Tampere University of Applied Sciences

Trust in Employee-Manager Relationships at Company X

Building Trust and Genuine Connections with Brene Brown's Model of Dare to Lead

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BACHELOR'S THESIS
December 2023

International Business

ABSTRACT

Tampereen ammattikorkeakoulu
Tampere University of Applied Sciences
Bachelor of Business Administration

ROOSA KILPINEN:
Trust in Employee-Manager Relationships at Company X

Bachelor's thesis 58 pages, appendices 6 pages
December 2023

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This thesis explores the dynamics of trust and genuine connections between employees and managers at the commissioning organization, an innovative talent attraction technology company. They saw a possible opportunity to discover what type of employee-manager relationships they have within the company and whether there might be a connection between those relationships and employee engagement and commitment.

The inspiration for this thesis comes from the leadership model of Dare to Lead created by Brene Brown. It represents building trust and genuine connections vital in employee-manager relationships in order to have effective and succeeding organizations. The author studied this newer-era leadership style and used it as a foundation for the research and recommendations.

The research was done in two parts, one being an anonymous survey to discover the general state of satisfaction with manager relationships and the possible connection between the relationships and employee engagement and commitment. The second part was interviewing employees to get a deeper understanding of their manager experiences and potential areas to improve.

The research provided a comprehensive overview of the company's current state of employee-manager relationship dynamics. Experiences varied from fully trusting relationships with their manager to having almost a non-existent relationship. As expected, a connection was found between the relationships and employees' engagement and commitment. Target areas for development were defined based on the research. Recommendations on how to enhance the relationships were created by using Brown's model of Daring Leadership.

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Keywords: leadership, trust, vulnerability, empathy, employee engagement

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

In modern organizational dynamics, building an embracing culture, successful business, and meaningful relationships begins with a fundamental still often overlooked element: trust. It is the foundation for effective teams, nourishing innovation, and enabling employees to be themselves at work. This thesis dives into the world of genuine connections, trust, vulnerability, and psychological safety in organizations. It challenges traditional leadership models and develops leadership styles to a more human and person-centric approach.

It all started by reading Brene Brown's (2018) theory on Daring Leadership and getting inspired by it. This thesis aims to enhance the commissioning company's employee-manager relationships by applying Brown's theories to real-life situations. According to Brown, the way to bring the relationship to the next level is through building trust and genuine connections between employees and managers. (Brown 2018)

The behaviors to achieve trusting connections include embracing vulnerability, practicing empathy, letting down your armor, building confidence, living according to your values, and learning to rise from challenges. The recommendations chapter presents a set of tools specifically chosen for Company X's needs that will support employees and managers to carry out these behaviors and eventually unravel their full potential. (Brown 2018)

2 CASE COMPANY

2.1 Introduction

The commissioner of this thesis is Company X, an innovative talent attraction technology company based in the Netherlands. It was founded in 2016 and now in 2023, it has managed to create an international and young environment for 36 employees.

The company aims to inspire millions of job seekers to find the positions of their dreams. They deliver visual content to specific talent segments based on their interests on the social media platforms they use regularly. The software is bringing quality candidates to the company's partners. They have distributed over 32,000 job postings and generated over 45,000 candidates while operating in over 90 countries. (Company X's website)

2.2 Background

Numerous insightful conversations with the HR & Recruitment Manager, the contact person of the commissioner, have created a great overview of the company and its operations. The author's five-month absorption within the commissioning company as an HR intern has provided an exceptional opportunity to observe the case company and its possible daily challenges thoroughly. The author was included in all HR operations as well as in recruitment and therefore got to collaborate with all the departments and teams.

The HR manager has been observing the employee-manager connections at the company and would like to explore them more to see if there is potential for improving the relationships between employees and managers. It is worth noting that Company X has many talented managers but rather young or new in their role therefore may be inexperienced in leading. This research is an opportunity to build and foster stronger connections between employees and managers.

In the biannual employee engagement surveys of the commissioner, there have not been any major issues which is positive news for the company. However, there have been many voluntary resignations lately which might indicate decreasing engagement among employees. Although, the rather young average age of employees can explain some of the turnover as well as the industry dynamics explain its part in employee movement. On LinkedIn's global insights, the tech & media industry had the second highest employee turnover rate of 12,9% in July 2021 – June 2022, where the average for all industries was 10,6%. The turnover rate indicates the total number of employee departures over the average headcount. The commissioner is interested in seeing if there is a connection between employee-manager relationships, employee engagement, and voluntary resignations. (Lewis 2022)

3 THESIS PLAN

3.1 Thesis Topic

Trust is a crucial part of building human relationships and the significance of trust in leadership has been researched for decades (Dirks & Ferrin 2002, 611). No wonder since trust is the foundation of successful organizations. A trusting environment makes employees more innovative, engaged, and willing to go "the extra mile" (Sinek 2014). The topic of this thesis is to explore trust in employee relationships at the commissioning company. In this research, the manager signifies the direct leader or supervisor of the employee. Whether there is trust between the employee and their manager, has a huge impact on the nature of their relationship. The current situation of the relationships between managers and employees will be established to see if there are areas that need improvement at Company X.

What initially inspired the HR & Recruitment manager and the author to choose this topic was Brene Brown's (2018) research on trust and leadership. She has studied vulnerability, courage, shame, and empathy for two decades, and based on that Brown created her theory of daring leadership and wrote a book called Dare to Lead. It challenges traditional leadership models where the focus is often on hierarchical leading, controlling, and avoiding vulnerability. Brown's research also gives a new perspective on what to prioritize in trust-building. Her trust-building and leadership approach will be a foundation for this thesis and research. (Brown 2018)

In addition, the research will investigate the employees' engagement at Company X. The nature of the relationship between manager and employee usually affects the level of employees' engagement. The importance of genuine connections and a positive relationship between manager and employee gets more weight in management's eyes when there's a clear link between the employee's level of engagement and the nature of the relationship with their leader. Therefore, it's valuable to survey also the engagement levels at Company X in this research. (Leapsome)

3.2   Thesis Objective, Purpose, and Research Questions

3.2.1   Objective

The objective of this thesis is to create a plan, proposal, or set of recommendations on how to enhance the trust in the employee-manager relationships at Company X. The objective is first to explore the current state of trust within employee relationships at the company and identify areas of improvement. Investigating the impact of trust on employee engagement in this case company is also important. After clarifying where the company stands and showing how Company X's employees experience the relationships with their managers, recommendations can be developed to improve the trust between employees and managers, by using Brown's Dare to Lead- theory.

3.2.2   Purpose

The primary purpose of this thesis is to empower the employees and managers at Company X by building or enhancing trust between the employees and their managers, using Brene Brown's Dear to Lead -theory. The research intends to help the company understand better the vital role of trusting relationships in an organization's development and success. Part of the purpose is to research a possible connection between employee engagement, employee-manager relationships, and employees' commitment at Company X. The thesis essentially aims to unlock employee's full potential by creating an engaging, trusting, and attractive working environment.

3.2.3   Research Questions

These research questions are made based on the objectives and purpose. They will guide the process in the right direction in order to achieve these objectives and the purpose mentioned above.

The main research question:

How can Company X improve trust in the employee-manager relationships, by utilizing Brene Brown's principles of leadership and building trust?

Sub-questions:

1. *What is the current state of trust in employee-manager relationships at Company X?*
2. *Is there a connection between the employee-manager relationships and overall employee engagement levels at Company X?*
3. *Is there a connection between the employee-manager relationships and the voluntary turnover rate at Company X?*

3.3 Concepts and Theory

3.3.1 Trust

According to Covey (2008), trust indicates confidence. At the workplace trusting someone is about having confidence in their integrity, ulterior motives, and competence. A lack of trust would lead to suspicion. (Covey 2008, 5)

Feltman's (2008) definition of trust is well aligned with Covey's one. Feltman sees trust as a decision to let something valuable to you be exposed to another person's actions. In both definitions, trusting someone is believing that what's important to you is safe with them. (Feltman 2008)

From the point of view of Brown (2018), trust is built by stacking small moments instead of grand gestures. Trust is gained over time by showing genuine care and connection, listening, paying attention, and being mutually vulnerable. (Brown 2018, 32-34)

3.3.2 Vulnerability

As indicated by Brown (2018), vulnerability can be defined as the emotion people feel when they are in situations of uncertainty, emotional exposure, and risk. Her research showed that vulnerability is not weakness, but it is being brave enough to turn up even though you cannot control the outcome. Vulnerability is to feel and accept the risk of getting hurt. (Brown 2018, 19-42)

3.3.3 Psychological Safety

When people feel psychologically safe, they can give honest feedback, have tough conversations, make mistakes, and ask for help without being afraid to be judged, punished, or humiliated by others. It is an environment of trust and respect where one can feel confident to speak up or suggest absurd ideas. Psychological safety is an important factor in building trust, and being vulnerable and therefore it has a significant impact on engagement. (Edmondson 2012)

3.3.4 Employee-Manager Relationship

Employee-manager relationship indicates the professional and interpersonal connection between an employee and their direct manager or supervisor. The relationship contains basic actions such as constant communication, giving feedback and support, and exchanging expectations. Having a good employee-manager relationship is important because it has a significant impact on employee performance and productivity. A positive connection motivates employees and as a result, enhances employee engagement. (Dlamini & Suknunan & Bhana 2022, 28-42)

3.3.5 Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement is a concept often used in HR and management to assess the level of employee's enthusiasm and loyalty toward their work. The main characteristics of an engaged employee are having an emotional and intellectual connection to their job and the company, being motivated to contribute towards the company's success, and being aware of what success looks like and how to achieve it. Engaged employees are productive, loyal to their employer, find their job meaningful, and feel valued and supported by their managers. (Smith 2022)

The employee engagement model is a framework to assist companies in supporting employees' happiness and job satisfaction and making them feel appreciated, respected, and trusted. Here are some of the most popular models to measure and improve employee engagement and relevant for this thesis research. (Leapsome)

The Zinger model highlights the importance of genuine employee relationships and connections necessary for great performance. The core of it is based on the acronym CARE which stands for Connection, Authentic relationships, Recognition and acknowledgment of how employee effort gets results, and Engage as a continuous action. The Zinger model uses a four-level pyramid to analyze engagement. The base comes from well-being and energy, the second row is building meaningful relationships at work and promoting recognition. On the top is a performance boosting and empowering employees to do meaningful work. Lastly is achieving the results. (Leapsome)

The Kahn model focuses on having a company culture where employees can fully be themselves and that way the company can utilize employees' individual and perhaps unique strengths. By establishing a safe, caring, and open working environment the Kahn model pursues physical, cognitive, and emotional engagement from employees. (Leapsome)

The Maslow Hierarchy of Needs (Picture 1) is a well-known psychological theory, and it is applied in the Maslow model of employee engagement. It empha-

sizes the importance of fulfilling employees' basic needs first before expecting a high-level engagement. (Leapsome)
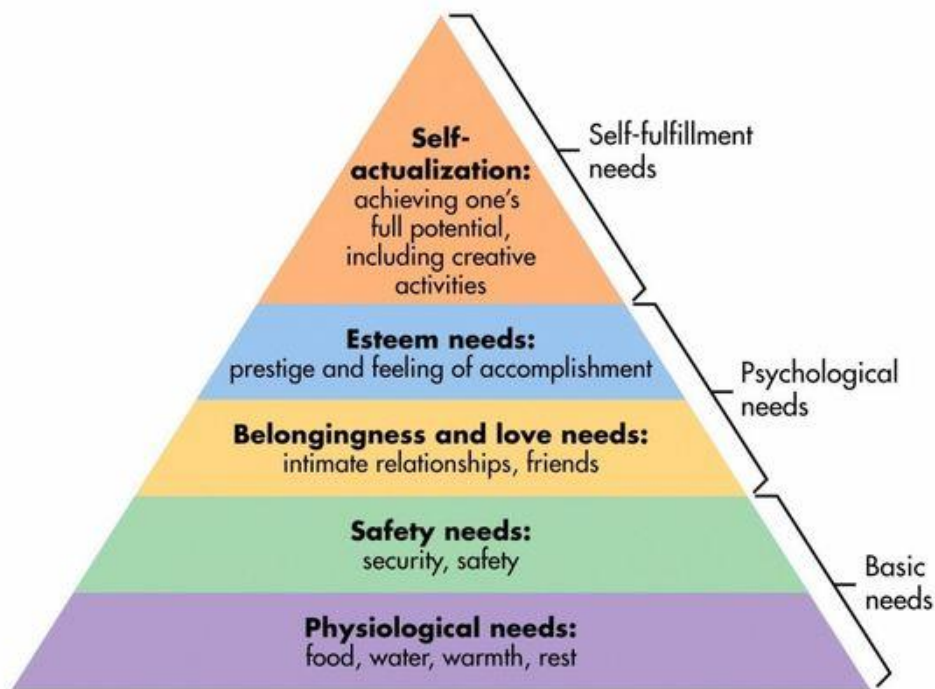
FIGURE 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Mcleod 2023).

The JD-R model signifies the Job Demands-Resources model where employees' stress and strain levels are linked to an imbalance between job demands and job resources. Job demands mean elements that are costing something to the employee. Demands can be psychological or physical, good examples are social stress, effort, or job pressure. Resources on the other hand are the elements that provides employee with something valuable, for instance, autonomy, or development opportunities. (Leapsome)

3.3.6 Voluntary Turnover Rate

Voluntary employee turnover indicates employees' decision to leave their jobs within a company where the general turnover rate includes all employee departures. Involuntary employee turnover is the opposite of the voluntary one and it represents the company's decision to terminate or lay off an employee. The voluntary employee turnover rate (VTR) can be calculated with this formula:

$$T = \left(\frac{\text{Number of Employees Who Left Voluntarily}}{\text{Total Number of Employees at the Beginning of the Period}}\right) \times 100$$

VTR is important to know for companies for several reasons. Voluntary turnover can get costly for companies since it includes multiple expenses such as recruitment, onboarding, training, and lost productivity. It has been estimated that each exiting employee costs their company around 33% of their annual salary. The average cost of replacing the existing employee is typically between six to nine months of that employee's salary. High voluntary turnover rates can illustrate for example dissatisfaction among employees, low engagement, or issues with the management which can have a negative effect on the company's performance. Excessive employee turnover can damage the company culture as well.

(Marable 2022)

3.4 Working Methods and Data

3.4.1 Methods of Data Acquiring

In this research data is acquired in a few different methods. The primary data is qualitative data gathered by interviewing ten of Company X's employees. To get different experiences of employee-manager relationships, it was important to interview employees from all departments and teams, different nationalities as well as employees who have been working at the company various times.

The interviews were held in the Netherlands at the office to create a safe environment for the interviewees to open up. Doing interviews through a video call might have felt much more distant for the employees and made having an open and honest discussion harder. The interviews were semi-structured with a set of base questions leaving room to adapt based on the interviewee's experiences. The author wanted to be present at the moment and have a genuine discussion without disruption, so the interviews were voice recorded with the interviewee's

consent. The interview data is highly confidential and only the author has access to the recordings.

More primary data is gathered with a survey consisting of multiple-choice and scale questions. A more general companywide overall picture and a bigger sample are possible to reach with an anonymous survey. It is sent to employees to understand the current level of trust and engagement. The expectation is to have around 20-25 answers, based on the commissioner's previous engagement surveys' answer rates.

Secondary data will be the commissioner's knowledge and observations, previous engagement survey results, and data of employees who have exited the company. In addition to the above-mentioned data, the author's observations and knowledge of the company gained during the internship, are used as well.

3.4.2 Data Analysis

The anonymous survey's analysis goal is to find areas of improvement in manager-employee relationships and see if employee engagement and trusting relationships are correlating at Company X. Analyzing the qualitative interview answers concentrates more on individual experiences and understanding the different types of employee-manager relationships on a deeper level. Both of these will help to see the pain points at Company X and reflect on how Brown's techniques and theories could be used to enhance trust in employee-manager relationships. The data gathered from the commissioner will be compared to existing research.

3.5   Thesis Process & Structure

3.5.1   Structure of the Report

The first chapter of the report will introduce the thesis and its subject briefly. The second chapter introduces the case company and its background. The thesis plan is covered in Chapter Three, where the reader gets an overview of the topic, the objectives, purpose, and research questions of this thesis as well as relevant theories and definitions, data acquiring, and analyzing methods. In Chapter Four the theoretical framework behind the research is introduced on a deeper level, especially focusing on Brene Brown's research and theories. The fifth chapter concentrates on the research findings, analyzing the results of the survey and interviews, and combining the data with existing theory. Chapter Six will use the information from the previous chapter to give recommendations for the company. The last Chapter, number Seven is a conclusion for this report.

3.5.2   Process and Timetable

This thesis process started in June 2023 when the author was doing her HR internship at the case company. The first step was brainstorming sessions with the HR manager to find possible development targets. At the end of July topic was finally chosen and the author spent August familiarising herself with the existing research done on the topic and finding out the best approach and research methods for this case.

The author and commissioner agreed it would be best to interview employees face-to-face in the Netherlands at Company X's office. Employees would be easier to reach for interviews and the author had the commissioner's support to conduct the interview questions when the author was still living in the Netherlands doing the internship. That decision created quite a time pressure, because of author's internship was coming to an end in September and she was moving back to Finland. For that reason, the general flow of the TAMK thesis process was not fully followed. The thesis plan was written after having the em-

ployee interviews at Company X. However, the objectives, purpose, and research questions were discussed and agreed upon with the commissioner, and the theoretical framework was studied as well as the research methods. However, nothing was written down in a formal setting because of the time pressure.

The plan for the rest of the thesis process can be seen in the picture below, there are deadlines for the steps and the intention is to follow the "normal" flow of a thesis process from now on. The schedule became quite ambitious but not impossible.

Thesis Timetable

Gate	Description	Deadline
1	Topic approval	5.9
	First meeting with the supervisor	20.9
	Timetable	3.10
2	Submitting the objectives and narrowing	9.10
	Submitting the 1st draft of the thesis plan	22.10
	Supervisor gives comments on the plan	
	Submitting the final version of the thesis plan	25.10
3	Approval of the thesis plan	
	Contract	
	Compiling the content/research	12.11
4	Approval of the content	
	1st written draft of the thesis	22.11
	Supervisor gives comments on the 1st draft	
5	Handing out the final version of the thesis to the supervisor	3.12
	Maturity test	
Stage 6	Assessing & publishing the thesis	12.12

FIGURE 2. Thesis Timetable.

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 New Era of Leadership

Scheins recognize trust as a foundation for effective leadership. Today's leadership should be based on building strong relationships, openness, and trust between the manager and the team members instead of traditional hierarchical and transactional leadership. (Schein & Schein 2018)

The world is facing changes and challenges at a rapidly growing pace which makes it crucial that managers can accept not having answers to everything and therefore managers being open to learning from their team and valuing their ideas and efforts. The business world is constantly evolving due to globalization, socio-political shifts, and technological innovations; accordingly, leadership needs to evolve as well. Modern leadership is adaptable and values teamwork and trust. Traditional hierarchical leadership approaches struggle with these qualities that are keeping leaders resilient to change. (Schein & Schein 2018)

When it comes to generational change in the workforce, the younger generations have completely different requirements and values than what for example the Millennials have. Older leadership models do not meet the values of younger generations. The importance of having a meaningful job that is socially and environmentally responsible is increasing remarkably. (Schein & Schein 2018)

4.2 Importance of Trust in Leadership

Relationship types can be divided into four different levels evolving from impersonal and controlling relationships to more personal, cooperative, and emotionally connected ones. (Schein & Schein 2018)

Level -1: The relationship is dominating and controlling without any personal connection—for example, a manager who coercively gives orders.

Level 1: On this level, the relationship is transactional, based on rules and inter-actions compelled by tasks or obligations. These interactions usually contain supervising and professional helping. For instance, level 1 relationships with managers or colleagues with whom we retain a "professional distance".

Level 2: Personal relationships with cooperation, driven by trust. Examples of this level of relationships are friendships and efficient team relationships.

Level 3: On the highest level relationships are emotionally intimate and deep connections with a strong mutual commitment, for instance, relationships such as best friends and spouses.

(Schein & Schein 2018)

Level 2 relationships do not inevitably indicate becoming friends or liking some-one. It more so is to express that "I see you" and therefore value other's pres-ence and choose to view them as individuals, whole people. Employee-manager relationships should pursue level 2 for openness and trust. (Schein & Schein 2018)

Benefits of trust: genuine, trusting connections with employees foster an envi-ronment of innovation and lead to more resilient and adaptable organizations. Innovation comes from trusting people around you because then people are more willing to share their ideas, be creative, and take risks without fearing fail-ure. (Schein & Schein 2018)

Trusting connections between managers and employees creates a foundation for the company's success because it allows both managers and employees to thrive. Trust in relationships fosters a positive company culture and psychologi-cal safety. As a result, productivity and innovation in the company increase as well as open communication and collaboration. Trusting relationships empower employees, boost their confidence, and grow their loyalty and commitment to the company. It is essential to remember that building trust is reciprocal so both parties must invest and commit to each other. (Mineo 2014, 1 & 4)

4.3 Brene Brown: Dare to Lead

The nature of jobs is shifting more towards valuing emotional intelligence as more important than physical or cognitive abilities because of artificial intelligence and machine learning. At the same time, company cultures are boosting an environment that prevents employees from expressing core human qualities like vulnerability, empathy, and emotional literacy. Brene Brown (2018) wants to change that by building genuine connections and trust between employees and their leaders (called managers in this research) and developing psychologically safe working environments to enable that. Brown has researched human connections for over twenty years, and in her latest research, she created the theory of daring leadership which serves as a foundation and inspiration for this thesis. (Brown 2018, 19-75)

The core of daring leading is about having the courage to show up and try your best even though you'll most likely fail at some point, but then you will have the skills and tools to rise and try again. The heart of a daring leader is ready to rumble with vulnerability to gain courage, perform courageously, and build their self-love and -awareness. Brown sees that courage can be taught, and the skills to learn it are categorized as rumbling with vulnerability, living into our values, braving trust, and learning to rise. (Brown 2018, 10-13)

4.3.1 Vulnerability Rumble

Vulnerability is necessary to build trust, and in turn, trust is essential to foster vulnerability. Also, for instance, creativity and innovation need vulnerability to thrive. Brown presents rumble as a way to massively increase vulnerability in companies. Rumble indicates a conversation or a meeting where all participants are committed to having an open heart and mind. In rumble it is essential to stay curious, assume others have good intentions, lean into vulnerability, and give time to the messy part of identifying and resolving the challenge. Being brave enough to own your part, call a break, or suggest returning to it the next day are also key behaviors in rumbling. To sum it up, when rumbling with vulnerability in a discussion, listen to others with the same dedication you are wish-

ing they would listen to you. Being vulnerable and rumbling with it does not imply sharing something very personal or your whole life, vulnerability needs boundaries. The purpose is to listen, show empathy, and be human to one another. (Brown 2018, 10, 30-43)

4.3.2 Wholehearted and Armored Leadership

Brown introduces a concept of wholehearted living which should be pursued in organizations as well. It has the mindset of being enough, not defining your value based on achievements, and taking off the armor. Wholeheartedness' foundation is accepting your imperfections, fears, and vulnerability, and believing that besides those things you are brave and worthy of love and belonging. Often company cultures encourage not showing emotions and vulnerability because of disbelief of being more productive and easier to manage when keeping the armor on. In reality, understanding and connecting to emotions helps to make decisions, think critically, and be more resilient, empathic, and self-compassioned. (Brown 2018, 72)

To have a wholehearted company culture, the leadership style needs to transfer from armored to daring. Below is a table of armored leadership behaviors and comparable daring behaviors that should be pursued. (Brown 2018, 76-114)

TABLE 1. Armored vs. Daring Leadership

Armored Leadership	Daring Leadership
Promoting perfectionism which boosts fear of failure and mistakes, shame, and approval seeking.	Showing examples of being empathic and self-compassioned. Pinpointing situations of perfectionism and encouraging healthy striving.
Not celebrating success or achievements because of not being sure if the product is perfect and will work, or because there is still a lot to do.	Celebrating even small milestones and achievements. Showing gratitude and recognition for example at the beginning or end of a meeting.

Numbing pain, discomfort, and vulnerability for example with food or alcohol.	The feelings causing numbing like resentment and vulnerability are often related to lack of boundaries. The cure is to have tools that allow leaning into discomfort, like finding the reason for the rising feeling.
Creating false binaries such as a crush or be crushed or win-lose power dynamics.	Integrating all aspects of yourself. Strong back as in having boundaries and grounded confidence, a soft front from being vulnerable and curious, wild heart resisting negativity reducing us.
Being a knower with all the answers and always being right.	First acknowledging being a knower, second, learning curiosity skills, and lastly, embracing great questions and admitting not knowing.
Making a cover of cynicism and sarcasm. Giving passive-aggressive and hurtful comments.	Being clear and kind. Having the courage to say only what you mean, communicate sincerely, and teach hope. Having a realistic goal, being clear on how to get there, and having faith in the way there.
Using criticism to self-protect. Often comes from fear or feeling unworthiness.	Contributing more than criticizing, putting yourself out there.
Holding power *over* others, for example by making decisions that benefit only a minority of the company.	Empowering by using power *with* employees to find a common ground. Giving power *to* individuals to bring value. Have power *within* as in respecting others, knowing yourself, and being comfortable to challenge beliefs.
Hustling everywhere in lack of knowing own strengths and areas where you bring value.	Being able to identify own and team members' strengths. Not undervaluing or ignoring own skills. Catching employees doing things right and boosting it.
Leading for compliance and control destroys innovation and the basis of vulnerability. It comes out often by micromanaging and pointing out when tasks are not done exactly how they want them. Employees start questioning their abilities and lose confidence.	Promoting dedication, sharing context, and reasoning for strategies and priorities. Supporting and setting up employees for success by making sure they have your support and everything necessary to complete their work.

Fan fear in uncertain times and use it to your advantage.	In uncertainty, sharing information transparently as much as you can. Fact-checking employees' stories and rumors. Making room for vulnerability, acknowledging, and naming the fear and uncertainty.
Linking self-worth to productivity and valuing exhaustion as a status symbol which bolsters stress, anxiety, and eventually burnout.	Showing examples and supporting boundaries, enhancing healthy work-life balance.
Fitting-in culture, tolerating discrimination, and boosting favoritism.	Developing a culture of inclusivity and belonging where diverse perspectives and opinions are included. Acknowledging own privilege and being ready to learn.
Focus on your success by collecting gold stars for yourself.	Focus on leading and helping your team to get the gold stars and shine.
Using energy and time to avoid potentially vulnerable, shameful, or hurtful situations like conflicts.	Facing the discomfort, taking action, and talking straight.
Not solving your issues and then ending up leading from a place of hurt.	Leading from the heart by exploring your feelings, fears, and history to be able to use those experiences for empathy and compassion.

4.3.3 Shame and Empathy

Shame is described as an intense and painful feeling or experience of being inadequate and thus unworthy of love, belonging, and connection. Often appears as thoughts of not being enough or asking who do we think we are. Shame is a universal feeling, everyone, except sociopaths, experiences it. Even the word shame might feel uncomfortable let alone talking about it, but the less it is discussed, the more power shame has over us. Giving up on the armor protecting us, can be scary because it reveals us to vulnerability and shame but keeping the armor on guarantees feeling disconnected. (Brown 2018, 119-127)

In organizations, shame appears in the form of perfectionism, favoritism, and comparison, and by connecting self-worth to productivity. Cover-ups are a huge

red flag of shame in companies. Covering for the reputation of the company or management at the cost of employee's dignity will lead to systematic shame, destroying accountability, money, and power overriding ethics, and a culture of silence and complicity. Unfortunately, shame will always be present in our lives, but shame resilience is possible to learn. With the help of authenticity and practice it is possible to move from shame to empathy. Shame is a social concept; hence it needs a social approach. According to Brown, empathy is the best medication for shame. (Brown 2018, 131-136, 160)

Shared human experiences and acknowledging we are not alone are the foundation of empathy. It is linked to an emotion underlying an experience, rather than to the experience itself. When someone is experiencing a tough moment, connecting is sufficient, there is no need for trying to make things better or give advice. To be empathic and connect, it is enough to have experience of feeling a similar emotion, such as disappointment, loneliness, shame, or grief. Choosing to show empathy involves connecting with something in ourselves that knows the feeling. This makes us vulnerable and might bring up something painful. (Brown 2018, 140-142 & 160)

Besides being the cure for shame, empathy is the most effective tool for authentic connecting and building trust, which is why it is an essential skill for leaders. Here are 5 empathy behaviors to rehearse empathy.

1. Perspective taking. Everyone has a unique way of perceiving the world, influenced by various factors like for example age, race, experiences, and knowledge. There is no one right way to understand the world so it's important to honor people's perspectives as truth. The key to perspective-taking is being a learner instead of a knower. It enables us to see a fuller picture of the world, and understand people's needs and how to meet them where they are.
2. Being non-judgmental. People tend to judge others on areas where they feel insecure themselves. Acknowledging the areas where we feel vulnerable and exposed to shame, allows us to avoid judging.
3. Understanding another person's feelings by being in touch with your feelings.

4. Communicating the understanding of another person's feelings opens space for discussion. It can be challenging to bring up since you can misunderstand what they are feeling, but the course can be fixed by showing up with an open heart, paying attention, and staying curious. Ideally, everyone would be fluent in the language of feelings and feel comfortable about their and other's emotions.

5. Practicing mindfulness as having a balanced approach to emotions to prevent suppressing or exaggerating them. Mindfulness can be trained while having a conversation by paying attention to what feelings are brought up in you and what is your and the other person's body language.

(Brown 2018, 143-149,160)

Brown presents the concept of empathy miss as a situation of sharing something vulnerable or personal, and not feeling heard, understood, or seen afterward. Examples of actions classified as empathy misses are judging the person sharing, blaming someone else, competing with misery, and not listening. (Brown 2018, 152-155)

As a summary of learning empathy skills, it is vital to engage, stay connected, and stay curious. It is not necessary to be afraid of saying something wrong, empathy is about connection, which is forgiving and easy to reroute. The goal is not to be perfect; the goal is to put yourself out there and do it. (Brown 2018, 150-152)

4.3.4 Grounded Confidence and Curiosity

Grounded confidence is built on self-awareness and practice. It is a messy but necessary process of learning, unlearning, and overcoming setbacks. Grounded confidence supports leaders with vulnerability rumbling aiming to daring leading. The foundation of grounded confidence comes from consistent practicing, rumbling skills, and curiosity. Practicing skills is vital to establishing a solid base that enables leaders to act in challenging situations from self-awareness and values instead of reactive emotions. When dealing with difficulties, grounded confi-

dence combined with rumbling skills, allows one to handle it with care, open-ness, and curiosity. (Brown 2018, 165-171)

According to Brown, curiosity is the willingness to question and listen while be-ing comfortable with not knowing the answer to everything. It is the connecting factor in learning new languages, tools, and skills. Curiosity is an act of vulnera-bility and courage, strongly correlating with creativity, intelligence, problem-solving, and improved memory and learning. Noticing gaps in knowledge leads to getting curious, so it is impossible to get curious about the complete un-known. Therefore, it is important to receive interesting information or facts at first to be able to spark curiosity. Curiosity and knowledge-building mutually boost each other's growth. (Brown 2018, 171-175)

4.3.5 Living into Our Values

Values symbolize the fundamental beliefs or ways of being that people perceive as the most important. These beliefs drive people to do uncomfortable and dar-ing actions because they believe it is the right thing to do. The sign of living into our values is when making a decision feels tough and challenging. Often doing the right thing is not easy, and it leads to feeling tired but strong and solid. Liv-ing into our values requires active practicing and contemplation of our values and how to align them with our intentions, thoughts, and actions. (Brown 2018, 185-217)

4.3.6 Braving Trust

Trust is the key to daring leadership and the glue to effective teams and organi-zations. Rumbling about trust can feel tough and the fear of a negative outcome might lead to avoiding the conversation with the person in question and then instead talking about the person to others. Trusting yourself is the first step, without self-trust it is impossible to fully trust others. People strive to be consid-ered trustworthy, but they also tend to be cautious about trusting others. A natu-ral response to someone questioning our trustworthiness is to pull up the armor

and close off our vulnerabilities. Beneficial would be to focus on behaviors of trust instead of character, for example when giving feedback. (Brown 2018, 220-233)

BRAVING INVENTORY (acronym) can be used as a rumble tool for trust. Here are the 7 behaviors of trust that the inventory is based on:

1. Boundaries - respecting other's boundaries and asking about them if not sure.
2. Reliability - delivering what was promised and avoiding overpromising.
3. Accountability – owning their mistakes and being able to apologize.
4. Vault – keeping confidentiality by not sharing information that is not theirs to share.
5. Integrity – choosing courage over comfort and right over fun, easy, or fast. Practicing values in action, not only acknowledging them.
6. Nonjudgement – both parties can ask for help from each other and express what they need without judgment. Asking for help is one of the main things that enhances leaders' trust in their employees.
7. Generosity – having the most generous and positive interpretation of others' actions, words, and language.

(Brown 2018, 225-228)

4.3.7 Learning to Rise

Being courageous and owning your story, makes it possible to write the ending for it. Denying the stories of failure, disappointment, and hurt, leads to the stories owning us instead. Practicing how to rise and get up from tough times increases courageous behavior and resilience. Learning to rise has three steps: reckoning, rumble, and revolution. (Brown 2018, 240-251)

Reckoning is to identify being emotionally hooked and becoming curious about it. It is essential to observe the body's signs of feeling, then slow down and take a deep breath. Without stopping and having this moment, people tend to offload the emotion onto others. Typical offloading strategies are for example exploding

to people they hold power over, hurt coming out as anger or blame, avoiding the emotion, or pretending everything is okay and being overly positive. When feeling anxious, people often start to over – or under-function. Overfunctioning comes up as taking over others' tasks, giving unnecessary advice, and micromanaging. The cure for it is to embrace your vulnerabilities. Underfunctioning is to get less competent and that can be handled by encouraging their strengths. For both, practicing calm is an effective way to decrease anxiety. (Brown 2018, 250-257)

For the rumble part, all the skills from Brene Brown, presented above, should be brought to the rumble discussion or meeting. Learning to rise process, depending on the situation, can be five minutes, days, or months, but the more you rumble with vulnerability, the better and faster you get at it. Revolution in today's world, according to Brown, is to take off the armor, rumble with vulnerability, live into our values, trust with open hearts, and learn to rise, so that we can own our stories and lives. (Brown 2018, 268-272)

4.3.8 Limitations of Brown's Theory

Brown's research of a few decades is quite thorough and solid. It states that for example some of the emotions are universal, but her research is supposedly limited only to people living in North America and the research language was English. 43% of her interviewees identified themselves as Caucasian, 30% as African-American, 18% as Latina, and 9% as Asian-American. This leaves an impression that the cultural differences were not fully researched. To include cultural differences or similarities would have demanded interviewing people from all the continents, from several different countries inside the continents, and preferably in their native language.

Another aspect that left wondering was different personality types. In Dare to Lead -research, there was no acknowledgment of whether differing personality types or traits are affecting daring leading, building trust, or showing empathy or shame for example.

5 ANALYSIS OF DATA

5.1 Results from the Survey

The purpose of the survey conducted within Company X was to explore employees' general satisfaction with their manager relationships and whether the relationship is impacting their engagement and commitment to the company. Word trust was left out of this survey on purpose since it is such a complex subject that can be understood in several different ways. For that reason, a survey was not an appropriate method to research deeper connections. The same applies to Brown's terminology. For instance, vulnerability and shame might have confused respondents without a proper context.

The survey was sent out to the employees by email, and the responses were conducted anonymously within the timeframe of 8.11. - 15.11.2023. The survey received 16 responses in total, slightly below the aim of 20-25 responses, possibly due to an overlap with the company's biannual engagement survey. Regardless, the survey provided valuable insights into the company's current situation and possible development opportunities. The survey was set in Google Forms and the exact questions and format can be seen in Appendix 1.

The first question of the survey was about how long the employee had worked at Company X. The question was set to see if there was any clear correlation with some of the following questions, but there were no clear connections.

The second question was discovering how satisfied the employees are with their relationship with their manager. The scale was from one, not satisfied, to five, very satisfied. According to the survey, 69% of the respondents indicated satisfaction and contentment with their relationships with their managers by choosing 4 or 5 on the scale. There are also opportunities for improvement but as can be seen in Figure 3 below, most employees lean into an overall positive opinion of their relationships and interactions with their managers.

How satisfied are you with your relationship with your manager?
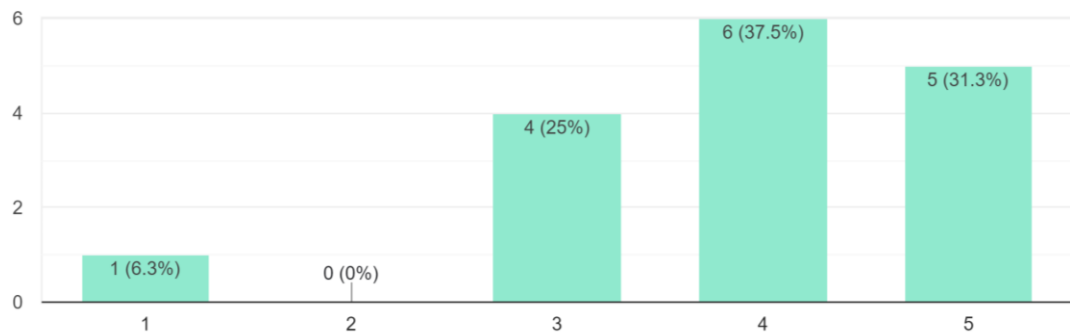16 responses

FIGURE 3. Employee satisfaction with their manager relationship.

The third question examines the possible connection between employee engagement and the employee-manager relationship. The scale was from 1 to five where 1 stands for *the relationship doesn't affect my engagement at all*, and 5 for *the relationship significantly affects my engagement*. As can be seen in Figure 4 below, most employees' work engagement is significantly influenced by their interaction and connection with their manager. Almost every respondent, 15 out of 16, gave a rating of 4 or 5 indicating that the relationship with the manager has a strong impact on the employee's engagement level at Company X.

Do you feel like the relationship with your manager is affecting your work engagement?
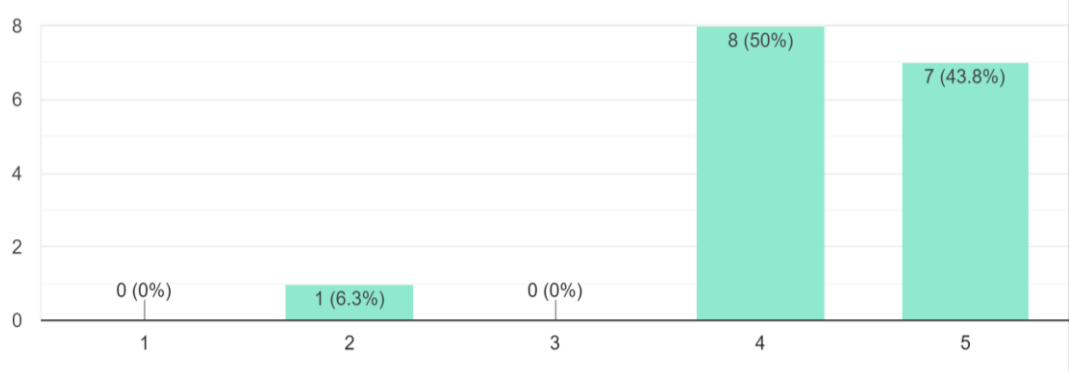16 responses

FIGURE 4. Relationship's impact on work engagement.

These responses are very much in line with the theories, such as Zinger's engagement model, presented in Chapter 3.3. of positive connections impact on engagement and performance. Also, Brown's theory of Dare to Lead supports these survey results. By combining the theory and survey results, the im-

portance of positive relationships at work can be emphasized even more. This shows how essential role managers perform in inspiring and engaging their teams. Therefore, by strengthening the connections between employees and managers, the engagement levels could be enhanced as well. (Leapsome)

As illustrated in Figure 5 below, there is a higher variation in the responses when it comes to the type of impact the relationship with the manager has on employees' commitment to the commissioner. On the scale of the fourth question, 1 demonstrates *it decreases my commitment,* 3 is *neutral,* and 5 stands for *it increases my commitment.* Whereas 56% of the respondents consider that their manager relationship has a positive impact on their commitment, 25% of respondents express that the relationship causes a negative impact on how committed they are. A neutral impact was shown by 19% of the respondents.

Does the relationship with your manager impact your commitment to Company X (3 = neutral)
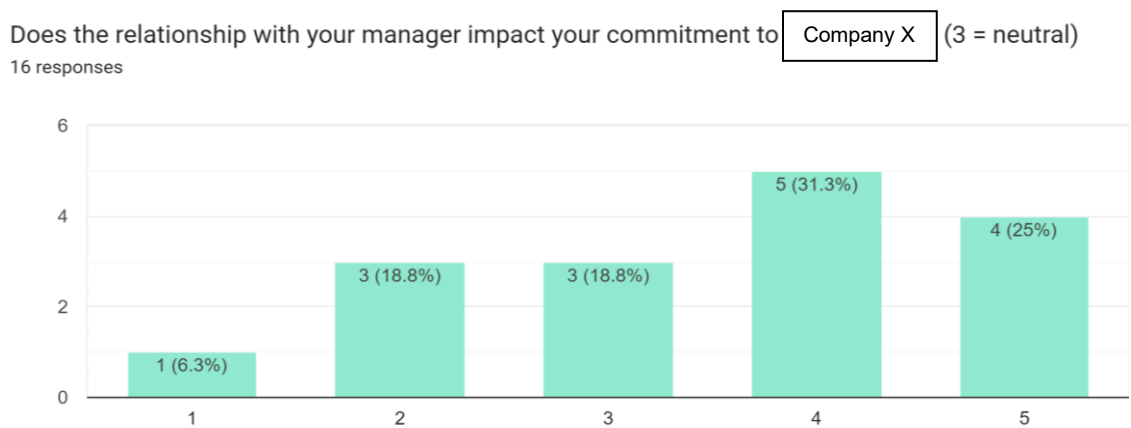
16 responses

FIGURE 5. How the relationship impacts commitment.

The broad range of responses to the impact of commitment indicates widely varying individual experiences. The negative impact on employee commitment is quite concerning and it is worth looking further into. By understanding these differences, the leadership methods can be modified to match employees' needs and boost the levels of employee commitment. The employee experiences and relationships were explored on a deeper level by interviewing employees and the results are analyzed in Chapter 5.2 Results of the Interviews.

The last question, and perhaps the most interesting one, was about areas where employees believe their managers are succeeding. This question

unravels the areas where there is a possibility for improvement as well. Respondents were able to choose as many areas as they felt fitting. Responses varied from choosing 8 areas where their manager was succeeding to not choosing any of the areas.

The option areas were chosen by using Brown's theory Dare to Lead as a foundation. The wording of the options was in a more practical form to avoid confusion and to be more respondent-friendly. (Brown 2018)

Here are the areas of behavior from which respondents chose the areas they believed their manager is succeeding:

1. Creating an environment where both of you feel comfortable to communicate openly and honestly.
2. Supporting your personal and professional growth for instance by dedicating time to it.
3. Fostering an environment where you feel valued, respected, and heard.
4. Giving positive feedback and recognizing your accomplishments.
5. Taking responsibility for their actions, decisions, and mistakes.
6. Responding to mistakes in a non-judgmental way, constructively, and by focusing on learning and growth.
7. Respecting your boundaries and work-life balance.
8. Demonstrating that imperfection is okay, for example by sharing their own experiences or challenges.
9. Empowering you to take risks, make decisions, and have ownership of your tasks.
10. Showing empathy for instance by reacting to professional or personal issues with understanding and compassion.

As can be seen in Figure 6 below, employees have a positive impression of their managers in several essential areas. Respondents believed their managers were succeeding especially well in creating an environment of open and honest communication as well as in empowering employees to take risks, make decisions, and have ownership of their tasks. These areas can be seen as strengths representing the general managerial style in the company.

In which of the following areas do you believe your manager is succeeding?
15 responses

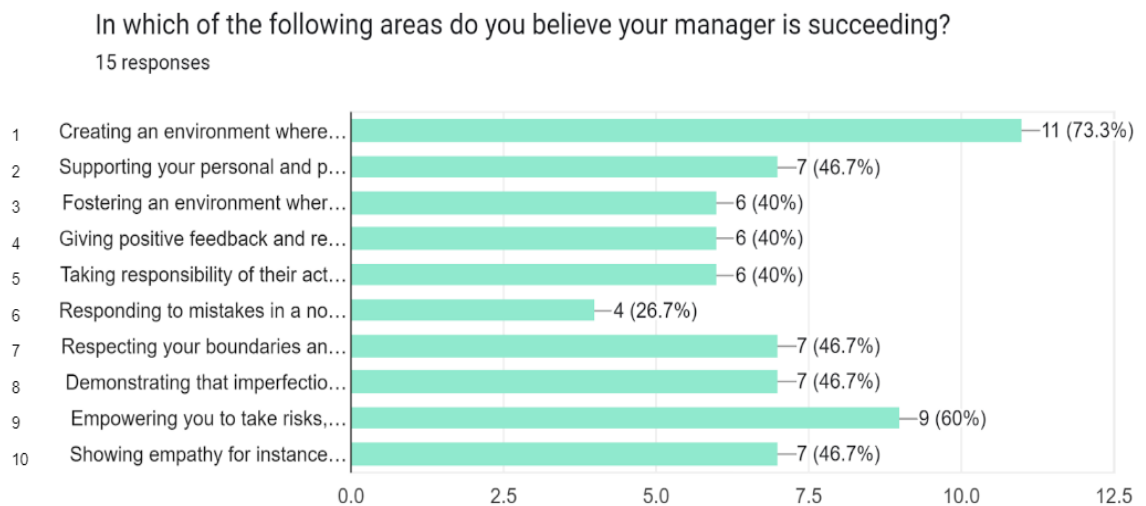|		
1	Creating an environment where…	11 (73.3%)
2	Supporting your personal and p…	7 (46.7%)
3	Fostering an environment wher…	6 (40%)
4	Giving positive feedback and re…	6 (40%)
5	Taking responsibility of their act…	6 (40%)
6	Responding to mistakes in a no…	4 (26.7%)
7	Respecting your boundaries an…	7 (46.7%)
8	Demonstrating that imperfectio…	7 (46.7%)
9	Empowering you to take risks,…	9 (60%)
10	Showing empathy for instance…	7 (46.7%)

FIGURE 6. Areas where managers are succeeding.

The area that needs the most improvement based on this survey is how managers respond to mistakes. Only 27% thought that their manager is succeeding in being non-judgmental and constructive when reacting to employee's mistakes and having a focus on learning and growth. Other areas where especially can be found development opportunities are:

- fostering an environment where employees feel valued, respected, and heard
- giving positive feedback, and recognizing employees' accomplishments
- managers taking responsibility for their own actions, decisions, and mistakes.

These three areas were chosen by 40% of the respondents.

5.2 Results of the Interviews

The interviews aimed to get a deeper understanding of the type of relationships managers and employees have at Company X. The author interviewed employees from every team, with variations on the length of employment, gender, age, and nationality to get a broad sample of experiences. The interviews produced over 10 hours of voice recording, and this chapter will be a summary of those recordings. To respect the anonymity of participants, in this analysis, the inter-

views will not be handled one by one but as a collection of experiences. Appendix 2 can be found the script of questions asked in the interviews but it is important to remember the interviews were only semi-structured. During interviews some areas were explored a bit deeper and follow-up questions and examples were asked depending on the situation. Most of the questions were based on behaviors and areas that build trust. In addition, there were a few questions on employee engagement.

In this interview analysis, the focus will be on defining and explaining current challenges in the employee-manager relationships at Company X. It will elaborate on the behaviors and elements that are preventing employees and managers from building trust and genuine connections. Therefore, the behaviors, experiences, and relationships where there is room for improvement will be explained more in detail than relationships already having a genuine connection.

5.2.1 Feedback Process

One of the main improvement areas that came up was feedback giving. Employees feel like there is not enough constructive and positive feedback coming from the manager. Employees highly value learning and development and especially constructive feedback is a necessary element of employee development. There have been situations where the intention was to share development possibilities, but the outcome has been more of a finger-pointing rather than constructive feedback.

A few employees on the other hand feel hesitant to give feedback because of their manager's reaction. When trying to give feedback, suggestions, or disagree on something, a manager tends to always have an answer ready with multiple counterarguments. This response does not give space for an open discussion and the employee is left unheard. Even though the company has a flat structure, some employees felt they were not in a position to share suggestions or feedback with their manager.

5.2.2 Imperfection and Making Mistakes

When asked about the working environment and whether it supports making mistakes or not, the general response was that it is okay to make mistakes, but there is always a limit to it and the same mistakes should not be repeated. Some felt they were not in a position to make mistakes anymore, or when they had made some mistakes the manager's reaction was frustration and not having enough patience and faith in the employee. In some cases, the manager was intervening too much, and, in some cases, the employees felt like they did not get enough support and guidance from their manager. After all, the responses varied quite a lot in this question from one far end to another.

What comes to managers owning their own mistakes or sharing their weaknesses or flaws with employees, could use some improvement as well. When managers are not sharing their imperfections, employees get the impression that they should be perfect too. It eats up managers' creditability when employee catches them making mistakes and not owning them or making excuses. This causes employees not willing to admit their mistakes or flaws either which is not good for the company culture. According to Brown, accountability for one's mistakes is one of the 7 behaviors to build trust, whereas trying to be perfect is supporting shame and armored leadership.

5.2.3 Armored Leadership

Unfortunately, half of the interviewees have experienced these leadership styles: Hierarchical top-down relationship, directive style, and micromanaging. These styles of leading indicate a lack of trust and genuine connection, and are good real-life examples of armored leadership styles:

Top-down management is based on the manager giving orders and information down the line to the employees. At Company X this has led to poor communication where the whole team is not up to date on important things like changes or new hires. Also, the manager feels distant and has not made an effort to create

a connection. The manager does not know the employees and what are their strengths and what weaknesses could be improved for example. There is a missed opportunity to get the best out of employees when there is no genuine connection.

In the directive style, the manager can come across as quite bossy and controlling. Some employees felt that the manager thinks to know the best and there was no room for suggestions which led to employees not voicing their opinions. In some cases, employees felt safe enough to disagree, but the result was manager overruling, out-dominating, or convincing them otherwise. A manager's role is to call the shots, but they must be able to have open discussions, hear out employees, and try to understand where they are coming from. Explaining the why and the reasoning behind tasks, decisions, and priorities is important as well, not just giving out orders.

The third not so positive style that came up was micromanaging. Multiple employees experienced that their manager was too involved. When encountering any challenges or setbacks, the manager intervenes and takes control or even takes the task away from the employee. This kind of behavior most likely comes from a good place of trying to help out, but as mentioned in Brown's theory of armored leadership, it leads employees to question their abilities and lose their confidence.

5.2.4 Empathy Skills

Based on the interviews, there is a need for improving empathy skills within managers. A few of the interviewees do not feel comfortable sharing more personal details with their manager because when opening up with their manager, they do not feel like the response is genuine and they do not feel heard. Employees expressed their wish for managers to be more understanding and empathic. In some situations, when employees shared personal information with their manager, the employee felt like afterward, it came back as a boomerang and was used against them.

5.2.5 Company Culture

Part of the interviewees felt like the managers were not treating employees equally. When looking at all the interviews, and Brown's definitions, elements of fit-in culture can be found in Company X. A few employees mentioned that to be successful in the company, employees should have a certain vibe and energy to fit in. It also was mentioned that the hiring of new employees had been losing the aspect of diversity by preferring certain types of people.

Several employees see an inner circle within employees who are informed of changes and decisions promptly and are always on top of things. The rest of the employees often get information at the last minute and sometimes even without a why and reasoning. A few interviewees felt like, the outside circle gets the information sometimes in the form of "no questions asked", and they have felt left out and not appreciated. Interviewees mentioned as an example that communication regarding exiting employees has been especially poor.

A last improvement target is for management to remember employees' importance. Interviewees describe company culture as a numbers-over-people kind of culture. They sometimes feel like the company's interest is overruling employees' interests and well-being even though those should be connected to each other rather than excluding each other. Employees have been feeling a huge amount of pressure from the management which causes them a lot of stress and a feeling that overtime working is expected. Management should always remember to care for the employees, even and especially during tough times.

5.2.6 Positive Experienses

In the company, can be found relationships with the behaviors or armored leading mentioned above but can be also found multiple relationships that are the exact opposite. The interviews brought up several trusting relationships and behaviors of wholehearted leading at the company. Based on the experiences and feelings shared in the discussions, 4 out of 10 interviewees had made a

genuine connection with their manager and were highly engaged as well. Most of the employees also felt mutual respect with their manager. Most of the employees also felt mutual respect with their manager.

One of the factors in building an effective relationship was knowing what employees and managers need from each other and being clear on their expectations. Giving and getting feedback daily helped employees to understand these needs and expectations. Getting both constructive and positive feedback, had a significant impact on boosting employees' motivation.

As can be seen already in the survey, Company X has a culture of open and honest communication between managers and employees. Employees feel safe to disagree and bring up challenging topics, even though they would not always feel comfortable doing so.

One thing that the interviewees who were thriving and highly motivated had in common was autonomy and ownership of their job. That is something they highly value. Looking back to Chapter 3.3.5, this aligns perfectly with the JD-R model of employee engagement where demands like pressure have to be in balance with rewards like autonomy for employees to be satisfied. (Leapsome)

Managers' transparency on why certain decisions or changes were made and explaining the reasons behind them, increased employees' trust in their manager. Interviewees saw it also important that the manager was owning up to their own mistakes and sharing their flaws or weaknesses. That decreased the pressure employees were feeling to be perfect.

Employees do really appreciate it when they have a good connection with their manager. According to one of the interviewees "The best jobs I've had, have been with a good manager". Based on the interviews, it can be stated that trusting employee-manager relationships do increase employees' engagement highly at Company X and it sets up employees for success.

5.3   Secondary Data

From the secondary data, the most important and relevant data was the data of exiting employees from this year. The voluntary turnover for the year 2023 (January-November) was 33% for Company X. It was the same as the general turnover rate since all the exiting employees resigned themselves, and no one was discharged. An interesting note is that 55% of them left without having a new job in sight. This most likely indicates high dissatisfaction with the company if the employee has not resigned because of a better opportunity, and would rather take the risk of being unemployed than being employed in their current company.

What comes to the 3rd sub-research question of employee-manager relationships having a connection with the voluntary turnover rate, it is fair to believe that some level of a connection is there. In the survey, some employees expressed that the manager relationship has a negative impact on their commitment to the company. In practice, this can mean the relationship being one of the factors leading to an employee's resignation. The interview results support this hypothesis as well. Accordingly, implementing daring leadership behavior at Company X can be expected to increase commitment and decrease the voluntary turnover rate.

5.4   Summary of the Current Situation at Company X

In this chapter, the primary data results will be summarized. One of the key takeaways from the survey results is that as expected based on the theoretical framework and models, managers have a significant impact on employees' engagement. They can also remarkably increase or decrease employees' commitment to the company.

As can be seen from the survey and interview results, there are a lot of positive connections, and trust can be found in several relationships. However, there are

also multiple employee-manager relationships where lies a great opportunity to improve the relationship by building genuine connection and trust.

When looking at Schein's relationship levels, the majority of the relationships at Company X are most likely on level 1 and the goal would be to bring them on level 2 to create an effective environment of psychological safety where employees are thriving. Based on the research there were signs of a few relationships that were on a negative level. Some employees' engagement has decreased significantly due to their manager's behavior. At the latest, this should work as a sign for the management to prioritize building genuine connections and focus on employee engagement. By pursuing Daring Leadership, the relationships are possible to develop to the second level and then engagement should increase as well.

Based on this research, these are the main development areas to concentrate on when starting to improve employee-manager relationships:

1. Giving and getting constructive and positive feedback.
2. Letting go of armored leadership behaviors, especially micromanaging, being a knower, and leading by control.
3. Enhancing empathy skills.
4. Improving the company culture to be more diverse and less pressuring.
5. Creating an environment of imperfection where everyone is taking ownership of their actions, decisions, and mistakes.
6. Employees feel valued, respected, and heard.

The following chapter will present behaviors and tools to improve these specific areas at the case company.

6   RECOMMENDATIONS AND TOOLS

In this chapter is presented the tools of Brown's Dare to Lead book that are the most applicable to Company X's situation and target areas. They will be written out in a form where they are easy to understand for everyone, even without reading the book.

6.1   Basics for Daring Leadership

The first step would be to create a foundation for being vulnerable and building trust. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, one of the core actions of Daring leadership is learning to have tough conversations and Rumble with vulnerability. For every employee and manager at Company X knowing how to deal with tough conversations would be an essential skill to have as a foundation to practice all the other skills of daring leading. Here are a few practical tips on how to rumble in vulnerable conversations with an open mind and heart.

A safe container is a tool for creating an environment of psychological safety for Rumble. To create a safe container, a manager can first start by acknowledging the struggle and name some of the unsaid emotions the team, an employee, or the manager themselves might be feeling. The next part is asking everyone to write down what kind of behavior they need during the conversation to feel safe and open. Collecting these notes and going through them together creates psychological safety, a safe container for the tough conversation. Before starting the vulnerability rumble, it would be good to do this to know what kind of behavior others need from you or what kind of actions stand in the way of a safe and open environment. (Brown 2018, 36-38)

In a Rumble, one tool is for a manager to ask the employee, what does support from them look like. This creates clarity on how to successfully support and get through the challenge or tough situation. Asking directly, helps the manager to understand exactly what kind of support employee needs from them and what behavior they do not need. An essential part of rumbling is to think about what

part am I playing in this challenge or situation and then own it. (Brown 2018, 38,58)

Another rumble tool is "say more". Asking for more context and details leads the conversation to a deeper level. It allows you to understand the whole picture and where the other person is coming from. As important as asking for more context, is giving white space in conversations. Leaving empty spaces and making pauses can feel uncomfortable but it is vital for creating the space where the other person can open up and start sharing. When they start talking, your only job is to listen, not to think of how you will respond, just genuinely listen. (Brown 2018, 40, 67-69)

Pushing or forcing vulnerable conversations should be avoided. If and when the rumble starts to feel overwhelming, have a timeout or a ten-minute break to give everyone some space. Circling back to it later that day or the following day is one of the best tools for rumbling and a great way to give some time to reflect and perhaps cool down. (Brown 2018, 49, 68)

In picture 3 below can be seen sentences to help start the tough conversations, the Rumble.

List of Rumble Starters:

01. The story I make up . . .

02. I'm curious about . . .

03. Tell me more.

04. That's not my experience (instead of "You're wrong about her, him, them, it, this . . .").

05. I'm wondering . . .

06. Help me understand . . .

07. Walk me through . . .

08. We're both dug in. Tell me about your passion around this.

09. Tell me why this doesn't fit/work for you.

10. I'm working from these assumptions—what about you?

11. What problem are we trying to solve?

PICTURE 3. Rumble Starters. (Brown 2021)

The first sentence, *the story I make up..,* presents one of the most effective rumble tools as well as a rising tool. Every human being starts making up stories when they do not have all the data. Brown calls the first story that people make up *the first shitty draft, SFD*, where fear and insecurities fill the gaps of data, creating the worst-case scenarios. It is possible to take the power back from the story to yourself by writing down the SFD on paper or talking about it to someone you trust for a reality check. To move from an SFD to a true story, ask yourself the following questions.

1. What further information do I need to understand and learn about the circumstances? What is actual data and what are my own assumptions?

2. What further information do I need to understand and learn about the other people in the story? What questions or explanations might help?

3. The last question needs the most practice and courage to answer: What more about myself should I learn and understand? What role am I playing in this? What is it that I am actually feeling and what is behind my reaction?

This SFD process is usually done individually but the SFD can also be shared with colleagues or with your manager/employee just like the rest of the rumble starters. For managers it would be important to fact-check especially during big changes, what kind of stories their teams and employees are telling themselves and others. (Brown 2018, 247, 258-268)

6.2   Leading for Control & Micromanaging

Company X managers had some elements of armored leadership, especially leading for control and micromanaging. In addition to embracing your vulnerabilities, TASC and Paint Done tools help with this type of armored leadership. They create clarity, a shared purpose, and commitment. (Brown 2018, 98-103)

TASC is a checklist to ensure accountability and success of the task. The first step is to discuss who owns the **T**ask**.** Then clear up if the person has the **A**uthority to be held **A**ccountable**.** Making sure there is enough time, resources, and clarity to enable the person to **S**ucceed. And lastly, having a **C**hecklist of

actions needed to accomplish the task. Using TASC helps to make sure all parties are aligned on the task and expectations, and that the person accountable is set up for success. (Brown 2018, 98-103)

The other tool is Paint Done, where the aim is to describe what the task looks like when it is done. By using context and color when painting the image of a ready task, it is possible to discover unsaid intentions or expectations regarding the job. Paint Done tool supports curiosity, learning, cooperation, and reality-checking. (Brown 2018, 98-103)

In addition to these tools, changing the way of thinking from knower to learner makes a huge difference and helps managers move towards wholehearted leading. Accepting that you do not know everything, and getting curious are the first steps. Embracing an environment of learning by rewarding team members who are asking questions or admitting not knowing but wanting to learn. (Brown 2018, 90-92)

6.3   Feedback Process

In the situation of giving or receiving feedback, one of the biggest challenges but also the most important part is to be aligned with our values. To deliver feedback daringly, Brown (2018) created this checklist for everyone to go through before providing feedback. It aims to ensure that you are in the right headspace to have the possibly tough discussion.

I know I'm ready to give feedback when:

☐ I am ready to sit next to you instead of across from you. This setting takes away some of the power difference and creates an environment of being in this together.

☐ I will put the issue in front of us, not between us. This helps to look at the issue from the same perspective and to be on the same side.

☐ I am ready to listen, ask questions, and accept the possibility of not fully understanding the issue. Feedback should be coming from a place of curiosity instead of lecturing.

- ☐ I am recognizing what they are doing well rather than having a full focus on their mistakes or weaknesses. Giving regular recognition of their accomplishments is important.

- ☐ I am recognizing their strengths and how they can use them to improve this situation.

- ☐ I can give productive and respectful feedback without shaming or blaming.

- ☐ I am ready to own my part of the situation.

- ☐ I am able to genuinely thank them for their work in addition to feedback giving.

- ☐ I can discuss how the solution will lead to growth and opportunity.

- ☐ I am able to show the vulnerability and openness that I would like to also see from them.

(Brown 2018, 198-201)

Learning how to receive feedback is as important as how it is given. Responding just by saying "Okay, I'll work on it" shuts down the conversation and rumbling and is not effective from the learning and development point of view. The key to receiving feedback is staying aligned with your values and thinking of ways to apply the feedback productively despite how it is delivered to you. Identifying value-supporting behavior or creating self-talk helps to receive feedback daringly. For example, saying to yourself that the person delivering the feedback has the best intentions, or saying there is something valuable in the feedback, and this will help me to develop. The aim is to stay present in the moment by listening, integrating feedback, and reflecting back with accountability. Getting defensive should be avoided, and when struggling to receive feedback it is better to circle back to it a bit later. (Brown 2018, 202-205)

6.4 Empathy Skills and Shame Resilience

Empathy itself is the most important tool for building trust and genuine connections. The 5 empathy skills can be seen in the theoretical framework, Chapter 4.3.3. However, this chapter presents a couple of ways how to work towards gaining those skills. Empathy is a cure to shame as well, and shame is for ex-

ample the driving force behind armored leadership, perfectionism, and fit-in culture. Therefore, learning empathy skills and shame resilience is the first step towards a mistake-friendly environment where people are not afraid to own their actions, decisions, and mistakes. Shame-resilient and empathic behavior also generates a more diverse and inclusive company culture.

Here are four questions to start practicing empathy skills:

1. When you look at the empathy misses below, are there one or two behaviors that shut you down and bring up your armor?

- Mixing sympathy with empathy. Empathy is feeling with people, and it fuels connection, while sympathy is feeling for people (for example *I feel sorry for you)* which drives disconnection.
- Gas and awe. After sharing something, the other person reacts to it by feeling shame for you which leads you to try to make them feel better.
- The mighty fall. The other person thinks highly of you and when you struggle, they are surprised or disappointed by you which evokes you to defend yourself.
- The block and tackle. When you share something, the other person judges you or starts blaming someone else.
- The boots and shovel. The other person desperately tries to make you feel better or they fail to hear what you are actually feeling and telling them.
- *If you think that's bad…* Competing with your story by telling something even worse that happened to them, changing the focus to themselves.

2. When encountering one of the empathy misses that brings up your armor, what emotions are you feeling in that moment? How does it impact your connection with that person?

3. How would you rate your own empathy skills?

4. Are there one or two empathy misses or responses that you usually use that should be changed?

(Brown 2018, 152-157)

Here are actions and elements to build up your shame resilience:

1. Recognizing when you feel shame and what are the physical symptoms you experience when feeling shame. What kind of messages or experiences are your shame triggers? When being able to recognize these elements, you can avoid using your shame shields of moving away, toward, or against. Moving away illustrates retreating, silencing ourselves, or keeping secrets. Moving toward is looking to please or appease and moving against is being aggressive and controlling people with shame.

2. Develop your critical awareness by first zooming in so much that you can only see your flawed self alone and struggling. Then zoom out to see the bigger picture where we see others struggling as well with the same things. This helps us to realize we are normal, and we are not alone.

3. Reaching out to other people to understand the experiences that make us feel the most alone, are in fact universal experiences. Acknowledging this makes us feel more connected and less alone with our challenges.

4. Talk about shame. If we do not talk about how we feel or what we need shame thrives and shuts us down or leads us to acting out. Learn to recognize the language and words that are used to shame others, good examples are using words *loser, lame*, or *weak*, and sayings such as *you are so sensitive/defensive,* and *I didn't realize that was such an issue for you.*

As a last tip for practicing empathy Brown (2018,160-161) created phrases to show empathy and feeling with:

- "Oh man. I feel you.
- I know that feeling and it sucks.
- Me too.
- I see you. You're not alone.
- I've been in a similar place and it's really hard.
- I think a lot of us experience that. Either we're all normal or we're all weird. Either way, it's not just you.
- I understand what that's like."

These are helpful to understand better what empathic language might look like. When feeling unsure what to say, these assist in getting the conversation started. (Brown 2018,160-161)

6.5   Trust Building

The tools and tips above are a great way to start building trust and genuine connections at Company X. All the areas are interconnected, so improving even one area has a broad effect on the relationship between employee and manager, however building trust needs effort in all the areas of Daring Leadership. Developing trust has an impact on all the areas that need improvement at the company.

The Braving Inventory presented in Chapter 4.3.6 can be used as a rumbling tool for trust. The aim of the braving inventory tool is to create space, time, and intention to discuss trust, in a productive and actionable way. Teams can develop one or two behaviors for every element, and the behaviors will be observed, and everyone will be held accountable for them. Using the Braving inventory in teams helps to build trust through smaller moments and behaviors. (Brown 2018, 225-233)

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, the foundation of trust comes initially from self-trust. The braving inventory tool can be used for self-trust too. First, think about a time when you let yourself down and questioned your ability to depend on yourself. Then ask questions from yourself on all the elements; for example, did I trust my boundaries? After discovering these areas, you should address the key areas that need improvement, and start to build trust in yourself through small moments and behaviors. (Brown 2018, 233-235)

7 CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to create a plan on how to enhance trust in employee-manager relationships at Company X. The current state and improvement areas were defined with the research combination of a survey and interviews. Even though many employees thrive at their work when they have a trusting leader who shows the behavior of Daring leadership, several employees have received more armored leadership from their manager.

The research question "How can Company X improve trust in the employee-manager relationships, by utilizing Brene Brown's principles of leadership and building trust?" is answered in Chapter 6 by presenting several tools of Daring leading targeting the areas identified in the research analysis. The sub-questions of the current state and connections with engagement and voluntary turnover were answered as well in this thesis, specifically in Chapter 5.

The asset that this thesis provides for the company is practical tools and tips on how to empower the employee-manager relationships and therefore unlock employees' and managers' full potential. In addition, the core knowledge of Brown's Darin Leading is brought into this thesis, making it easier for managers and employees to access and apply.

As a next step, the author highly recommends the managers and the employees of Company X also get inspired by Brene Brown and take the recommendations and tools into action. That way for example within one year, they could research the topic again and see if the Daring leadership has succeeded in building trust and genuine connections.

To be able to survive the rapidly changing industry, enhancing daring leadership within the company is vital. Trusting relationships and connections will create an innovation and creativity-friendly working environment for the commissioner which is essential as well for them.

Here are three of the author's favorite quotes from Brene Brown (2018, 19, 67, 195) to wrap up this thesis:

"Daring is saying *I know I will eventually fail, and I'm still all in.*"

"Leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time attending to fears and feelings, or squander an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behavior."

"A brave leader is someone who says *I see you. I hear you. I don't have all the answers, but I'm going to keep listening and asking questions.*"

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Employee-manager Relationships Survey

1(3)

Employee-manager relationships survey

Greetings from Finland!

Some of you may remember me as the HR intern from last summer. Currently, I'm doing my thesis in collaboration with Company X, researching trust in employee-manager relationships and its impact on work engagement. The foundation of the thesis comes from Brene Brown's theory of Dare to Lead, which highlights the importance of vulnerability, empathy, and genuine connections.

With this short survey, I'd like to see where Company X currently stands on these topics. I'd be very grateful if you could spare a few minutes for this survey. Answers are confidential, anonymous, and used solely for my thesis research. The survey is open until Thursday evening, November 16th. If you have any concerns or want to chat more about this topic, please don't hesitate to contact me at roosa.e.kilpinen@tuni.fi.

I hope this thesis will contribute to creating an engaging work environment that empowers employees to thrive! Thank you in advance, and I hope you're having a lovely autumn :)

Warmest regards,
Roosa Kilpinen

How long have you worked at | Company X? |

○ Under 1 year

○ Over 1 year

○ Over 2 years

○ Over 3 years

How satisfied are you with your relationship with your manager?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not satisfied	○	○	○	○	○	Very satisfied

Do you feel like the relationship with your manager is affecting your work engagement?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Doesn't affect my engagement at all	○	○	○	○	○	Affects significantly my engagement

---

Does the relationship with your manager impact your commitment to | Company X? |
(3 = neutral)

	1	2	3	4	5	
It decreases my commitment	○	○	○	○	○	It increases my commitment

In which of the following areas do you believe your manager is succeeding?

☐ Creating an environment where both of you feel comfortable to communicate openly and honestly

☐ Supporting your personal and professional growth for instance by dedicating time for it

☐ Fostering an environment where you feel valued, respected, and heard

☐ Giving positive feedback and recognizing your accomplishments

☐ Taking responsibility of their actions, decisions, and mistakes

☐ Responding to mistakes in a non-judgmental way, constructively, and by focusing on learning and growth

☐ Respecting your boundaries and work-life balance

☐ Demonstrating that imperfection is okay, for example by sharing their own experiences or challenges

☐ Empowering you to take risks, make decisions, and have ownership of your tasks

☐ Showing empathy for instance by reacting to professional or personal issues with understanding and compassion

☐ Other:

Anything you'd like to add or comment?

Your answer

Thank you for your valuable answers!

Google Forms

Appendix 2. Interview question script

Trust in employee-manager relationships
→ how it impacts employee engagement

Intro

- The idea is to see what kind of relationship you had with your manager, a deeper understanding, etc.

- No right or wrong answer, just your own experiences

- Approach → going through different areas that build trust to get an overall picture

Warm-up

- How are you doing?

- How long have you worked at Company X?

- How many different managers you've had here and how long you've had your current manager?

Trust & Manager Relationship

- How would you describe your professional **personality** and working style?

- How would you describe the **leadership style** of your manager?

- How does that leadership **style work for you**?

Open & transparent communication

- How would you describe your **communication** with your manager?

- How do you feel about discussing **challenging topics** with your manager?

Feedback & Listening

- Are you giving and getting **feedback**? Both positive and constructive. Do you think it's impacting your motivation?

- Are you able to **disagree** with them and challenge them? Do you **feel safe** to do that?

- Do you feel **heard**?

Putting people first & decision making

- How would you describe the **decision-making** within the company?
- Do you feel like **changes & decisions** are **communicated** well?
- Do you feel like your manager is making decisions with your **best interest** in mind?
- How much **autonomy** do you have in your role?

Vulnerability & Empathy

- Are you able to **share personal details** that are affecting your work? Do you feel comfortable sharing them? Is your manager understanding?
- Is your manager comfortable with sharing their **weaknesses or imperfections** with you?
- How about you? Have you felt safe to share your **flaws and imperfections** with your manager?
- Do you feel sharing things has **affected** your **relationship**?
- Do you feel like there's **respect** both ways?

Empowerment & Support

- Do you feel like you're in an **environment** where it's **okay to fail and make mistakes**? Any examples? How did your manager **react**?
- Do you feel your manager has your **back**? What kind of support do you get from your manager?
- Do they take **ownership** of their own **mistakes**?

Ethical Behaviour

- How are **conflicts** handled? How do you feel about **discussing conflicts**?
- Is your manager **leading by example**?
- Can you **count on their word**? If they say they'll do something, do they follow up with it?

Engagement

- How would you describe your **energy and enthusiasm** when you come to work? How does this compare to how you feel outside of work?
- How do your work **environment** and the nature of your tasks **impact your overall well-being and job satisfaction**?
- Do you ever feel **stressed**? What **causes** stress for you?

- Do you feel connected to our company's values & mission? Do you see a clear connection between the values & mission and your role?
- Do you feel part of this company?

- How important is it to you that you have learning & development opportunities? How does your leader support your development?

- Can you see yourself staying with the organization in the long term? What factors would influence your decision to stay or leave?
- Would you recommend it to a friend?

Final Questions

- In summary, how would you describe your relationship with your manager?
- Is there anything you'd like to change about your relationship with your manager?
- Do you feel like there's trust between you and your manager?
- Do you feel like the relationship with your manager (and their leadership style) is **impacting your work**? If yes, how?
- What kind of **actions** make you trust more someone?
- Could you describe your **ideal** leader and ideal relationship?
- Is there **anything else you would like to share** about your experiences?