



Brain Fitness and its impact on organisational health

By Dr. Jenny Brockis

Is your workplace healthy? Is it a place where policies and procedures are in place to ensure that the risk of physical injury is minimised? Is it a place that offers free lunchtime sessions on healthy nutrition, and discounted gym memberships? While all highly valuable, a healthy workplace is one that provides complete health, safety and well being for everyone that includes care of their physical, mental and brain health requirements.

Why brain fitness?

Having a healthy brain makes everything work better. Brain fitness is a relatively new concept in the business world and now is the perfect time to take advantage of this. We already have a far better understanding of what the human brain is potentially capable of, how it best likes to operate and what really works to boost performance. This knowledge has arrived at the perfect time because in a world facing relentless and increasing

speed of change, knowing how to adapt fast enough and in the right way is vital to business and our own wellbeing.

The statistics around levels of disengagement, burnout and mental health issues reflects the amount of pressure many people face today in juggling heavy workloads, high expectations and being available 24/7. This has led to a re-evaluation of what matters most to future business success and growth. Traditionally the approach has been

to build profit through investment in technology and expertise. While still relevant, forward thinking business is now looking to invest in what is called their existing mental capital.

A vast amount of time, effort and energy is invested in recruiting and retaining the best staff. It makes sense to ensure that every staff member is given the opportunity to work to their best capacity through developing a workplace culture based on shared values, beliefs and purpose. Cutting through the jargon, what this implies is that fundamentally business is about people and the business of relationships.

A workplace that is people focused, results in staff enjoying their work more, helps them retain a higher level of energy and enthusiasm, and builds confidence in their ability to do their work well. When people feel valued, respected and supported for the work they deliver, we contribute more and to a higher level.

In a study published by the Society of Knowledge Economics in 2011 it was shown how in the highest performing workplaces, the key differences lay in how people behaved and interacted with each other, leading to a 12 % higher level of productivity and a profit margin three times higher than in the low performing workplaces.

While happiness and better health can be difficult parameters to measure, the value of brain fitness shows up in lower staff turnover rates, reduced sick leave and improved profit margins. There are a number of ways organisations can quickly and easily incorporate some

of the brain fitness principles:

1 Review reported fatigue levels.

Operating tired is a cognitive menace because it reduces concentration and is associated with higher rates of human error, miscommunication and misunderstanding. When we have been awake for over 17 hours our ability to think has been reduced to the equivalent to operating with a blood alcohol level of 0.05%. Encouraging staff to not work extended hours consistently, helps keep everyone safe.

2 Stay on the move.

Prolonged sitting at our desks reduces blood flow to the brain and has been shown to boost anxiety levels. Exercise or increased physical activity during the workday has been shown to boost attention, lift mood and increase performance. Encouraging people to walk rather than take the elevator, or to stand while on the phone or in meetings has been shown to increase energy levels and productivity.

3 Take regular brain breaks.

The human brain was designed to apply focus in chunks of time. Attempting to stay focused on work-tasks for hours on end is cognitively exhausting and sets us up to make more mistakes and take longer to complete our work. By working in blocks of high focus time of 60-90 minutes and then taking a 10-15 minute break, we provide our brain the break it needs to consolidate thoughts and learning and opens us up to more innovative thinking.

4 Find your thinking space.

Overbusy brains find it harder to switch off leading to poor sleep patterns and increasing fatigue. Many people today report how hard it is to find the thinking space required to pause and reflect. Scheduling a 20-minute appointment with yourself is a great way to start. This could be as simple as closing the office door with a do-not-disturb sign, a 20 minute interlude listening to a piece of your favourite music, a brief meditation or getting outside to a nearby green space.

Organisational health is a must not a maybe for future potential business growth and success. Integrating brain fitness is the logical next step because it provides the means to know how to lead, change and adapt in response to our rapidly changing environment, and create a brain healthy workplace that leads to high performance.



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