HOME TRUTHS

Circleback Studios: Stat Block

Foundation · 6-Nov-2026 · RPS-3

36 people finished the questionnaire.

PATTERNS FOUND

Trust Debt

The answers point to one way this Condition may be taking hold.

Broken promises nobody puts right	CANDIDATE	Code

Meeting Inflation

The answers point to one way this Condition may be taking hold.

Meetings are the only way to coordinate	CANDIDATE	Design – limited evidence for this team

Candidate: three or more people described it, out of six or more who had a proper look.

THE OTHER CONDITIONS

Picture clear	**Onboarding Debt** The people who could answer consistently described the relevant features as working well. That's encouraging, but it doesn't prove these Conditions are absent or that things will stay that way.
Not settled by this read	Documentation Debt · Firefighting Mode · Accountability Vacuum · Analysis Paralysis Home Truths didn't find enough evidence to flag these Conditions, but the answers didn't give a clear picture of them working well either. They aren't findings from this read, but they haven't been ruled out.

TRAITS

Sound	Follow-Through · Incentive Alignment · Information Flow · Psychological Safety · Resource Visibility · Slack · Trust Default
Mostly positive	Ownership Clarity · Response Variety
A varied picture	Process Elasticity · Principle Coherence

Organisation-wide readings: each shows the overall picture, not that everyone had the same experience.

CAPABILITIES WORTH EXAMINING

Capabilities are the six things every organisation does: noticing what needs attention, talking and thinking it through, deciding, delivering and learning from what happened. The patterns above make these ones worth examining more closely. Home Truths hasn't established that they're weak.

Discuss	Getting the right people talking while there's still time to resolve something. Why it appears here: the Trust Debt route above depends on it.
Deliberate	Thinking things through together over time, and capturing that thinking so it can be examined and come back to. Why it appears here: the Meeting Inflation route above depends on it.
Decide	**Memory and legibility** – Making decisions clear, recording what was agreed and leaving it easy to find and act on. Why it appears here: the Trust Debt route above depends on it.

SAMPLE

What stands out

Chock Hoss commentary

Two patterns stand out, and they share a thread. In Code, people described commitments being broken and never put right. In Design, people described meetings as the only way anything gets coordinated. Both are about what happens to an agreement after it's made: in one, promises aren't repaired; in the other, nothing outside the room is trusted to carry them.

Principle Coherence, which the Trust Debt route depends on, had a varied picture, so the two are worth reading together. Response Variety, which the Meeting Inflation route depends on, read as Mostly positive across the studio: a pattern can sit in one team while the organisation-wide picture looks fine. Most of the other Traits read as Sound.

What this does – and doesn’t – establish

Chock Hoss commentary

Both patterns are Candidates: in each case, at least three people in a position to see it described the whole of it. They're leads for a closer look, not conclusions. The evidence for placing the meetings pattern in Design is thinner, because fewer than six people in that team had a proper look.

The read doesn't show how widespread either pattern is, how long it has been running or what's causing it, and it isn't a measure of how serious either one is. It gave a clear picture of Onboarding Debt among the people who could answer. The other four Conditions weren't settled either way: they haven't been found, but they haven't been ruled out.

What I’d investigate next

Chock Hoss commentary

Three things I'd want to find out.

In Code: which commitments are people thinking of, and what happened afterwards? A handful of conversations, and a look at how recent decisions were announced and then applied, would show whether this is about promises from leadership, rules applied unevenly, or something narrower.

In Design: is this where it sits, and how far does it reach? The first job is to talk to more of the team, and to look at where Design's decisions actually get recorded and how work passes to and from other teams.

Across both: how the studio discusses, records and revisits what it decides. Between them, the two patterns depend on Discuss, Deliberate and Decide, so that's the hypothesis to test: not whether people talk, but whether what they agree survives the conversation.

SAMPLE

The full report

The rest of the report shows the evidence behind the Stat Block.

Home Truths: Circleback Studios

Prepared for Circleback Studios by Chock Hoss.

A Foundation read, open from 6-Nov-2026 to 6-Nov-2026. There were 44 people on the list.

Reported under Reporting Protection Standard RPS-3: the fixed rules this report follows to protect the people who answered. They decide when a team can be named and when exact figures can be shown, and every report is checked against them before it's released. They were set before your read opened, and can't be loosened afterwards.

36 people finished the questionnaire.

How to read this

Home Truths is a screen rather than a diagnosis. It looks for the routes through which each Condition takes hold and reports what the people who answered described. That shows you where a closer look is worth the effort. It can't prove cause, tell you how widespread something is or decide what to do about it – that part needs a conversation.

A route becomes a candidate only when at least three people, separately, described the whole of it. One or two never make a candidate, no matter how clearly they described it, and the rule also protects the people who answered.

A proper look means someone answered every question a route needed without saying they hadn't come across it, so they were in a position to describe it. When fewer than six people have had a proper look at a route, the report calls the evidence thin. That's about how much there was to go on, not how serious or how new anything is.

So a figure like four of eleven isn't a measure of how common something is. It's how many of the people in a position to see the pattern went on to describe it.

Each Condition can take hold in more than one way, and the report describes every route in this edition, whatever was found. The description says what the route looks like when it's running; whether people here described it is the result shown just beneath its name. A route with no candidate isn't one this report is saying happens here.

Where a team is named, the pattern turned up there. Teams are never given counts, and a team is only named where naming it can't point at anyone in it.

SAMPLE

Candidate
three or more people described it, out of six or more who had a proper look.

Thin candidate
three or more people described it, but fewer than six had a proper look.

No candidate found
six or more had a proper look, and fewer than three described it.

Thin reach
fewer than six had a proper look, and fewer than three described it. Too little to say either way.

Not included
not part of this edition.

Trust Debt

Trust Debt is what happens when an organisation runs out of the ordinary good faith that lets work get done without everyone checking everyone else. People work defensively. Announcements meet cynicism before the details are out, and well-meant gestures get read as spin. The mood is closer to exhaustion than hostility.

How it behaves. It builds up from small breakdowns – a missed commitment here, a policy applied unevenly there – none of which would matter much on its own. It pays back slowly, too. The usual responses to low trust, more sign-off and closer watching, tend to add to the debt, and fixing what caused it doesn't pay the debt back straight away.

TD-A Broken promises nobody puts right

Candidate

The organisation says one thing and does another – a promise broken, a rule applied to some people and not others – and nobody goes back to explain or put it right. Each breach would be easy to repair while it's small, if anyone raised it. When nobody does, and nothing records what was decided or why, each new inconsistency makes the next commitment a little harder to believe.

8 of the 26 people who had a proper look described it. 18 of them didn't. 5 said they hadn't come across it.

Appeared in Code.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Principle Coherence, Discuss and Decide (memory and legibility) being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

> **Evidence the other way**
>
> Answers that pull the other way, shown beside the result and never taken off it.
>
> Of the 29 people who answered about Trust Default, 20 described it as strong. 6 of those 20 were among the people who described this route.

SAMPLE

TD-B Tighter control that feeds the distrust

No candidate found

Suspicion arrives as process – more monitoring, more approvals, more sign-off – and nobody feels able to question it openly. People with less room to use their judgement do exactly what's asked and no more, and that withdrawal is then taken as proof the controls were needed. Each turn of the loop tightens it.

19 people had a proper look at it. 12 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Trust Default and Discuss being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

> **Evidence the other way**
>
> Answers that pull the other way, shown beside the result and never taken off it.
>
> Of the 29 people who answered about Trust Default, 20 described it as strong.

TD-C Missed commitments nobody talks through

No candidate found

Deadlines and promises slip often enough that people treat them as forecasts. When a miss isn't talked through – why it happened, what it cost, what changes – the next promise is received with more suspicion. People also get warier of saying early that something's going to slip, which makes the next miss more likely.

17 people had a proper look at it. 14 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Follow-Through and Discuss being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

> **Evidence the other way**
>
> Answers that pull the other way, shown beside the result and never taken off it.
>
> Of the 29 people who answered about Trust Default, 20 described it as strong.

Documentation Debt

Documentation Debt is the running cost of decisions nobody wrote down, context nobody captured and reasoning that lived only in the room. Like technical debt, it compounds: the longer it goes on, the more of the people who knew have moved on, and the more often the organisation finds itself relearning things it already knew. Light records aren't automatically debt – in fast-moving or low-risk work, or work that can only really be learned by doing, sparse writing can be the right call. It becomes debt when the missing pieces keep costing people time.

How it behaves. It builds up a little with every undocumented decision, and the cost stays out of sight until it lands somewhere else – a slow start for a new hire, an argument run again, a process only one person can operate. Stopping new gaps slows the build-up but pays nothing back; that takes going back and restoring, or replacing, what was lost.

SAMPLE

DD-A Under pressure, the why never gets written down

No candidate found

When delivery is under pressure, writing down why something was done is the first job to go, because it never looks as urgent as the work itself. Later, someone has to work the reasoning out again from scratch, which eats into the same scarce time – and makes it even less likely anyone stops to write the next one down.

23 people had a proper look at it. 10 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Slack and Deliberate being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

In the same model, a strong Information Flow would also get in its way.

> **Evidence the other way**
>
> Answers that pull the other way, shown beside the result and never taken off it.
>
> Of the 36 people who answered about Information Flow, 32 described it as strong.

DD-B Decisions that live only in the heads of those who were there

No candidate found

A decision gets made, but its reasoning never travels beyond the people who were there. Anyone else who needs to understand or apply it has to go back and ask, and because those people can usually reconstruct it well enough, the next undocumented decision looks survivable too.

28 people had a proper look at it. 4 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Information Flow and Decide (memory and legibility) being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

In the same model, a strong Deliberate would also get in its way.

DD-C A cost that never shows up under its own name

No candidate found

The cost of lost context is real, but it never shows up under its own name. It turns up as onboarding time, decisions argued over again, interruptions and mistakes, so nobody connects it to the record that was never kept – and the organisation makes the same trade-off again.

30 people had a proper look at it. 2 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Resource Visibility and Decide (memory and legibility) being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

In the same model, a strong Information Flow or Deliberate would also get in its way.

> **Evidence the other way**
>
> Answers that pull the other way, shown beside the result and never taken off it.
>
> Of the 36 people who answered about Information Flow, 32 described it as strong.

SAMPLE

Meeting Inflation

Meeting Inflation is when meetings have become the default answer to every coordination problem, and the calendar fills faster than the work gets done. The people most needed in the room end up with the least time left for anything else. A full diary that produces clear, proportionate results is just a busy diary. It's inflation when meetings keep generating more meetings, and crowd out the work they were meant to help.

How it behaves. It feeds itself. A meeting that doesn't settle its purpose spawns a follow-up; people who missed it need briefing, often in another meeting; decisions that weren't written down get argued again in yet another. Cutting the number of meetings won't fix it unless whatever keeps generating them changes too.

MI-A Meetings are the only way to coordinate

Candidate

The organisation has no workable way to coordinate other than getting people together – no written channel people trust, no clear way for teams to hand things to each other, no shared sense of what needs a live conversation and what's better written down and thought over – so every coordination problem, whatever its shape, becomes a meeting. More and more decisions and context then exist only in rooms, which means more meetings to get at them.

4 of the 25 people who had a proper look described it. 21 of them didn't. 6 said they hadn't come across it.

Appeared in Design – thin evidence there: fewer than 6 people in that team had a proper look.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Response Variety and Deliberate being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

MI-B Meetings that leave nothing behind

No candidate found

A meeting seems to settle something, but the decision, the reasoning or the action doesn't outlive the meeting and never quite gets closed. Anyone who was absent, or who needs it later, has to reconstruct it, be re-briefed or argue it again – usually in another meeting, so each one produces the next.

27 people had a proper look at it. 4 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Information Flow and Decide (memory and legibility) being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

MI-C Each unresolved meeting books the next

No candidate found

A meeting ends without settling what it was called to settle: the disagreement is still open and nobody has committed to a next step. So another is booked to deal with much the same problem, often with more people in it, and with each repeat, convening again comes to feel safer than changing how the issue gets handled.

SAMPLE

18 people had a proper look at it. 15 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Discuss and Decide (commitment) being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

Firefighting Mode

In Firefighting Mode, most of the organisation's energy goes on responding to crises rather than preventing them. The reactive work has crowded out the preventive work that would mean fewer fires, and the team has become very good at firefighting and steadily less able to do anything else. A burst of unfamiliar incidents that the organisation then learns from and prevents doesn't count. The mode is when the way each crisis gets handled makes the next one more likely.

How it behaves. It becomes the way the place runs. Every fire fought takes the time that would have gone on prevention, so the causes stay put and the next fire arrives on schedule, until the pace stops feeling like an emergency and feels like the job. A postmortem on its own changes nothing. Recovery shows up when what gets funded or practised next is different.

FM-A Urgent work crowds out prevention

No candidate found

Capacity is fully committed, so whenever something urgent arrives it wins – over investigation, over maintenance, over the work that would stop it happening again. The causes stay in place and produce more urgent work, which leaves even less room for prevention next time.

27 people had a proper look at it. 7 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Slack and Deliberate being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

FM-B Lessons learned, nothing changed

No candidate found

Incidents get acknowledged, reviewed and explained, sometimes very well, but the lesson never turns into a finished structural change. When the same kind of incident comes back, it reinforces the sense that responding to incidents is the real job rather than an interruption to it.

25 people had a proper look at it. 7 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Digest and Follow-Through being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

FM-C Problems seen late, rescue costs never counted

No candidate found

Problems only become visible once they're urgent, and the effort spent rescuing them is treated as unavoidable instead of being counted as the recurring cost it is. Without a decision to protect time for prevention, the next faint warning is left to grow into the next emergency.

SAMPLE

24 people had a proper look at it. 7 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Detect, Resource Visibility and Decide (commitment) being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

Accountability Vacuum

In an Accountability Vacuum, nobody is clearly on the hook for outcomes. Decisions get made, but ownership of what happens next spreads across so many people that when something goes wrong there's nobody to take it up with, and when it goes right the credit is just as hard to place. Shared ownership works fine where decision rights are explicit and the obligations stick. The vacuum is when you can't find anyone with both the authority to act and a real obligation to answer for the result.

How it behaves. It's held in place by how decisions are structured more than by anyone's reluctance, which is why naming an owner doesn't fill it on its own. The owner needs both the authority to act and a real obligation to answer for the result, at the same time.

AV-A Responsible, but without the authority

No candidate found

People are told to own outcomes they can't meaningfully control, because the decisions that shape those outcomes sit somewhere else. Sensibly enough, they hedge – contributing, consulting and seeking approval rather than committing – and that makes ownership look shared, which hides even further who can actually act.

23 people had a proper look at it. 10 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Ownership Clarity and Decide (commitment) being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

> **Evidence the other way**
>
> Answers that pull the other way, shown beside the result and never taken off it.
>
> Of the 34 people who answered about Ownership Clarity, 28 described it as strong.

AV-B Owning it is too risky, so nobody does

No candidate found

Owning this particular outcome would be exposing, politically or personally, so people contribute to the discussion without taking on the risk of being accountable for it. The group leaves with a shared intention and nobody who is both empowered and willing to carry it, which teaches everyone that ownership is safer spread thin.

24 people had a proper look at it. 9 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Psychological Safety and Ownership Clarity being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

In the same model, a strong Decide would also get in its way.

SAMPLE

> **Evidence the other way**
>
> Answers that pull the other way, shown beside the result and never taken off it.
>
> Of the 34 people who answered about Ownership Clarity, 28 described it as strong.

AV-C Hedging pays, and vagueness lets it

No candidate found

People get credit for taking part while keeping clear of the downside of owning anything. Vague records let that work – later, nobody can say who committed to what – so hedging becomes the sensible strategy, and steadily more normal across later work.

25 people had a proper look at it. 6 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Incentive Alignment, Deliberate and Decide (memory and legibility) being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

> **Evidence the other way**
>
> Answers that pull the other way, shown beside the result and never taken off it.
>
> Of the 34 people who answered about Ownership Clarity, 28 described it as strong.

Onboarding Debt

Onboarding Debt is what builds up when an organisation has never properly worked out how new people get up to speed. Newcomers piece it together for themselves, from watching, trial and error, and questions that interrupt everyone else, and none of what they learn gets captured for the next person. A long apprenticeship can be the right thing if it's deliberately supported. The debt is the avoidable part – the time each new arrival spends rediscovering what the last one already worked out.

How it behaves. It repeats with every intake. One difficult arrival is just a difficult arrival; the debt shows in each new cohort paying the same tax, while the people who could fix it are too busy doing the work – and every newcomer who gets there the hard way becomes one more person too busy to fix it for the next.

OD-A Every newcomer works it out alone

No candidate found

Each newcomer learns the same things the same way – by trial, by watching and by asking around – and they do get there in the end. Because they do, the route looks adequate, and the cost of all that reconstruction stays out of sight while the next cohort pays it again.

25 people had a proper look at it. 6 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Information Flow, Deliberate and Resource Visibility being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

SAMPLE

OD-B Nobody owns the cost of onboarding

No candidate found

Every manager or team absorbs the cost of bringing someone up to speed on their own, out of their own time. Nobody can see what it adds up to across the organisation, and nobody owns fixing it, so the next newcomer repeats the same discovery work.

25 people had a proper look at it. 6 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Resource Visibility and Decide (commitment) being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

In the same model, a strong Information Flow or Deliberate would also get in its way.

> **Evidence the other way**
>
> Answers that pull the other way, shown beside the result and never taken off it.
>
> Of the 36 people who answered about Information Flow, 32 described it as strong.

OD-C Too busy to write it down for the next one

No candidate found

A newcomer asks an experienced colleague, gets the answer, and both go back to their current work, so the explanation never becomes part of how things are done. Because the improvised handover worked, the next newcomer has to buy the same answer again from people who are still too busy to write it down.

22 people had a proper look at it. 9 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Slack and Deliberate being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

In the same model, a strong Information Flow would also get in its way.

> **Evidence the other way**
>
> Answers that pull the other way, shown beside the result and never taken off it.
>
> Of the 36 people who answered about Information Flow, 32 described it as strong.

> Among the people who could answer these questions, the relevant features of the system and what happened next were consistently described as working well. Home Truths found no measured foothold for Onboarding Debt in this sample. This describes the answers received; it doesn't guarantee that the Condition is absent or will remain so.

Analysis Paralysis

Analysis Paralysis is when an organisation can't commit. More information is gathered, more options are modelled and more people are consulted, but the decision keeps receding, and the cost of not deciding grows unnoticed in the background. Real care over a decision that can't be undone is proportionate. Paralysis is when the analysis keeps expanding and never comes to a legitimate end.

SAMPLE

How it behaves. It gets heavier the longer it runs. Each round of analysis turns up new considerations, the time already invested makes stopping harder, and the world moves on around a decision that hasn't been made. How much analysis there is matters less than the repeated failure to bring it to a close that people will stand behind.

AP-A Nobody with the authority to call it

No candidate found

The evidence is in and the disagreements are visible, but nobody has accepted authority to close the question. So more people and more analysis get added, to build the legitimacy a clear decider would have provided, and each addition brings new considerations and new stakeholders, making the close harder and more politically exposed.

20 people had a proper look at it. 11 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Ownership Clarity, Decide (commitment) and Deliberate being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

AP-B Being wrong is costly; delay belongs to nobody

No candidate found

No amount of evidence will make this decision risk-free, and being wrong would be personally costly, while delay belongs to nobody. So the people deciding ask for more evidence, which spreads the responsibility out instead of concentrating it. The extra analysis is praised as diligence, and the safer non-decision lasts while the opportunity, or the situation, moves on.

12 people had a proper look at it. 21 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Psychological Safety and Decide (commitment) being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

AP-C Every review adds more reviewers

No candidate found

Disagreement survives the first review, and each attempt to make the decision safer adds another reviewer or another perspective. The cost of coordinating grows faster than discussion can resolve anything, and the mounting uncertainty is taken as proof that still more control is needed before anyone commits.

26 people had a proper look at it. 5 said they hadn't come across it.

In the House Rules model, this route depends on Trust Default, Discuss and Decide (commitment) being weak, so strengthening any one of them is a possible way to interrupt it.

Traits

These are the Traits beneath the Conditions above, as people described them across the whole organisation. A Trait that isn't broadly weak doesn't prove that everyone's experience of it was good. It

SAMPLE

means only that the overall picture didn't come out weak.

Process Elasticity	A varied picture
Follow-Through	Sound
Incentive Alignment	Sound
Information Flow	Sound
Ownership Clarity	Mostly positive
Principle Coherence	A varied picture
Psychological Safety	Sound
Resource Visibility	Sound
Response Variety	Mostly positive
Slack	Sound
Trust Default	Sound

Capabilities

Capabilities – how well an organisation spots, discusses, deliberates, decides, gets things done and learns from what happened – are properly assessed in a full House Rules diagnosis, so this read doesn't grade them. Each route above does show which Capabilities, in the House Rules model, it depends on being weak.

Not in this edition

These Conditions weren't part of this edition: Commitment Inflation, Competence Concentration, Delivery Decoupling, Hero Dependency, Hidden Burnout, Learned Helplessness, Politics, Process Worship and Silo Formation.

How sensitive this read was – modelled, not measured

If a route's pattern really were running here, how likely was this read to catch it, with six proper looks and three people describing it? The figures below are the planner's estimates, worked out before anybody answered, so they say how well the read was set up to see each route rather than anything about what it found.

The plan assumed that 70% of people would finish, and that somebody placed to see a running pattern had a 50% chance of describing it. The range varies both assumptions, along with how often people come across things, between the planner's low and high settings.

It's the same for every route in this read: between 53% and 99%.

None of this proves cause, shows how widespread or severe anything is, promises things will stay as they are, or shows that a Condition is absent everywhere. It's what people described, counted carefully.

SAMPLE