

ELP-006 · EXECUTIVE TOOLKIT

Team Trust Diagnostic + Leader Conversation Guide

A practical diagnostic for executive-team silence: separate trustworthiness, interpersonal risk, expected impact and accountability before prescribing 'more trust'.

Do not diagnose silence from silence. Apparent agreement can hide personal cost, hierarchy, futility, status effects or learned experience. Diagnose the mechanism first.

Part 1 — Four questions before you call it a trust problem

1. TRUSTWORTHINESS

Ask: Can and should we rely on the relevant people?

Test ability, benevolence, integrity and reliability. Identify the vulnerability or dependency that actually matters.

Evidence / example from our team:

2. INTERPERSONAL RISK

Ask: What is the informal cost of speaking?

Who is hardest to challenge? What happened after the last unwelcome question, dissenting view, admitted uncertainty or reported failure?

Evidence / example from our team:

3. EXPECTED IMPACT

Ask: Will speaking change anything?

Is challenge real or ceremonial? Review the last three material challenges: what changed, what did not, and was the reasoning explained?

Evidence / example from our team:

4. ACCOUNTABILITY

Ask: Are standards and ownership clear?

Can people admit good-faith errors while remaining responsible for decisions, execution and standards? Safety is not exemption from accountability.

Evidence / example from our team:

Part 2 — Leader conversation guide

Use this after a decision, risk review, incident or meeting where you suspect useful information stayed below the surface. The aim is diagnosis and learning, not forced disclosure.

Open the conversation

Suggested opening: “I want to understand whether our meeting design or my response made it harder to surface useful information. I’m not asking you to agree with my diagnosis. I’m asking what made speaking up easier or harder, and what we should change.”

Ask for observable experience

- Where did you hold back, soften or delay a view? What made that rational?
- Was the concern mainly about a person, the room, hierarchy, timing, or whether speaking would matter?
- What happened the last time someone raised similar bad news or disagreement?
- Which senior person, sponsor or expert is hardest to challenge — and what consequence do people expect?
- Did the final decision explain how challenge was considered, even when the decision did not change?
- Where are standards or decision rights unclear enough that 'safety' and 'accountability' get confused?

Convert the diagnosis into one design change

The main mechanism suppressing useful voice is:

One leader behaviour or meeting-design change we will test:

What evidence would tell us the change is working?

Leader response check

- Did I become defensive, dismissive or overly reassuring?
- Did I ask for the strongest evidence rather than loyalty or agreement?
- Did I explain what changed — or why the decision did not change?
- Did I protect the right to challenge while keeping standards and accountability intact?
- Did my behaviour teach the room that future bad news is worth surfacing?

Remember: Every response to bad news is also training for the next piece of bad news. Safety should protect the right to challenge, not the right to be right.

Use with ELP-006: Why Smart Executive Teams Stay Silent. This diagnostic is practical ELP synthesis, informed by research on organisational trust, psychological safety and employee voice; it is not a validated academic diagnostic instrument.