



Amplified Group




# HOW TO ACHIEVE AN AGILE ORGANISATION WITH AN EMPOWERED WORKFORCE



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High trust environments create agile organisations that thrive in our fast-paced world. This report identifies the paths to achieve acceleration and then maintain momentum.

Only organisations who are truly agile can compete and survive in the business world today. Why? Because the pace of technological change has never been faster and shows no signs of slowing down.

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The pace of change is unprecedented. Personal computers, the internet and smartphones have created (and destroyed) entire industries over the last two decades. Now, artificial intelligence and robotics are likely to do the same. Change is coming inexorably, and business leaders must be nimble in order to embrace it. Put bluntly, if we can't manage the next disruption, it will destroy us.”  
John Schwartz – *Forbes Technology Council*

The speed of adoption and the impact on the way we work is no longer something that we can afford to ignore. According to a recent survey conducted by the Amplified Group survey findings suggest trust is the foundation for business agility.

## What do we mean by agile?

McKinsey describes a perfect balance of speed and stability working in unison as the recipe for an organisation to become and stay agile.

An organisation demonstrating 'speed' is responsive, nimble and dynamic. Stability however is harder to define and arguably harder to deliver in a world of urgent and fast paced change.



McKinsey help us understand what is meant by stability within an organisation. They use an analogy of a smartphone and a series of apps installed on the phone. If one thinks of the organisation as the operating system, then despite the development of new apps, the smartphone's operating system remains consistent. In an organisation, stability comes knowing that how you are looked after as an employee is always guaranteed, no matter what you are being asked to develop and work on. You can trust that no matter where you are positioned within the business, your role may change but the way that you are supported and rewarded does not. There is always consistency across the business and over time.

Stable organisations place great emphasis on holding their people accountable, to the values and vision of the business, rather than on specific tasks, this requires a high trust environment.

## Delivering organisational stability through high trust environments

In a high trust culture;

- There is clarity of purpose, people are inspired
- People are empowered to make decisions, all the way to the front line
- People have freedom to learn from their mistakes
- People are rewarded for their loyalty
- People have fun and fulfilment in their job

There is growing evidence that increasingly, people expect that their workplace will be a place of stability, trust, fun and fulfilment. This is particularly true of millennials and in the absence of those values' talent will simply move from one organisation to another, until they feel their needs are being met.

At Amplified Group we wanted to explore the extent to which organisations in our industry have established a high trust environment.

We surveyed 200 IT leaders, supported by a cross section of interviews, to give us their first-hand experience of the five tangible elements required for a high trust environment. We looked at these against age and number of employees in the company.

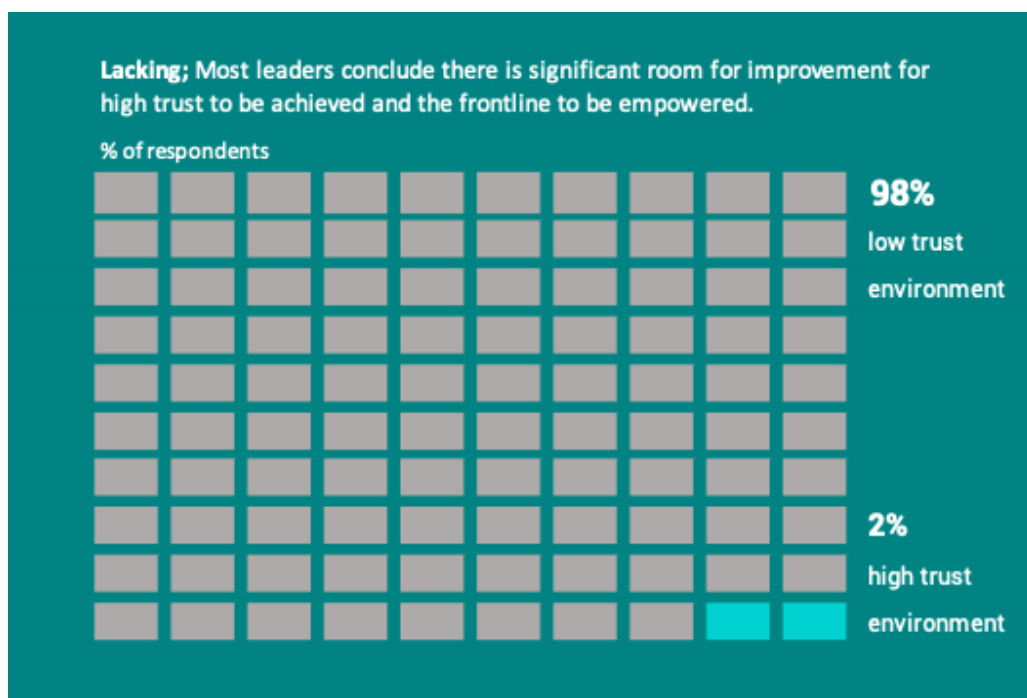
### THE FIVE ELEMENTS

1. You are inspired and empowered
2. Loyalty is rewarded
3. There is trust and belief that the best idea wins
4. Failure and mistakes are treated as lessons
5. You have purpose and fulfilment and feel valued

We found that only 2% of the IT Leaders we surveyed experienced a high score across the five elements

With only 4 of the 200 individuals in our survey claiming to be experiencing a high trust culture, we needed to understand what was happening in the other 196 and where were productivity opportunities being missed.

If being inspired and feeling fulfilled scored the highest of the five elements with a strong correlation between them it raises the question why is there such a missed opportunity for the workforce to be empowered?



As we explored the responses and the characteristics of the companies involved, where a company was positioned in its lifecycle had a significant bearing on whether it was able to deliver a high trust culture or not.

We expected to see a linear relationship between the age of the organisation and its ability to deliver a culture of high trust. By contrast, what we found, was that there were peaks and troughs as the life cycle progressed.

From the study we identified different lifecycle and adoption stages that High-Tech organisations might find themselves in. Adoption phases were clear, those organisations that were potential Tech- Unicorns, most likely to grow and scale, the opposite to the Laggards. Then there were organisations that have reached the heady heights of growth and maturity but then become Tech- Dinosaurs. Due to lack of trust, they are slow to change and at risk of becoming extinct, the opposite to the Unicorns.

## The early-phase start-up

In organisations of less than 3 years we saw employees were inspired by the tech, believed they could make a difference, were committed and had purpose.

We expected these organisations to be the most agile given their relatively small size and lean structure. However, when we tested our assumption, the results surprised us. There was a consistent response demonstrating that there was untapped productivity in these companies. It often appeared that the founders held back the potential scale and growth by not being able to let go and empower the growing talent and experience they have hired into their organisation.

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I'm inspired by the technology – this is clever stuff –very innovative in a hot market but we have weak leadership”

“

The lack of trust at the leadership level, there is not an open door, leadership have a divisive way of pushing down from the top, not up for discussion”

## Mid-phase start-up

Moving past the 3 year mark, we found that employees were highly inspired and believed in the business purpose. Organisations of this age were beginning to learn from their mistakes and starting to feel more stable. However, the influence of the founders was still dominating, with 45% of the respondents still not feeling empowered or trusted resulting in significant untapped talent.

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When I was hired, they said they wanted someone to do the job but in practice they wanted to do it for me. They were at a growth phase where the people who set up the company just couldn't let go.”

## The Tech-Unicorns vs the Laggard

It is after the 5 year mark we identified two clear paths, the potential Tech-Unicorns who had created a high trust culture early in their lifecycle resulting in higher productivity and thus were able to scale — enabling them to reach the sweet spot — and the Laggards who were still in the start-up phase.

For the Unicorns (organisations between 5 and 10 years old that had grown and scaled), teams within those businesses told us that they felt they had a strong sense of direction and purpose. They felt trusted and empowered to contribute supported by an aligned leadership team. Our survey determined 77% of the respondents in the Unicorns segment agreed that all the elements of a high trust culture existed.

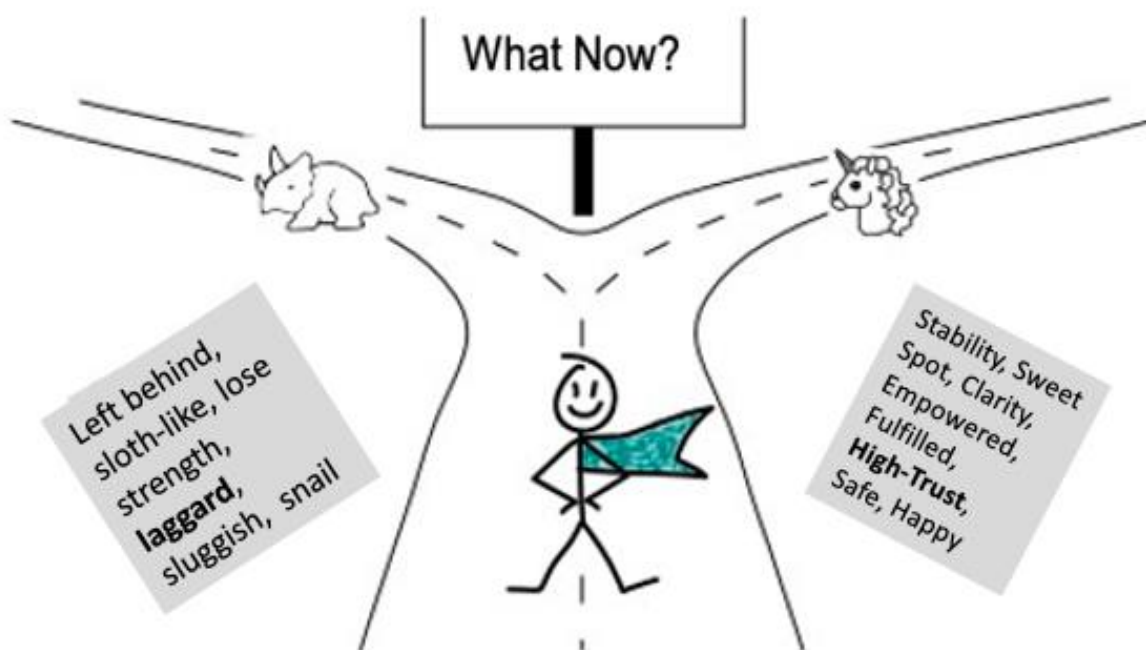


Conversely, our survey indicated that all of our laggard organisations (which despite their age had failed to move beyond start-up status) had a lack of trust as a defining characteristic of their cultures. The leaders of the business were spending too much time and energy on their own personal agendas rather than performing as a cohesive unit, pulling together, trusting and empowering everyone in the organisation to achieve common business goals.

“There was no energy at the leadership level. I was in control of being inspired with my team directly but that didn’t last because I felt the leadership were not inspiring overall and ultimately this dragged me down”

This 5 to 10-year stage in an organisation's lifecycle appeared from our findings to be a crucial fork in the road. The unicorns appeared to have hit a sweet-spot. They had built the foundations of a high trust culture early in their start up days and were now sustaining that culture to scale and grow fast by empowering their people to contribute and deliver growth. The future direction of travel at this stage looked less optimistic for our laggard organisations. Of all the lifecycle stages, we found that companies at this stage had a responsibility to take stock of the extent to which they were providing a high trust culture and, if it was absent, take action now to ensure agility in the future.

## Take advantage of the fork in the road



## Becoming a Tech-Dinosaur

Moving beyond the 5 to 10 year stage the lifecycle sweet-spot was only retained by 44% of the respondents of the large organisations that have moved past the 10 years.

We found that even though some organisations were well established their initial growth had now stalled. From the survey and interview responses we could see a common thread of lack of leadership alignment, values being spoken about but not acted on and most significantly, leaders not relinquishing control and trusting their teams. For these older organisations there is an added risk from new disruptors who have been built in a new age of urgency, and who are readily empowering their frontlines and identifying the skills they need to hire for the future.

Our findings showed that the vast majority of respondents were less inspired in this group, there was complacency and neutrality across all five elements and people in the organisation tended to be resigned to the status quo.

Respondents said that a lack of trust inhibited them, and this was evident throughout the organisation, executive to employee, peer-to-peer and department to department. This creation of silos slowed down confidence and inevitably productivity and agility.

“ I wanted a manager I could trust to fight for me. A manager that would step in, provide trust and support, particularly support and not hide behind fake processes”

We also found notable examples where leaders had taken it upon themselves to be the inspiration for their team creating a high trust culture, their teams were highly motivated and empowered, although working in isolated units within the larger organisation. For these teams to be fully effective, the silos would need to be broken down and their best practices repeated across the organisation, ideally starting at the leadership level.

### Does lack of trust slow you down?

Respondents said that lack of trust inhibits them beyond red tape and process is evident throughout the organisation.

- Executive to employee
- Peer-to-peer
- Department to department

Causing silos, all of which slows down confidence and, inevitably, productivity.

## Maintaining agility is crucial as you grow

It was evident that only companies who consistently deliver a high trust culture can be stable and agile enough to survive and thrive.

One respondent interviewed sums this up;

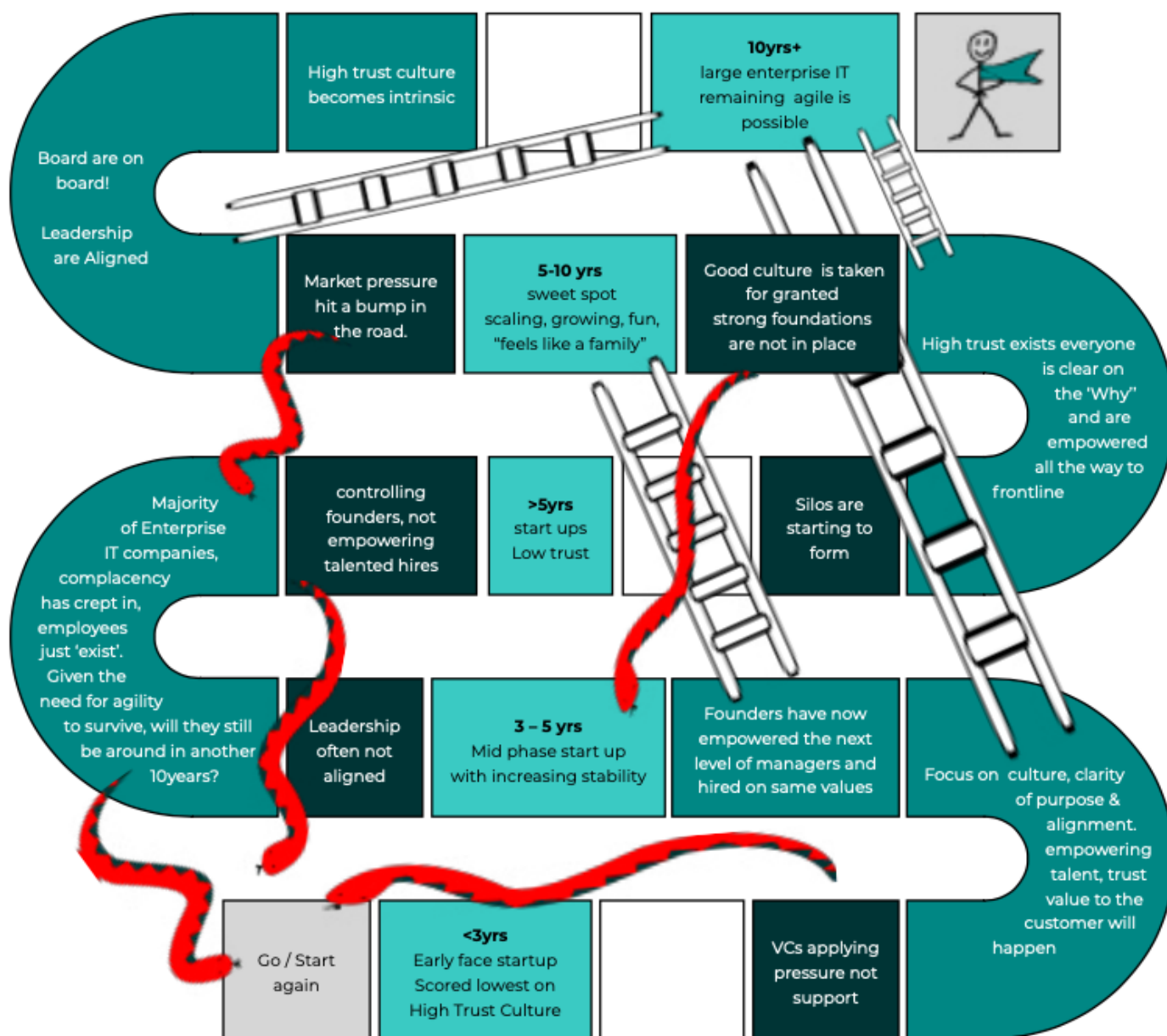
“ Lack of trust has definitely stunted the growth of the company”



Of all the organisations we heard back from, it was the Unicorn organisations between 5 and 10 years that were performing in the most agile way, by creating a high trust environment, they had the ability to scale rapidly.

However, this culture needs to be sustained as the organisation progresses along its lifecycle. If a business is not able to consistently provide high levels of trust to its people, the glue that holds it together begins to dissolve and the stability of the business is put at risk.

How do these findings compare with your own organisation? The traditional game of snakes and ladders provides a useful illustration of how easy it is to ascend to the next stage or slide to failure. Take a look and consider which path you need to take.



At [Amplified Group](#), we specialise in helping organisations build and sustain high trust cultures. We would love to hear from you if you would like to find out more.