decisions.

Recommendations for practice

- Keep track of trust and psychological safety levels through employee surveys, using these measures as an important gauge of the health of your organisation.

- Choose measures that reflect what is important for your business, and always consult stakeholders on which are most relevant, for which activity (in particular, to inform learning and development, or to inform managerial decisions like selection or performance-related pay).

- Approach the measurement of specific people's trustworthiness with great care. It may be more appropriate to stick to measures of trust climate and psychological safety.

- When using measures, stick as closely as possible to the original ones that are tried and tested.

6 Conclusion

Trust and psychological safety are widely recognised as fundamental for positive human interactions and often viewed as intuitive and straightforward. When it comes to addressing issues involving them, it is tempting to rely on common sense. But while research confirms the broad importance of trust and psychological safety, it also gives telling insights into the factors that drive it and the outcomes that it leads to. These are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Drivers and outcomes of trust and psychological safety

When designing workplace interventions, it is important not to rely on gut feelings or popular beliefs, but to ground them in high-quality evidence to increase their chance of being effective.

"It [makes] such a huge difference to the team to have that evidence-based aspect. I think the problem is that a lot of [business issues] can be sort of finger in the air and a bit of guesswork. … [Once you have access to and an understanding of the scientific literature], then you can apply it to your own business. That makes a massive difference. [...] Ultimately just taking something off the shelf doesn't work." **Gareth Neale, Head of Human Resources, Crimson Hotels**

Related to this, it's worth noting that being objective and choosing unbiased, high-quality information are integral parts of building trust.

Trust can be approached from the perspective of gaining it or losing it. Leaders in organisations must earn the trust of their colleagues and subordinates and foster trust between them. Once obtained, maintaining it becomes an ongoing effort.

> *"[Trust is] hard to earn and, when you've got it, potentially quite easy to break."* **Kerri-Ann O'Neill, People and Transformation Director, Ofcom**

However, there often seems to be a tendency to concentrate more on the negatives than the positives – that is, on dealing with a crisis of low or broken trust. Addressing this is obviously hugely important, but trust is not only something to be repaired. Leaders should not underestimate or take for granted the value of trust as an organisational asset. Trust is an essential aspect of a healthily functioning organisation. It can and should be nurtured and should be valued – perhaps even explicitly celebrated – when it's present.

In this report we have drawn together the best scientific evidence on the closely related areas of intra-organisational trust and psychological safety. Along with senior leaders, HR and other people professionals are custodians of these aspects of organisational culture and climate. People professionals should ensure that they have a good grasp of the component parts of trust and psychological safety and understand how they can proactively take steps to foster them.

7 Endnotes

[1] Gallup. (2020) Confidence in institutions. Online article. https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx

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