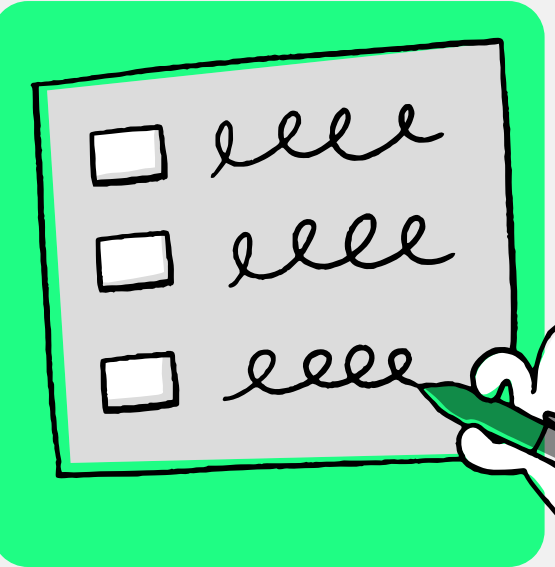
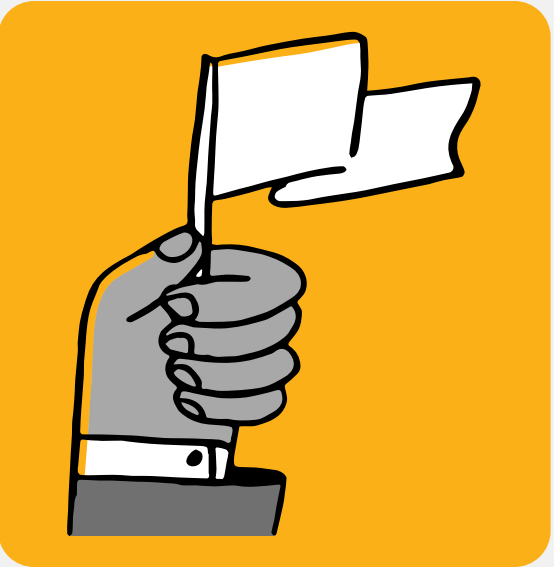
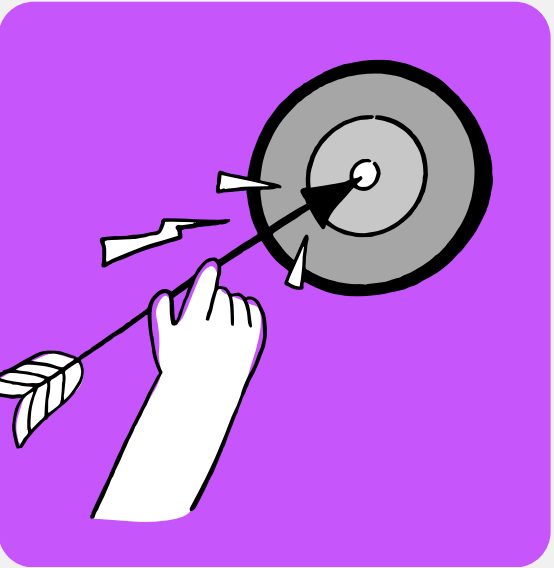
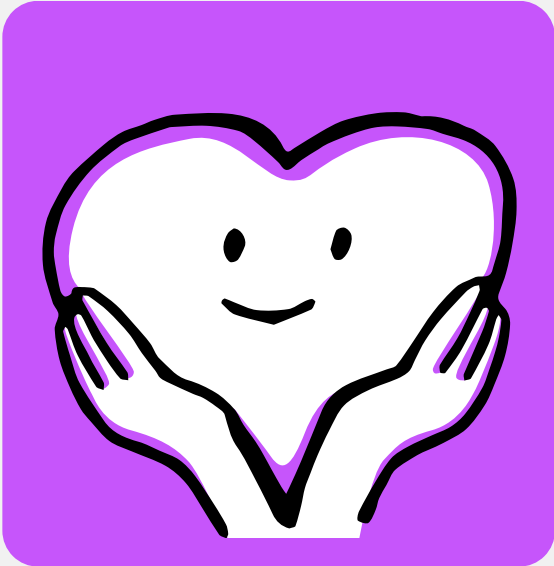


# Emerging Leaders and Advocacy: Strengthening Organizations and Serving Communities.

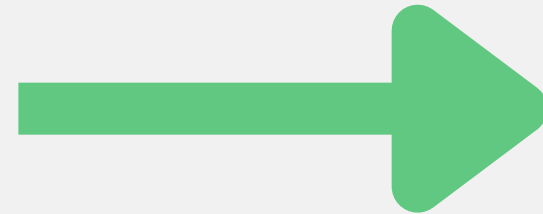
**Jasmin Alim, Amanda Aponte,  
Curran Cross, Verna Wade**

2026 Emerging Leaders in Nonprofit Management



# Nonprofit Finance Fund's 2025 National State of the Nonprofit Sector Survey

**80%**  
reported increased  
service demand



**48%**  
couldn't meet the  
increased demand

**85%**  
anticipate another  
increase in the  
following year



**54%**  
don't expect to  
meet that demand

# Agenda

1. The Challenge
2. Survey Demographics & Methodology
3. Components of Effective Advocacy
  - a. Strategic Alignment
  - b. Workplace Culture
  - c. Communication
  - d. Trust
4. Conclusions





Raise your hand if you have recently received feedback from your community (whether it's from leadership, staff, program participants, members of the public).



Raise your hand if you have successfully incorporated constructive feedback from your community.



Raise your hand if you have ever received feedback from community members, and didn't know what to do with it.



Raise your hand if the challenge of sharing feedback stemmed from competing organizational, board, funder, staff, or community priorities.

# How can emerging leaders be successful advocates for their organizations & the communities they serve?

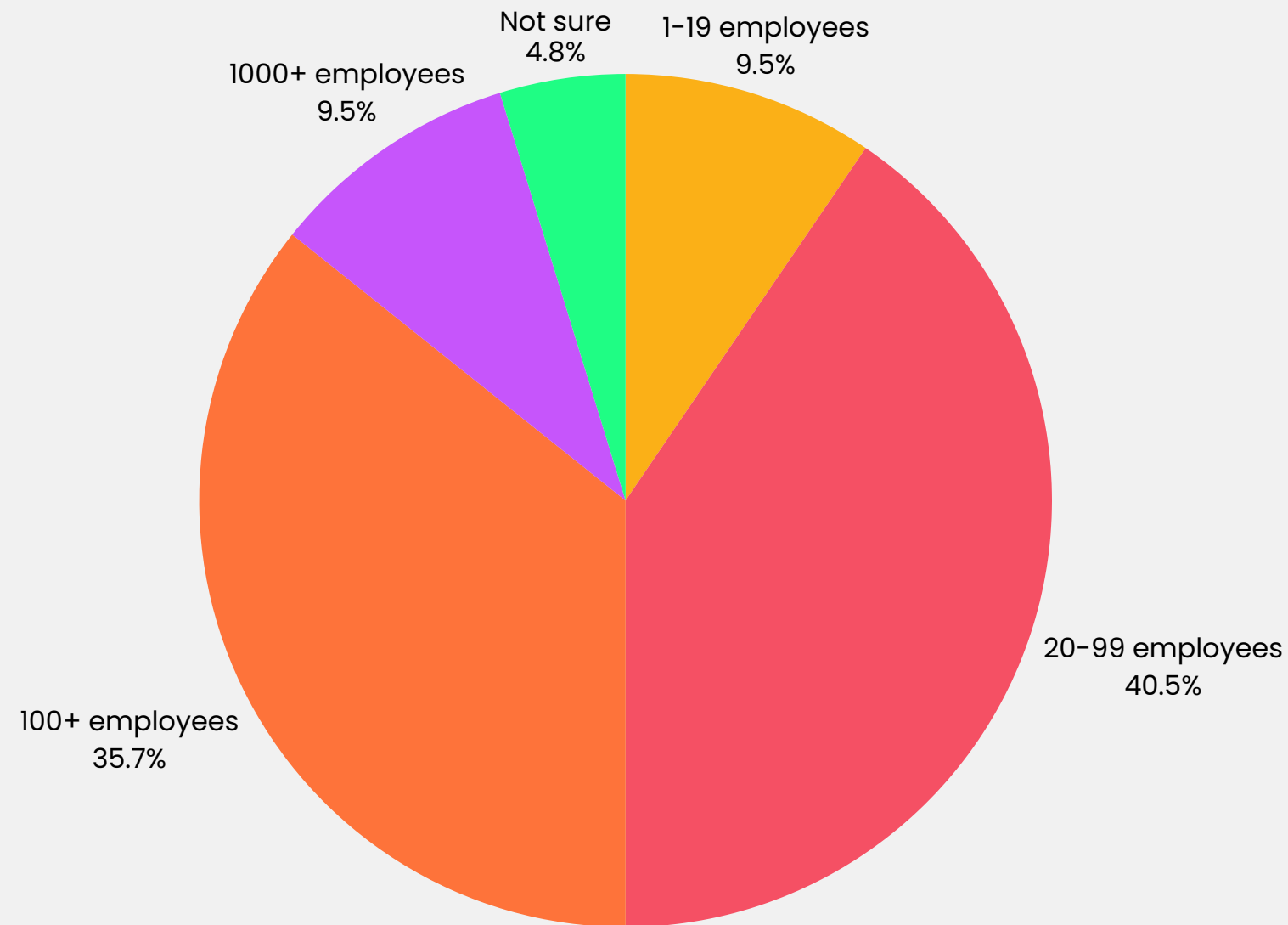


We will explore the roles of **strategic alignment, communication, trust,** and **workplace culture** in building a stronger organization.

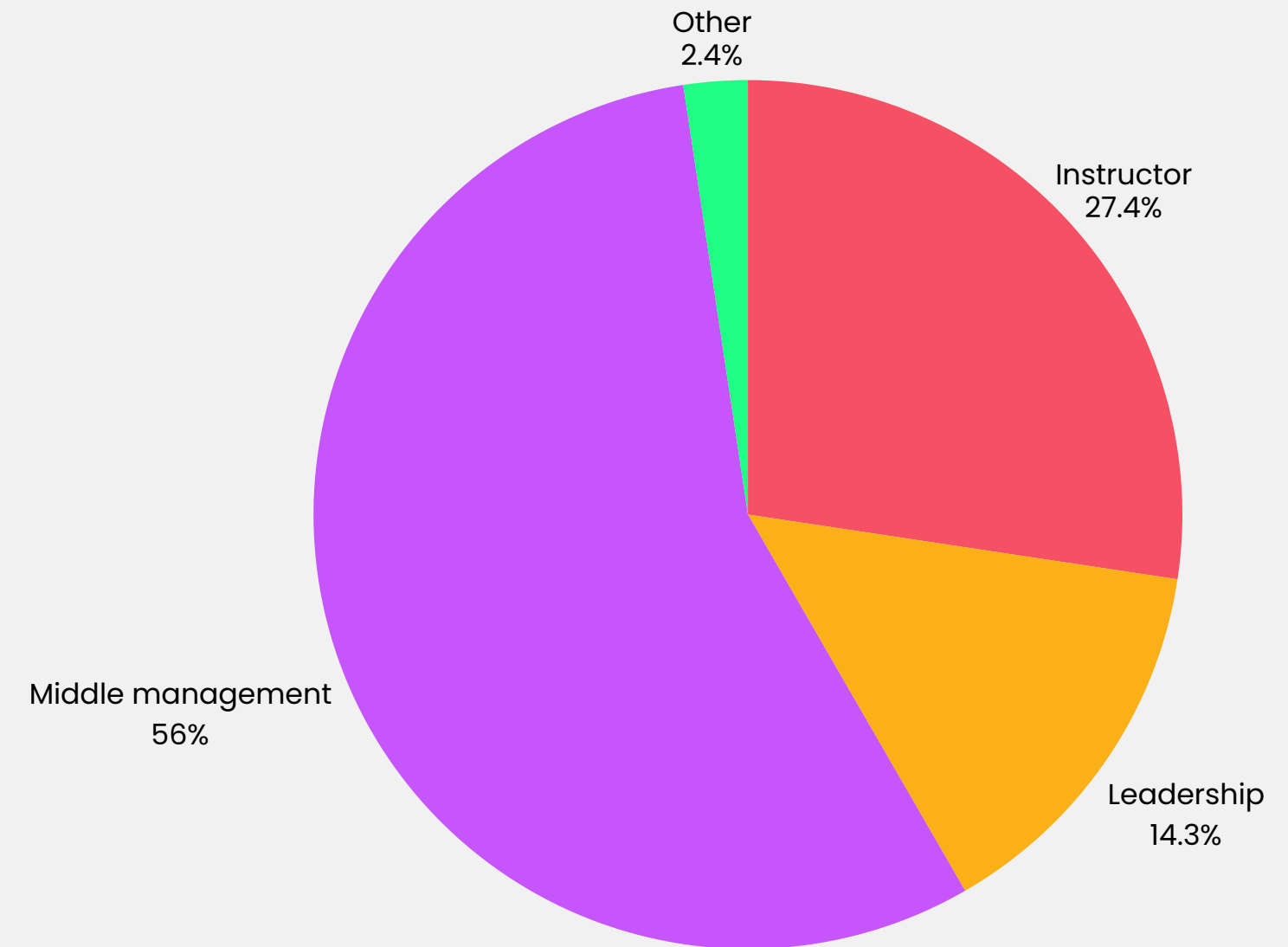
These components support leaders in bridging decision-making gaps between staff, leadership, program participants, and various community stakeholders.

# Survey Demographics & Methodology

## Organization Size



## Organization Roles



**84 total respondents**

# Challenges

## Strategy

“Workloads feel unsustainable to program staff and only seem to increase over time.”

“Funding Stipulations.”

“Overall lack of staff development and contingency planning.”

“Senior staff struggle to give true decision making power to middle management..”

“Beyond the direct regional program team level, feelings of trust and transparency from senior leadership are extremely low.”

## Trust

## Culture

“Staff morale is low.”

“Wearing multiple hats, acting in multiple roles lack of staff.”

“I need support.”

“Isolation from rest of organization.”

“In my organization, we tend to struggle with streamlining communication.”

“I wish there was a little bit more communication on things that are last minute.”

## Communication

# Strategic Alignment

Strategic alignment supports an organization in working towards a shared mission and strategy, across resources and stakeholders: (staff, board members, leadership, and community).

Buy-in and understanding of the organization's strategy supports:

- execution of the strategic plan
- team morale and sense of purpose
- effective allocation of resources
- increased collaboration and productivity
- fundraising success

(Donor Perfect, The Strategy Institute)

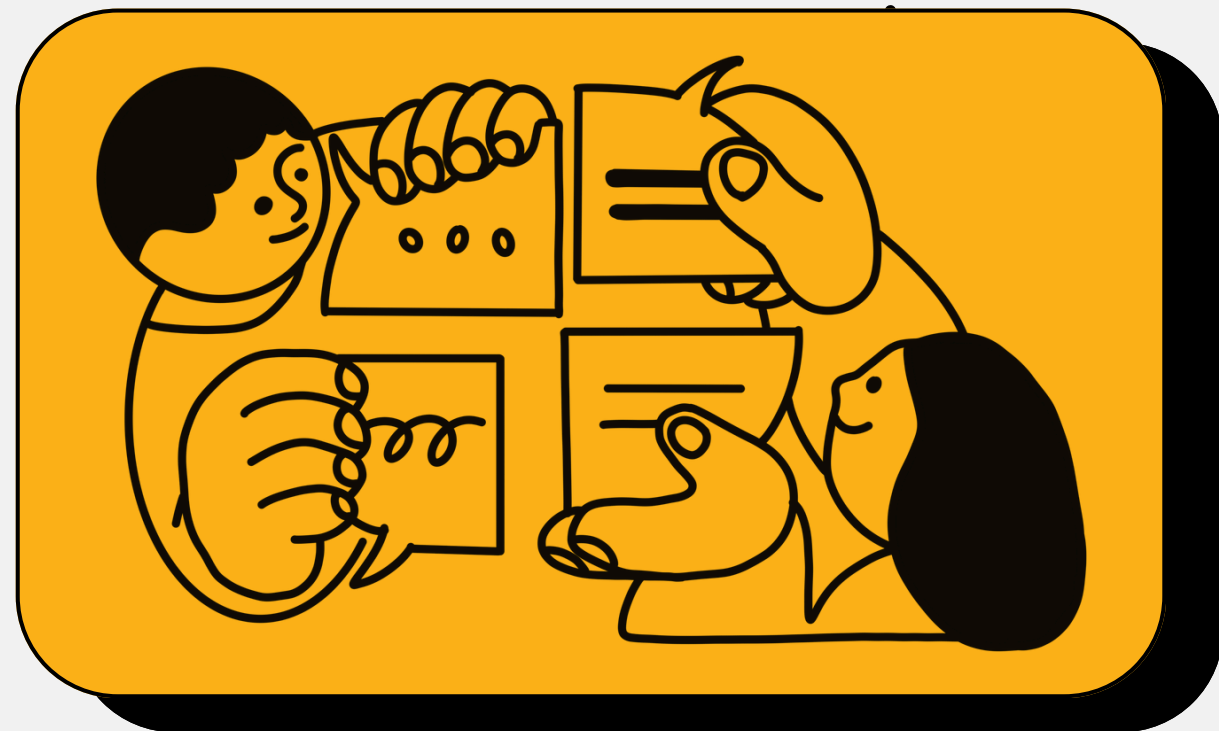


Emerging leaders can use strategic alignment as a guiding star for their advocacy efforts.

# Mission Drift

## Barriers to Strategic Alignment

A 2023 NFF study found that 52% of nonprofits modified programs to fit available funding rather than strategic priorities. ([The INS Group](#))



- Stakeholders are unclear on the mission of the organization
- Programs may reflect funder expectations rather than mission
- Staff may feel burnt out if work is not mission driven
- Resources get stretched to expand the organization, but in a direction that may not align with the mission

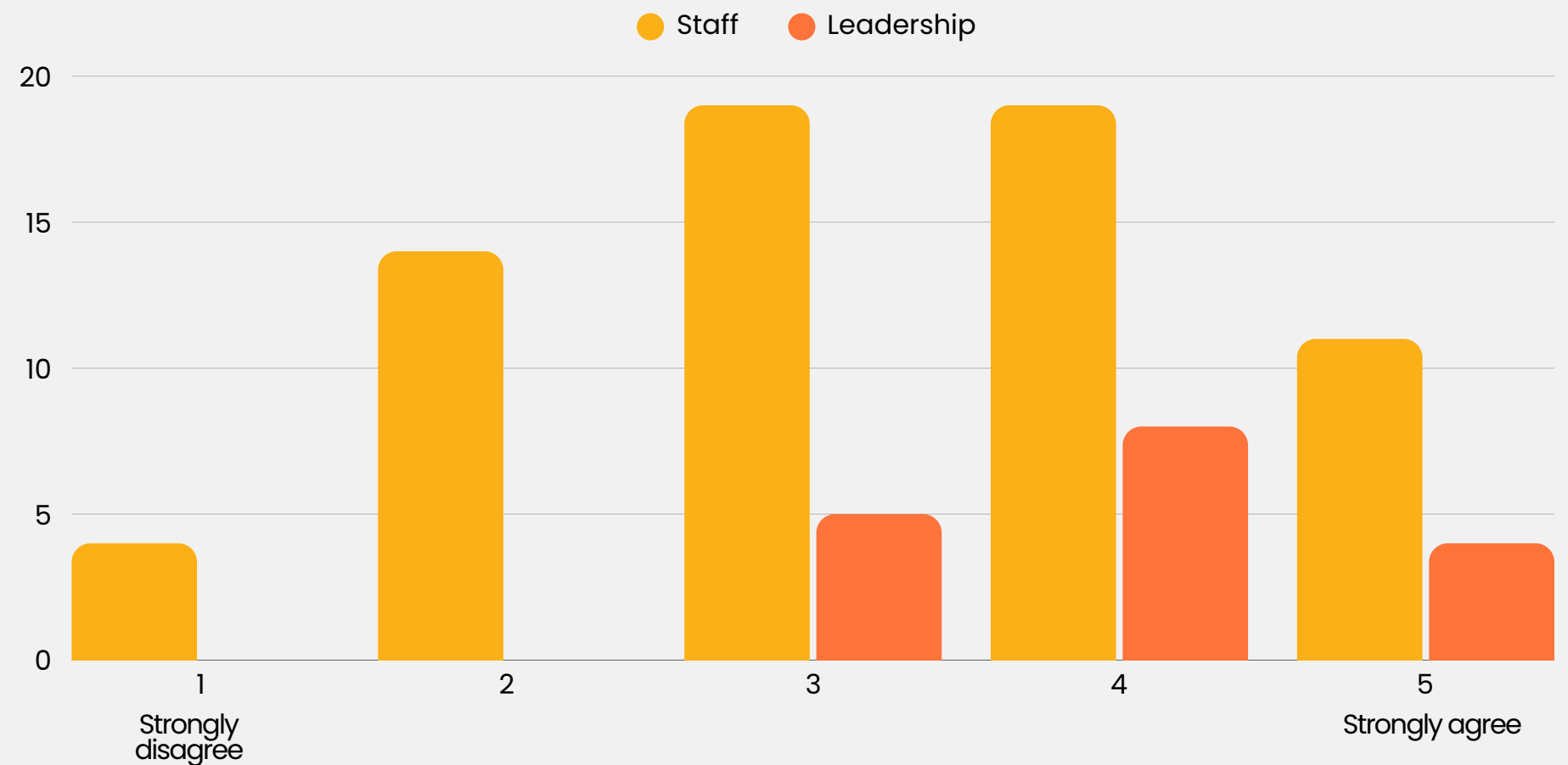
([Harvard Business](#), [Bloomerang](#))

# Strategic Alignment

**84%** + **60%**  
of leadership + of staff

can confidently understand & explain their organization's mission and strategic goals.

Number of respondents who believe that leadership communicates organizational changes in a way that is clear, timely, and transparent.



# Building Strategic Alignment



Use your strategic plan as your guiding star!

## 5-Step Compatibility Test

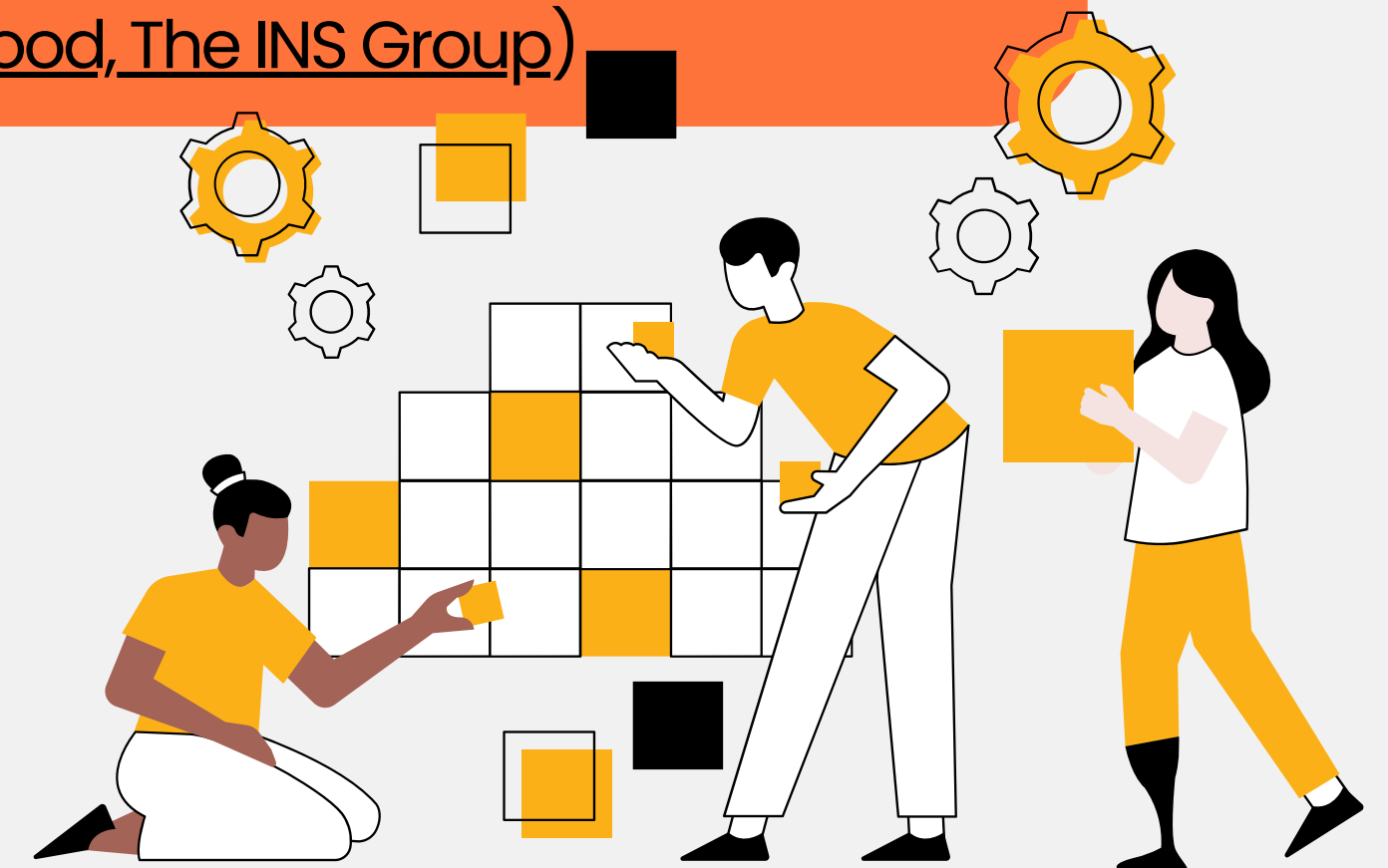
1. The One-Sentence Match
2. The "Who is This For" Test
3. The Readiness Check
4. The Tradeoffs Test
5. Stakeholder Support

(Engage for Good, The INS Group)

## 70/20/10 Model

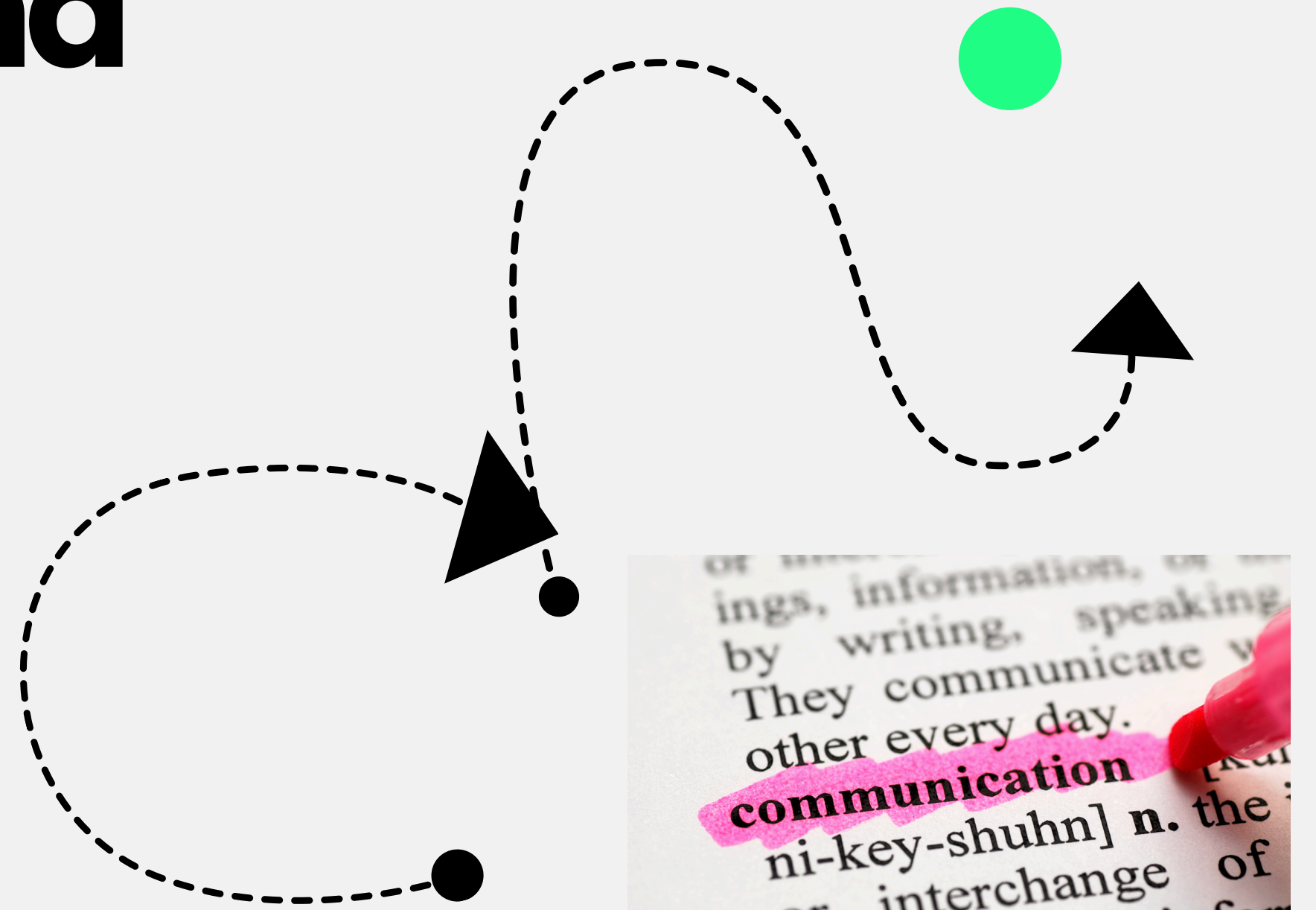
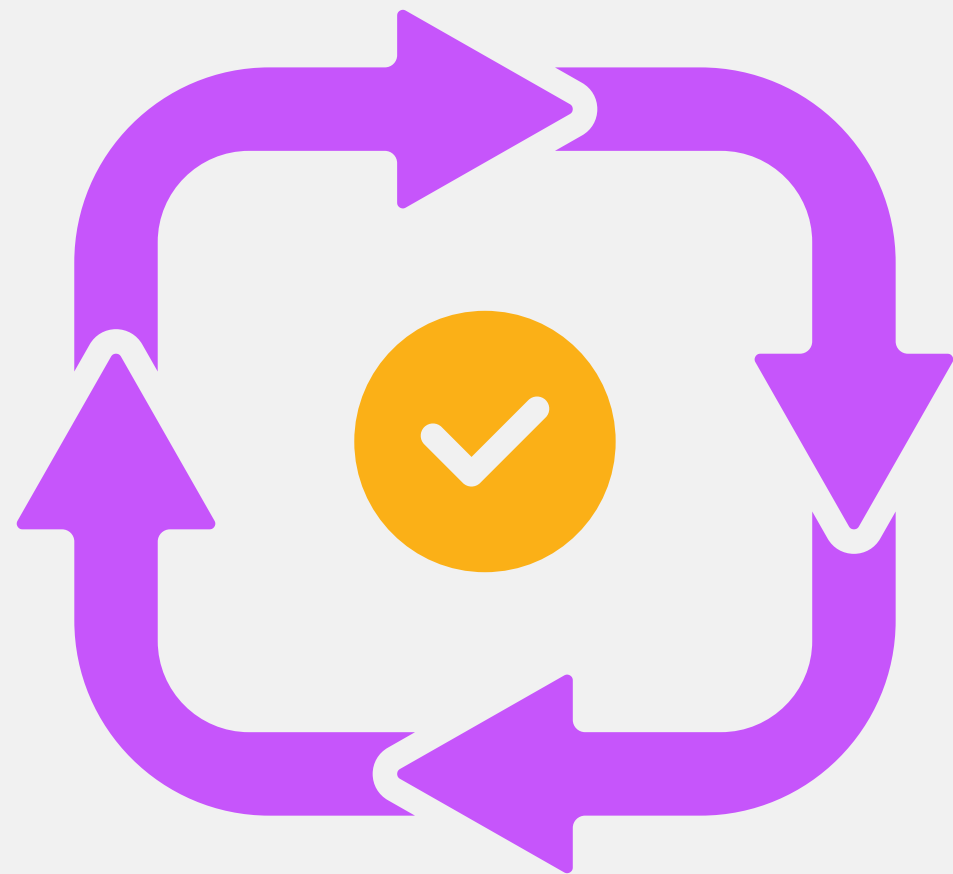
70% - core mission  
20% - broadening impact  
10% - experimentation

(Bloomerang)



# Communication and Clarity

*Feedback, trust, and buy-in from grassroots to grass-stems.*



**64% of staff surveyed express comfort providing feedback to their supervisor.**

**82% of staff report that "My team trusts me to represent their concerns."**

**55% of staff felt neutral or negative about leadership communication with *them*.**

**94% of leaders felt comfortable giving feedback to their staff.**

**94% also report feeling open to accepting feedback and questions.**

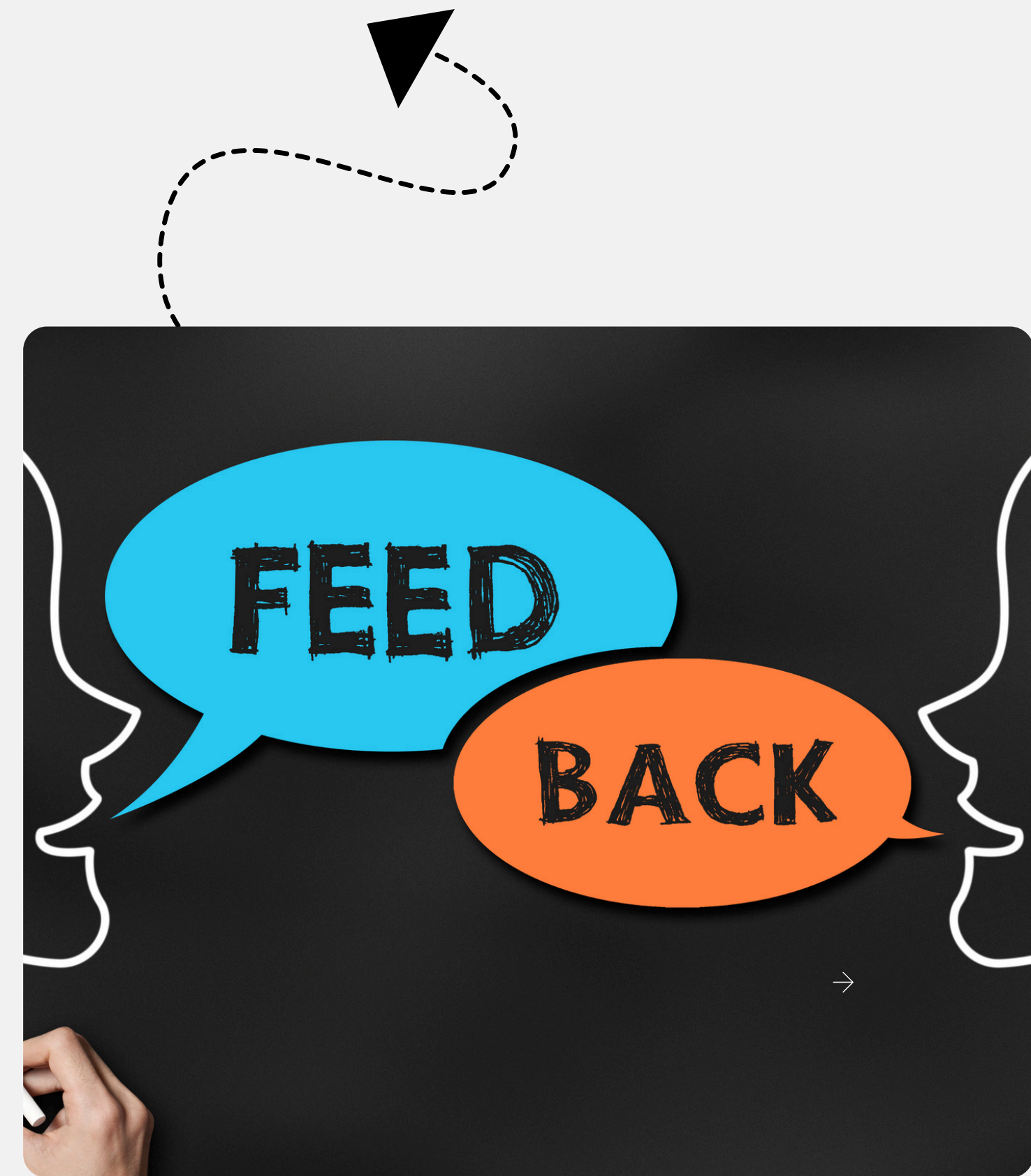
# Feedback Loops

## *Unlocking Continuous Growth*

Feedback loops are purposeful, multi-directional and iterative.

Components of a successful feedback loop:

- Sentiment analysis.
- Employee listening platforms.
- Pulse surveys.
- Dedicated communication channels.
- Staff updates and communications.



# Communication and Advocacy



Translating feedback loops into the field:

- Uplift community expertise.
- Access community knowledge.
- Form advisory, or focus, groups.
- Leverage solutions from within.

## Voice

“Much unhappiness has come into the world because of things left unsaid.”

— Fyodor Dostoevsky

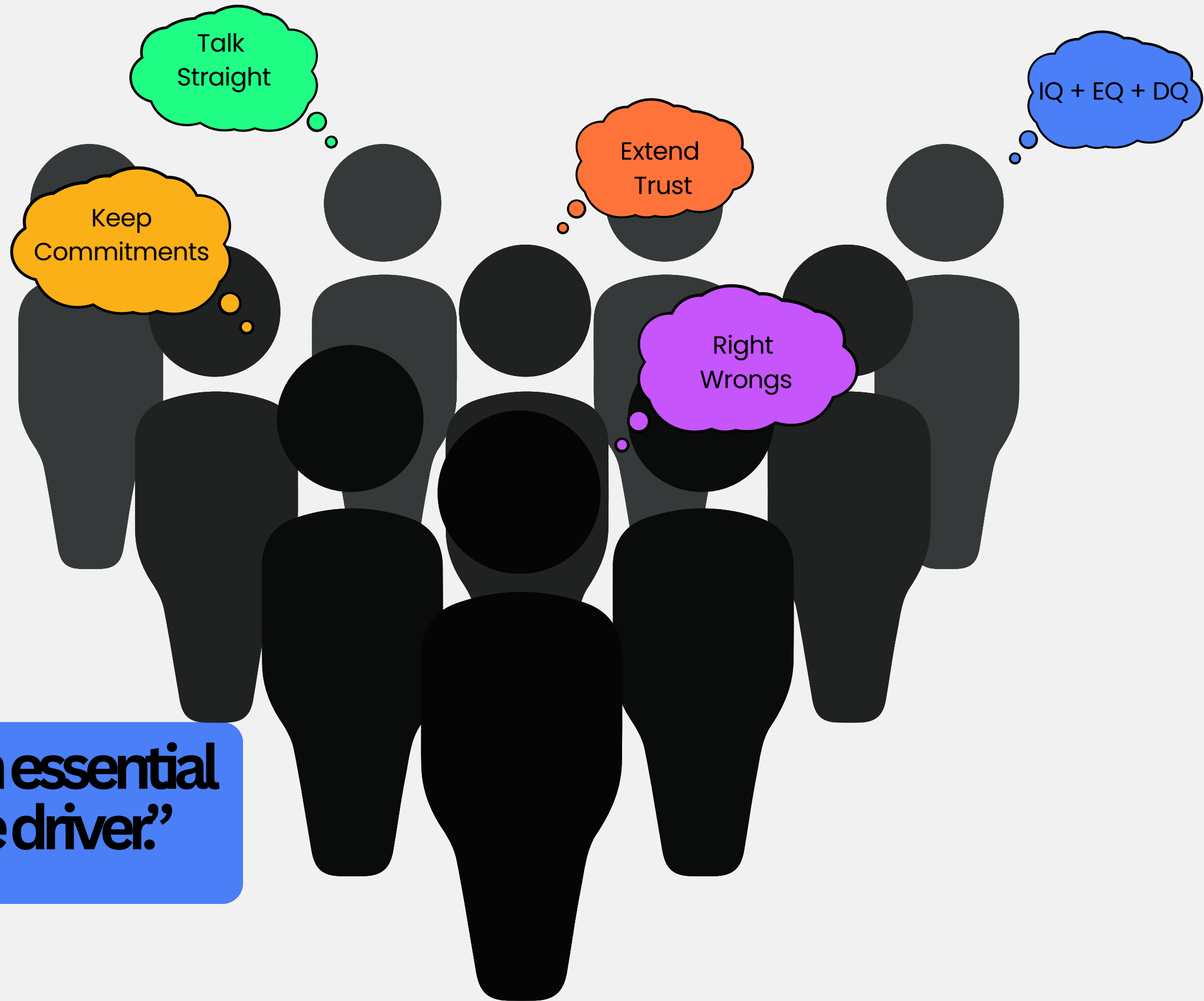
# Communication and Advocacy

## The Three C Method:

- **Curate**
- **Cultivate**
- **Communicate**



# Trust



**“Trust isn’t a ‘nice-to-have.’ It’s an essential and measurable performance driver.”**  
(Cohen, 2026)

# Trust

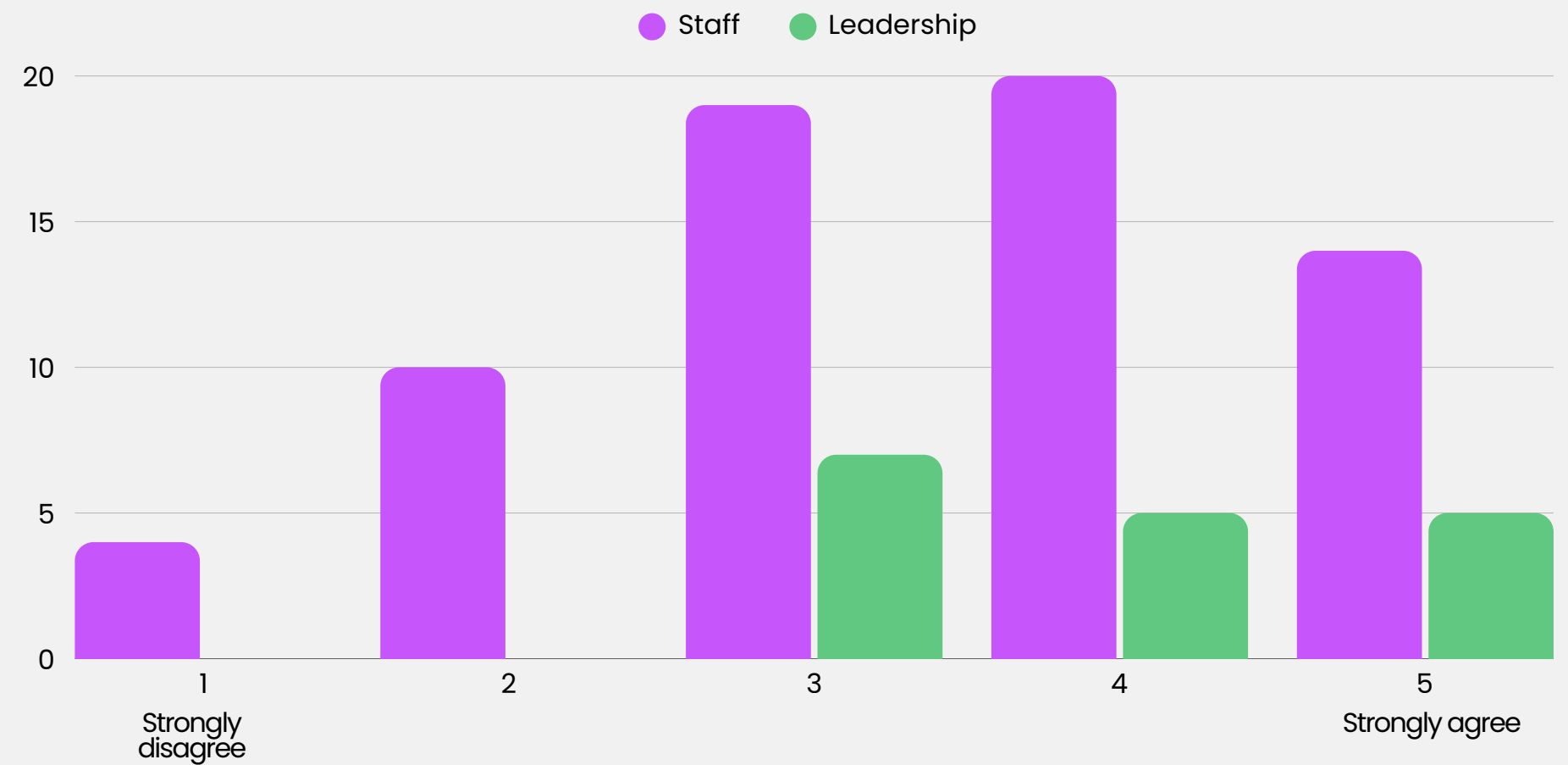
**34%**  
of staff

+

**65%**  
of leadership

## Organization-focused Decision Making

Over one-third (34%) of staff reported low perceived trust from senior leadership (scores of 3 or below), highlighting a potential gap in organizational trust.



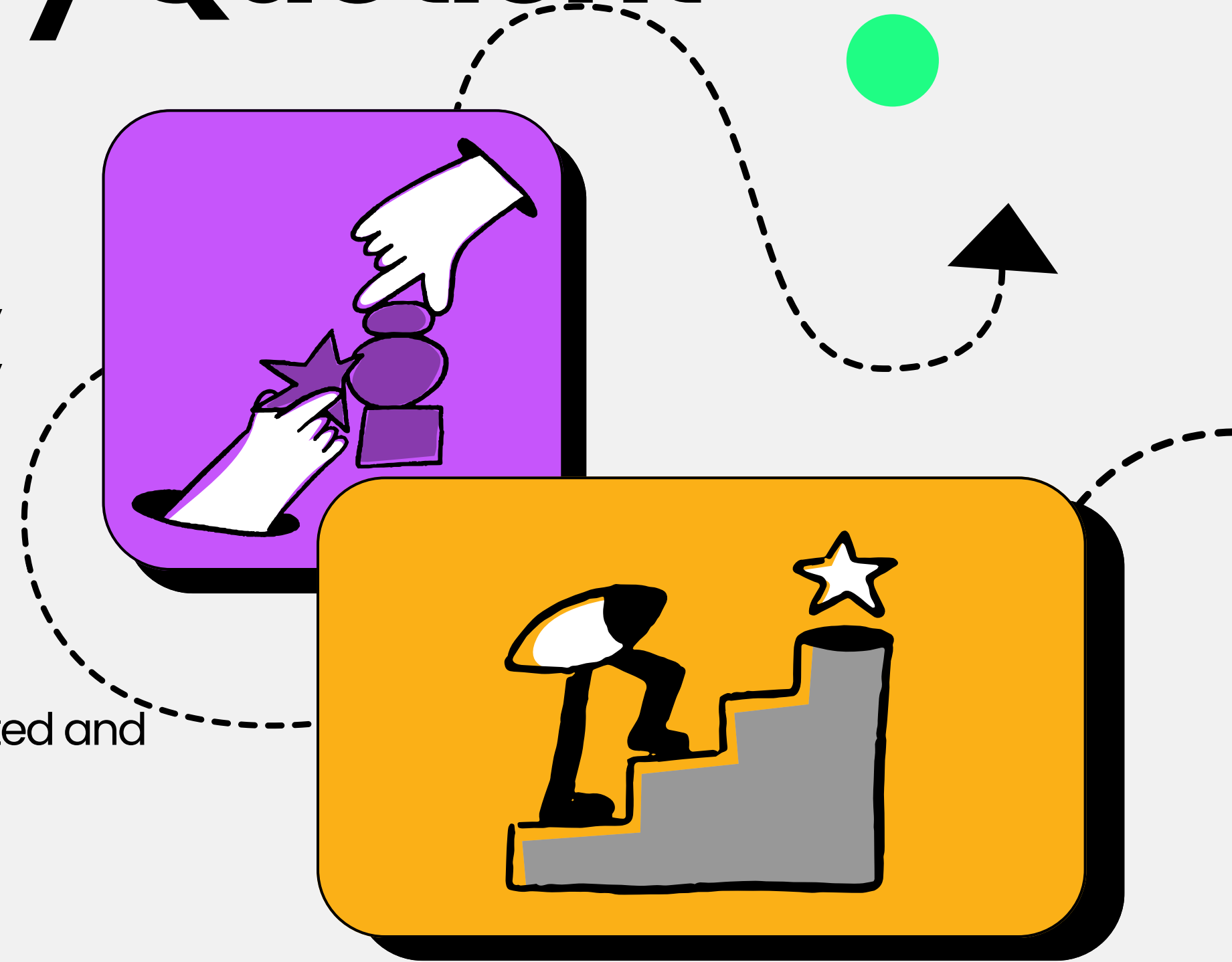
# DQ – Decency Quotient

While IQ and EQ refer to cognitive ability, relationship building, and team dynamics, DQ focuses on individual character, values and how we show up as leaders day-to-day.

Companies that value DQ:

1. **Build** stronger trust within teams
2. **Cultivate** healthier workplace cultures
3. **Create** environments where emerging leaders feel supported and empowered

(Harvard Business, 2019)



According to a 2023 Gallup poll, only 19% of employees reported trusting their organization's leadership. (Mclain and Pendell, 2023)

# Building A Culture of Advocacy & Trust

💡 "Trust is the highest form of human motivation" – Stephen R Covey

## Shared Decision-Making & Empowerment

💡 Identify decisions that community members can own and invite them to the brainstorming and planning process

## Trustworthiness as a Core Value

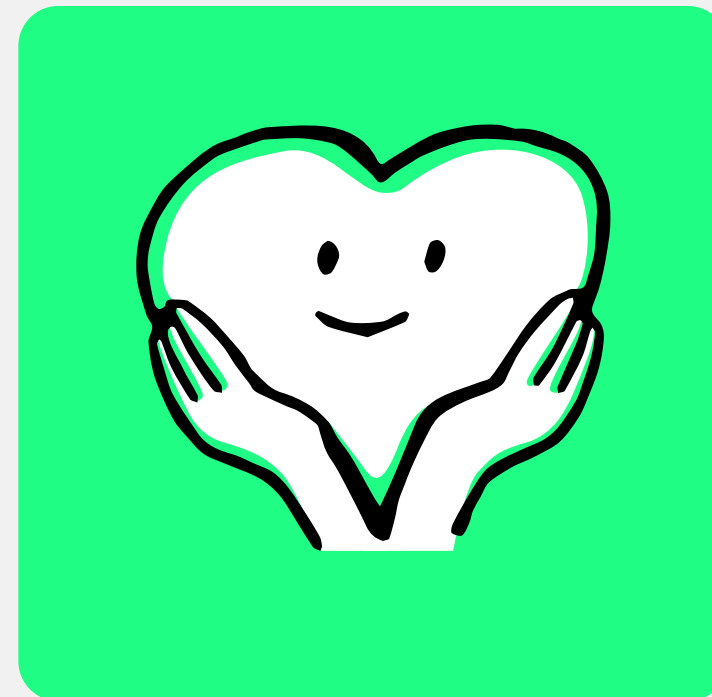
💡 Practice radical transparency

## Building Relationships & Engagement

💡 Implement skip-level meetings



# What is Workplace Culture?

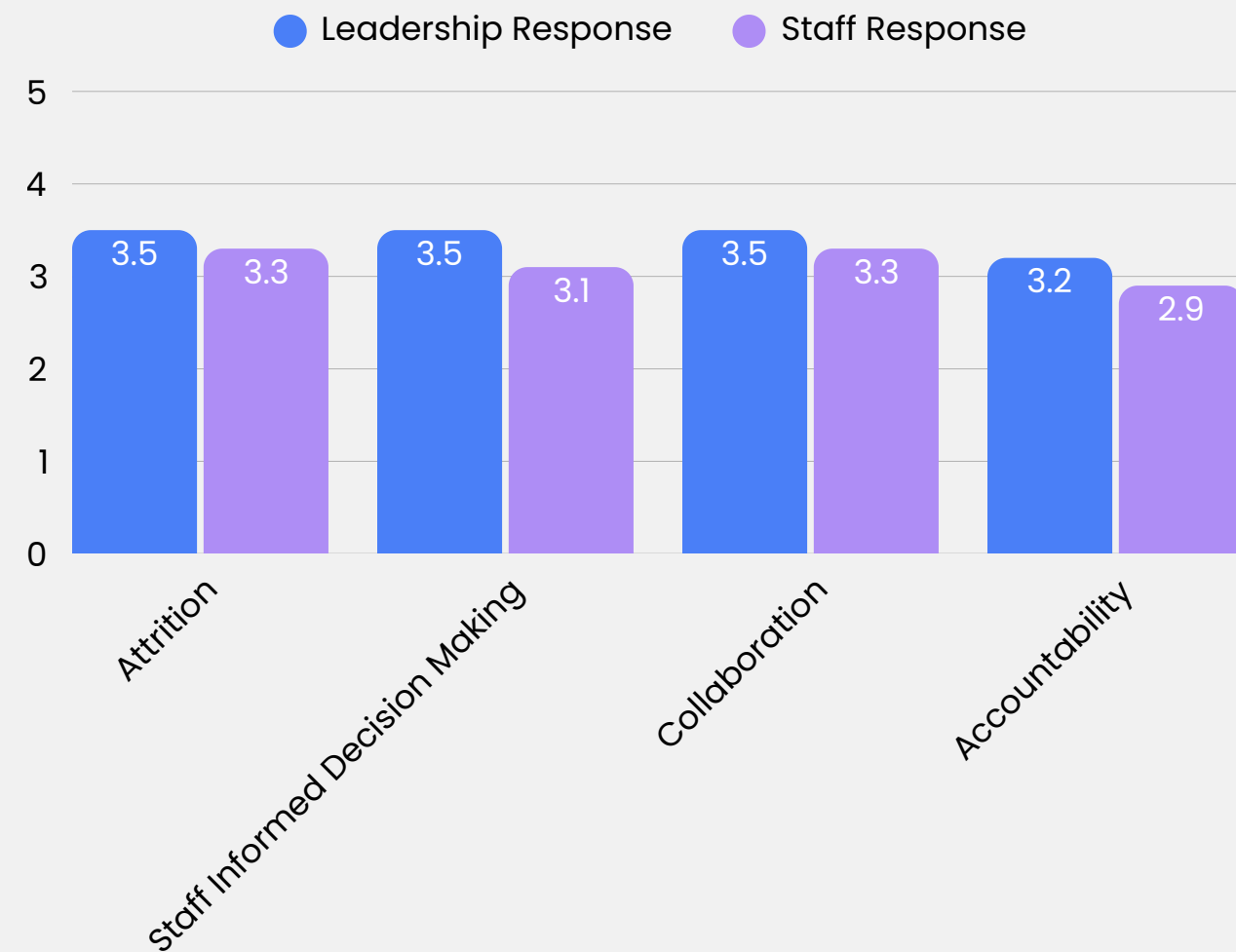


"A best definition of workplace culture is: the sum of organizational norms, values, and beliefs of an organization as impacted by organizational leaders" (Watts, 2025).

"People's behaviors at work are shaped by the organization's collective beliefs and values...When people across the business flourish, the company does better as a whole..." (Harvard Division of Continuing Education, 2023)

# Workplace Culture

Average Response to Domain Rankings



**52%** + **100%**  
of staff of leadership

View staff as key contributors of organizational success.

# Domains of Workplace Culture

(Watts, 2025)



# Why does this matter?

"A poor work culture creates a toxic environment where team members become disengaged, productivity suffers, and employee retention is negatively impacted."

"A company with a healthy culture has engaged employees, fosters trust and respect, and encourages new ideas."

"This can lead to..."

- Improved profitability
- Higher levels of innovation
- A greater competitive advantage
- Improved flexibility and adaptability" (Russell, 2024)

Next Slide

# Successes

## Strategy

## Culture

"I have a clear vision of my schedule for me and my students and achieving and goals or objectives given."

"The ability to gather as an organization for team building and the authentic care for their employees.."

"We understand our strengths and our weaknesses and are always willing to to fill in where we need to work on.."

"Workshops, trainings, team building activities.."

"Accountability from all staff."

"intra-departmental collaboration and team building."

"...strong sense of camaraderie and trust.."

"passionate."

"Weekly full staff meetings and department meetings, strong buy-in into the mission from staff, professional development opportunities."

"Constructive criticism."

"Staff retreats."

"Collaboration, Listening to each other, taking accountability."

## Trust

## Communication

# Conclusion

When establishing a culture of advocacy within your organizations, the work must start at the top. Leaders must set the example and:

- Establish open and honest **2-way** communication
- Stay aligned with organization's mission and core values
- Create opportunities for personal growth
- Walk the talk--> builds trust and respect

When leaders create a positive work culture built on trust and respect, employees feel empowered to advocate on behalf of themselves and their communities. They will feel heard and seen.



Leadership

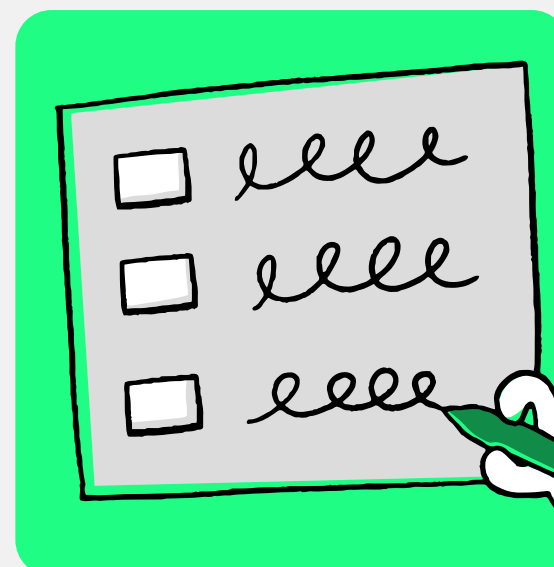
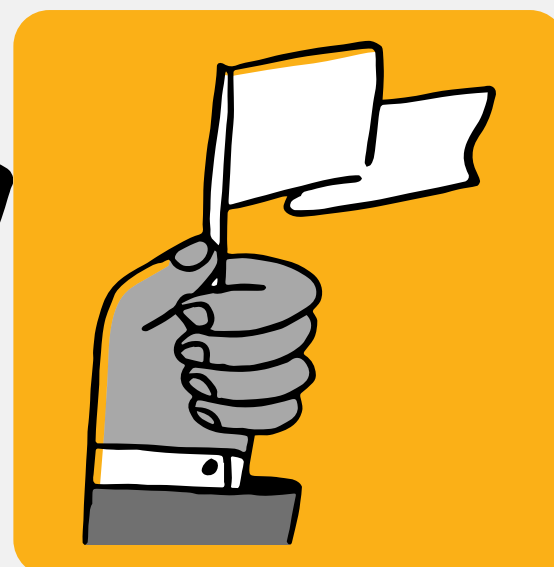
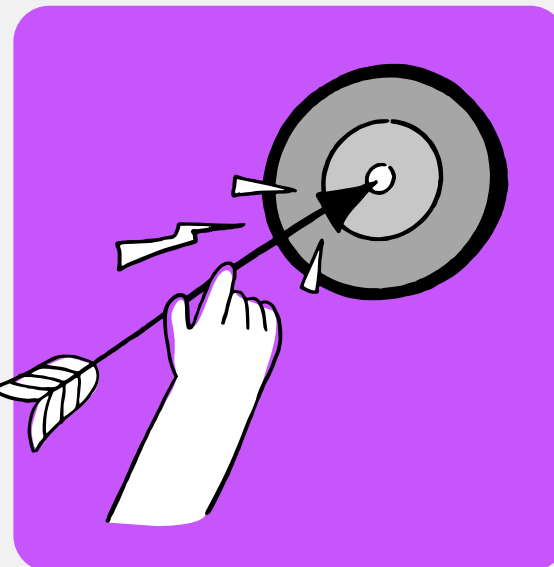
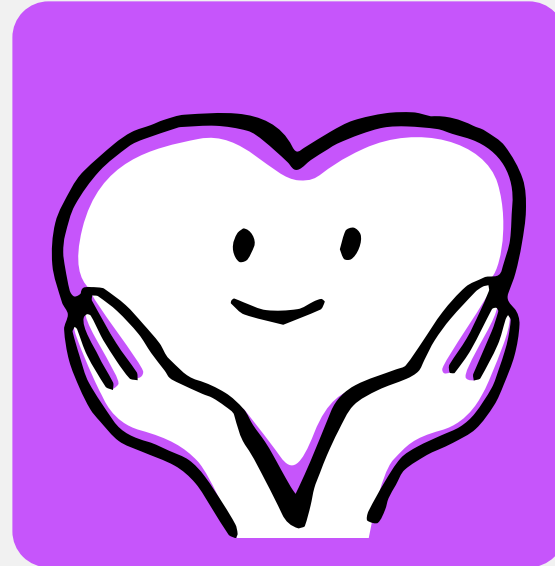
## Action step:

When you get back to your office, try one small tangible change: create a pulse survey with your team.

What is one commitment you can make when you leave here today?



# Thank You.



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