THE TRUST leader

WHITE PAPER · FOR L&D TEAMS AND LEARNING PROVIDERS

Strengthening trust in your learning programmes

Most programmes start on borrowed trust. The first week back at work is where it gets spent.

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THE STARTING POINT

The promise is tested when people return to work

A learning programme asks people to believe that something worthwhile can change. Participants give time and effort. Sponsors commit money. Colleagues may depend on participants using what they learn.

> TRUST LEADER DEFINITION
>
> Trust is someone's confidence in you with something they care about.

At enrolment, a participant relies on the provider's name, L&D's track record or the sponsor's sign-off. That is borrowed trust. The first chance to use the learning gives them direct experience of whether the promise holds.

Take a fictional delegation programme. Participants learn to agree decision boundaries with their teams. Back at work, their managers still require approval for every decision. The course may have been well delivered, but the change people were asked to expect has no room to happen. The participant has learned something, just not what the programme intended. They have learned that the promise didn't hold.

That moment matters more than the session. Design for it first.

The first workplace attempt is where borrowed trust turns into direct experience, for better or worse.

Three insights for programme design

- **The first workplace attempt tests the promise behind the programme.** Plan that moment before choosing the session content.
- **The colleague on the receiving end has evidence the participant can't supply alone.** Ask what became clearer, more dependable or more useful for them.
- **Useful change usually has several causes.** Measure what happened first, then look at how the programme, support and working conditions each helped.

Where Trust Leader contributes

For a behaviour-focused programme, I start with what another person needs to experience to rely on the participant. In delegation, a colleague needs confidence that an agreed decision boundary will be respected, even when they make a choice their manager wouldn't have made.

Someone can understand a delegation model and still take decisions back without explanation. Practice has to reach that moment and include the colleague's experience afterwards.

The participant's outcome and the organisation's outcome need to connect. The participant wants to delegate with more confidence. Their colleague needs clearer authority. The organisation wants fewer avoidable delays. Each describes part of the same change.

THE EVIDENCE

Design for useful change, and for evidence of it

Leadership development can make a real difference. Lacerenza and colleagues' meta-analysis of 335 independent samples found positive average effects on reactions, learning, transfer and results. Needs analysis, practice and spaced sessions were among the design features that helped, although findings differed by outcome.[1]

Blume and colleagues' review of 89 studies linked transfer to motivation and a supportive work environment, with stronger relationships for open skills such as leadership. The relationships were inflated when the same person rated both the predictor and the transfer at the same time.[2]

That is a reason to look at opportunity and support, and to use evidence beyond a participant's end-of-course survey. Ford, Baldwin and Prasad make the same call for more precise accounts of transfer and how it develops over time.[3]

Ask what evidence the sponsor needs

In *Performance Consulting* (2015), Robinson and colleagues report a 2010 ROI Institute study of 96 Fortune 500 CEOs: 96% wanted business-impact information about non-capital initiatives, including learning, and 8% received it.[4] It is a historical finding, not today's level of confidence in L&D. I use it to ask a sponsor one question at the start: what evidence would help you decide about this programme?

Use satisfaction for the question it answers

Sitzmann and colleagues found that trainee reactions mainly reflect the course itself, especially instructional style and interaction. Reactions predicted gains in motivation and self-efficacy, and responded more to course features than learning outcomes did.[5]

So positive reactions tell you about the learning experience and its potential to support further effort. They need to sit alongside evidence of learning, workplace use and the difference that use made.

Give the workplace commitments an owner

A programme owner can arrange practice and follow-up. A participant's manager controls workload and authority. A sponsor may need to resolve a conflict between the programme and the way decisions are approved.

Agree those actions before making the promise to participants. If support becomes unavailable, say what has changed and revise the expectation. Borrowed trust gives the programme a starting point. What people experience next decides whether they rely on it again.

Use the 6Ds to connect the programme with work

The 6Ds approach, developed by Roy Pollock, Andrew Jefferson and Calhoun Wick, starts with intended business results and treats the complete learning experience as the thing to design, including application, transfer, support and evidence.[6] The discipline names below are the 6Ds authors'. The questions beside them are our application to a programme meant to change workplace behaviour.

6DS DISCIPLINE	A PRACTICAL QUESTION FOR THIS PROGRAMME
D1 Define Business Outcomes	What should improve in the work, and who needs to notice the difference?
D2 Design the Complete Experience	What needs to happen before learning starts and when participants return to work?
D3 Deliver for Application	What will participants practise that resembles a real situation they face?
D4 Drive Learning Transfer	Who will provide the opportunity, support and follow-up needed to use it?
D5 Deploy Performance Support	What help should be available at the moment a participant needs to act?
D6 Document Results	What evidence will help us judge progress and decide what to change?

This is where the two approaches connect. The 6Ds organises the wider programme around application and results. Trust Leader points attention at one person relying on the participant, and the behaviour that person needs to experience.

Plan the first attempt

For delegation, identify a real task before the session. Agree which decisions the participant can hand over, which controls stay, and who responds if the boundary becomes unclear. The session then prepares the participant for a situation they will actually face, and the review afterwards looks at what happened to that agreement and what the colleague could really do.

Make the support commitment visible too. A manager's promise of time or authority should appear in the programme review alongside the participant's attempt. Otherwise a failure of support gets mistaken for a failure to learn.

A WORKED EXAMPLE

One change, from promise to evidence

Back to the fictional delegation programme. The sponsor wants routine customer decisions made without unnecessary escalation, while keeping the controls needed for higher-risk work.

A FICTIONAL EXAMPLE: THE DELEGATION PROGRAMME

Agree the useful change

Participants, managers and the sponsor agree which decisions could reasonably move closer to the work. They check existing approval rules and note what sits outside the programme's authority. The participant behaviour is to agree the outcome, decision boundary, support and review point before handing over a task, and to explain any later change to that agreement. The colleague's outcome is clearer authority and support. The work outcome is fewer avoidable delays or repeated approvals within that boundary.

Prepare a real opportunity

Each participant picks a suitable piece of work. Their own manager confirms the authority available and when to escalate. The session includes practice with an uncertain case, including how to respond when a colleague makes a different decision from the one the participant would have made. The review date fits the work: a monthly decision and a daily task need different intervals.

Ask the colleague what happened

With their agreement, ask the colleague whether the boundary was clear, what happened when they used it and how the participant responded to difficulty. Invite specific examples, including times the participant took control back. The participant may discover that repeated checking made the agreement feel unreliable, even though they thought they were being supportive.

Follow the effect into the work

Review the relevant decisions: which stayed within the boundary, which were escalated, and what caused delay or rework. More delegated tasks can look positive while creating unclear responsibility, so check quality and risk alongside speed. If approval rules changed, workload rose or a manager prevented practice, record it.

The next decision may be to repeat the practice, improve support, revise the behaviour or stop an application that doesn't fit.

Measure change before arguing about cause

You can observe behaviour without proving what caused it. Keeping those two questions apart makes evaluation more useful. Agree a starting point, then check later using comparable work situations. Use a few measures that will actually inform a decision.

QUESTION	EVIDENCE WORTH GATHERING
Was there a chance, and an attempt?	How many participants had a suitable task, and how many tried the behaviour. Record why the others couldn't.
Did the behaviour become more dependable?	For a sample of tasks, how many had clear boundaries agreed beforehand and respected afterwards. Keep the total sampled.
What did colleagues experience?	What authority and support they had, what happened when they used it, and what stayed difficult. Keep the accounts.
Did the work benefit?	Delays, avoidable escalations or rework before and after, read alongside volume, risk and quality.
What contributed?	Practice, manager support, approval rules, workload and any other relevant changes.

A participant can describe what they attempted. A colleague can describe what they experienced. Work records show what was agreed and what happened. Where the accounts disagree, that is information to understand, not noise. Eight clear agreements from ten suitable tasks is different from eight from a hundred, so keep the denominator visible.

Decide in advance what result would support continuing, call for a redesign or justify stopping.

THE TRUST LENS

Make the promise credible through behaviour

Borrowed trust makes a programme worth trying. Direct experience then gives participants evidence about the people responsible for it. System trust is confidence in the standards, governance and accountability around the work. All three can be at work at once.

The five Trust Questions help each person look at their own part. In each one below, *I* is the person named and *they* is the participant.

TRUST QUESTION	WHO IT IS ABOUT, AND WHAT TO CHECK
Do they believe what I say?	**Programme lead.** Can the participant recognise the stated outcome in the design, including what depends on their workplace? Describe the promise accurately and revise it when conditions change.
Do they believe I'll do what I said?	**Line manager.** Did the promised practice opportunity, time and follow-up arrive? Check the participant's experience of support and explain any change early.
Do they believe I can handle what's needed?	**Facilitator.** Can I help the participant work through a realistic situation, and recognise where the answer needs expertise or authority elsewhere?
Do they feel I really understand them?	**Line manager.** How did I respond when the participant described an obstacle? Check what the work requires before reading a missed attempt as low commitment.
Do they believe I act with their interests in mind?	**Sponsor.** Have I considered workload, the risk of trying something different and how participant information will be used? Say who will see what, and how concerns can be raised.

Dependable behaviour makes the programme more credible, but it still has to show what people learned, used and changed. A participant can feel well supported while making little progress, and a sponsor needs to know that too.

Programme evaluation can use agreed evidence of change. Personal Trust Maps, Reflections and Journal entries stay outside employee ratings, pay and formal capability decisions.

TRY IT IN A PROGRAMME YOU ALREADY RUN

Three things to change

1 Hold the manager conversation

When: before the participant attends. **Write together:** "The task I'll practise on is __. I can decide __ without further approval. We'll review what happened on __." 10 to 15 minutes.

Check: count conversations held out of those planned, for example 11 of 14. Note any missing authority or support.

2 Change one evaluation question

When: at the first review after workplace practice. **Ask:** "Name one occasion you used it, who it affected, and what they would say changed." Five minutes.

Check: count answers that name a real occasion and a real person, as x of y.

3 Ask the colleague

When: for a sample of participants, with agreement. **Ask:** "What could you decide on your own this month that you couldn't before?" Five to ten minutes.

Check: count conversations held out of those planned. Keep each answer as an account, including where nothing changed.

Start with one promised outcome in an existing programme. Use these checks to decide whether the next action belongs with the participant, their manager, the programme owner or the sponsor.

Start with yourself

Trust Leader uses Identify, Design, Practise and Reflect to give a learning programme a behavioural focus.

28-DAY FREE TRIAL

Try the trust lens on one of your own working relationships: map it, choose one behaviour, practise it through a Behaviour Playlist and reflect on what changed.

PRACTITIONER

When you want to use it with others, Practitioners can assign prepared Behaviour Playlists to individuals or groups, with each participant working through them between modules.

Three changes, Hub examples and the trial: **thetrustleader.com/insights/learning-programmes-and-trust**

SOURCES

References

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[5] Sitzmann, T., Brown, K. G., Casper, W. J., Ely, K. and Zimmerman, R. D. (2008). A review and meta-analysis of the nomological network of trainee reactions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(2), 280–295. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.93.2.280

[6] Pollock, R. V. H., Jefferson, A. McK. and Wick, C. W. *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning*, fourth edition, Wiley, 2025. The practical questions in this paper are Trust Leader's application. the6ds.com

Scope. This narrative paper combines selected research, an attributed practitioner approach and a historical survey account. It is not a systematic review, and reviews may share studies. Sources [1] and [2] were consulted in selected sections; [3] and [5] at abstract level; [4] through the authors' account rather than the original study; [6] through the official overview and third-edition introduction. The practical applications are Trust Leader proposals, and the delegation example is fictional. The sources do not validate the five Trust Questions as a programme assessment or establish results for Trust Leader or the Hub. Apply the ideas with attention to language, hierarchy, authority and opportunity to practise.

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