

# Fit for the future



Why the health of our workplace is at risk and what organisations can do to inspire productivity, passion and high performance.

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A white paper by Dr Jenny Brockis



# Firing up or down?

Workplaces and workers everywhere are struggling – they are under pressure, stressed out and stretched to their limits.

In your organisation, how many of your leaders have lost their enthusiasm for their role (maybe even you)? They're uncertain about what's expected of them because everything is constantly changing as a result of the volatile and uncertain times that we are in. Mounting pressure to 'innovate', 'disrupt' and 'think ahead' add to their woes.

When the demands for new products, services and ideas aren't being met because of internal struggles and competition, then silo mentalities develop. Human resource departments fend off complaints, chew up precious time resolving interpersonal differences or recruit for roles like it's a revolving-door policy.

How can an organisation focus on long-term strategic business goals, when everyone is busy putting out short-term spot fires?

How can you be competitive externally, if all the competition is happening internally?

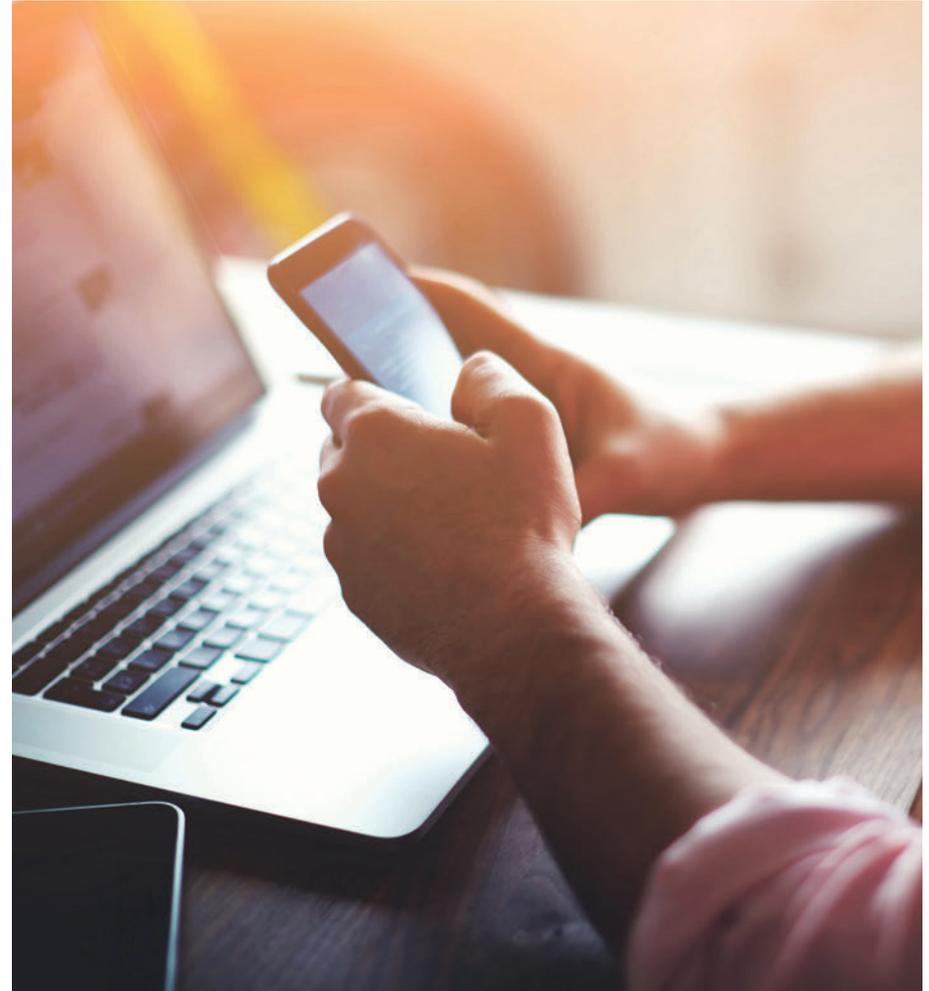
How can you sustain your high performers without putting them at risk of burnout?

According to the 2017 workplace wellbeing survey conducted by Dr Lindsay McMillan from Reventure, technology stress impacts 73% of workers (compared to 46% in 2016). Feeling constantly connected is blurring work-life boundaries and making it harder for individuals to disconnect from their work, which leads to rising mental fatigue, difficulty focusing and problems remembering.

Add to this increasingly high levels and costs of staff turnover, sick leave, stress leave, and the less tangible impact of mental distress and mood disorders such as anxiety and depression.

For decision-makers who are desperate to retain the competitive edge in an increasingly noisy and crowded marketplace, it's frustrating to witness what comes across as a lack of commitment or enthusiasm for what needs to be done; a reticence to step up to a new challenge or come up with new ideas.

The workplace community is at risk – and it has dire consequences for the profit and productivity of the business as a whole.





In 2018, life-insurance company MetLife Australia reported that Safe Work Australia found workplace stress costs Australia around 92 million working days each year, with direct costs to employers being over \$10 billion per year.

**Now imagine – what is it costing your business today?**

# Change is NOT the problem

Businesses that have stood the test of time for decades, even hundreds of years, have successfully adapted to changing times and circumstances. Yet it is easy to blame the external forces that influence the business world, rather than see the internal forces as the issue.

In actual fact, change is essential to our continuing evolution, not just as humans, but as profitable and productive businesses. Change fuels business growth and innovation. Without it, there would be no advances in technology and no improvement in outcomes.

The real issue is high stress.

Our people need to have the personal tools and strategies, as well as the physical structure around them – that is, the workplace – that help them adapt to change and thrive.

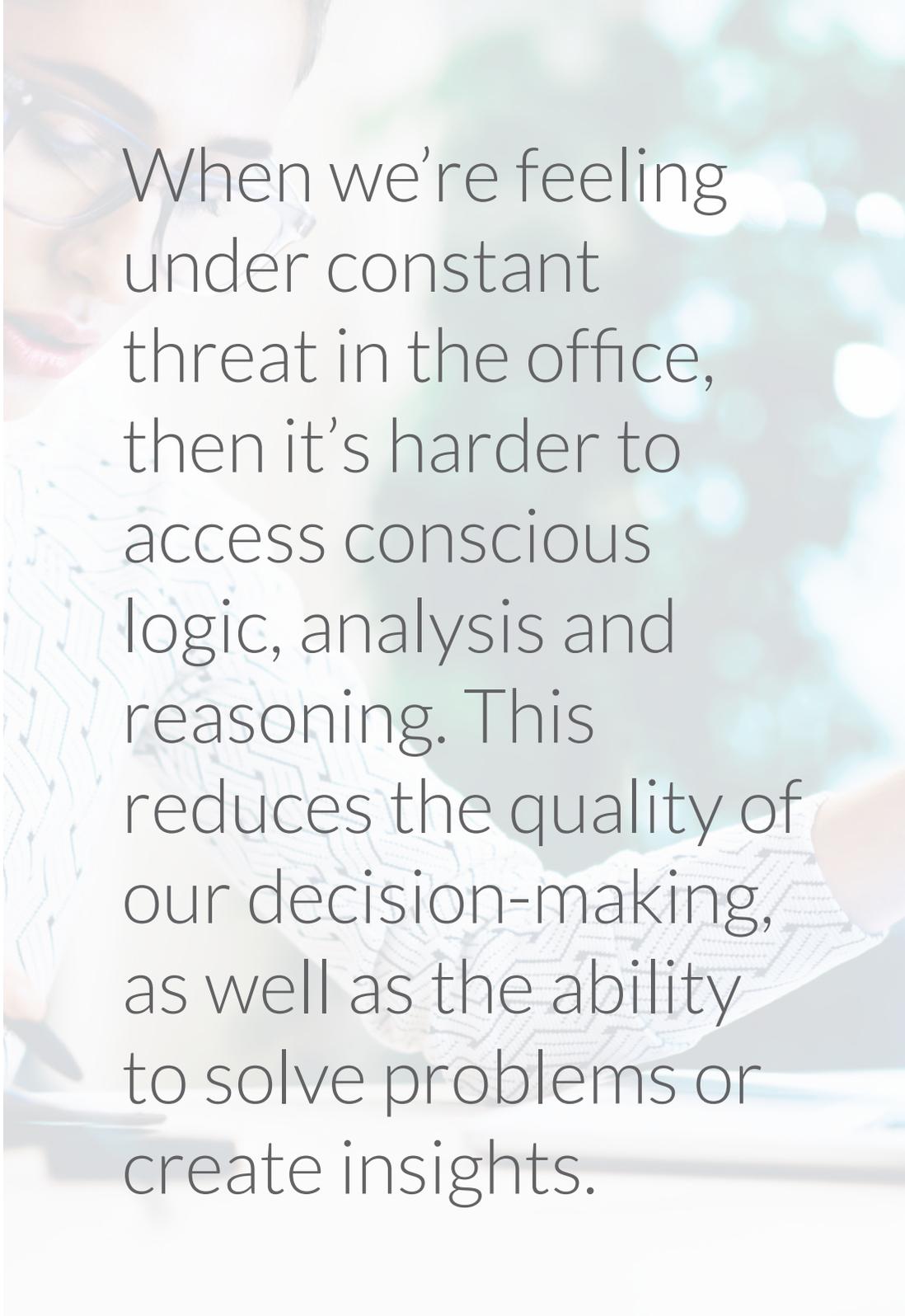


Adaptability is facilitated when stress is experienced at healthy levels, in a way that enhances performance (not detracts from it) through higher levels of enthusiasm and excitement.

It's a fine balance between enough stress to motivate us to get out of bed in the morning and too much chronic stress that saps energy and motivation, impacting our health.

The problem is that our modern brain has evolved to respond to the immediate potential threat of becoming the sabre-tooth tiger's lunch, and it can't differentiate between this and the perceived threat of looming deadlines, difficult people and overwork.

Chronic excess stress is not conducive to healthy people with high-performance thinking capacity – which is what we want – right?

A woman with glasses is looking down at a document. The document has a circuit board pattern overlay. The background is blurred, showing green foliage.

When we're feeling under constant threat in the office, then it's harder to access conscious logic, analysis and reasoning. This reduces the quality of our decision-making, as well as the ability to solve problems or create insights.

# The workplace that, well, works

We've all heard that our people are our organisation's most valuable asset. Yet this only holds true when our people are able to play to their strengths and are encouraged to shine.



According to Gallup, 60% of employees surveyed said that being able to do what they do best in a role is very important to them. However, the reality can be poorly managed performance reviews, being called out in front of peers for making a mistake, or feeling judged or micromanaged. This keeps the focus on what isn't being done well, leading to a sense of disconnect, disengagement and loss of confidence.

More so, the Gensler 2016 survey of high-performance workplaces revealed that truly innovative companies design workplaces that suit the individual, group and community, to facilitate communication across all levels, and it is this that drives creativity and innovation.

This is where the work ecosystem looks to provide the physical environment that supports the need for quiet, deeper-focused work or interactive collaboration, a psychological place of safety that enhances efficiency and effectiveness and a cognitive safety that drives performance.

Findings from a joint study between the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) and Rob Cross, Edward A Madden Professor of Global Business at Babson College, found that companies that promote collaborative working were five times as likely to be high performing.

Further, the *Harvard Business Review* article 'Proof that positive work cultures are more productive' states:

In studies by the Queens School of Business and by the Gallup Organization, disengaged workers had 37% higher absenteeism, 49% more accidents, and 60% more errors and defects. In organizations with low employee engagement scores, they experienced 18% lower productivity, 16% lower profitability, 37% lower job growth, and 65% lower share price over time.

A healthy and happy workforce and work environment isn't just a nice to have, it's the key driver to increased productivity and performance



A study by economists from the University of Warwick found that happiness at work led to an increase of employee productivity by 12%, compared to a drop of 10% in their unhappy counterparts.

**When Google invested in initiatives like employee support, then overall satisfaction rose by 37%.**



# Think smarter, perform better

Who wouldn't want to have a high-performing workplace?  
(Just as who wouldn't want to be thinner, fitter and healthier?)

Yet our desire and our intentions must transform into tangible results and actions.

This requires more than a 'wellness budget or program' because while standing desks, foosball tables and funky office furniture are nice to have and add to the general appeal of a workplace, they have little or no effect on performance or long-term tenure.

It's when everyone is struggling with tiredness from working long hours and overwhelm from so much 'stuff' that we make poor decisions that impact our entire lives, as well as that of our organisation. This is what translates into high staff turnover and high rates of absenteeism that cost your business, as well as yourself, dearly.

To make an impact and become high performing, it is essential to consistently be able to think clearly, show sound judgement, and have the degree of mental flexibility, agility and innovation that is needed in today's fast-paced environment, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: From awareness to high performance



Change is a constant and because it is increasing in volume and velocity, keeping up with – and preferably one step ahead of – the pack requires being open to the idea that what is working now might not be satisfactory in the future.

This is about staying aware of technological advances such as in the fields of brain science and positive psychology, where new findings are being used to improve productivity and performance.

This growing awareness includes being willing to consider learning about alternative strategies, techniques and procedures that appear foreign to current thinking and behaviours.



Staying curious and approaching new ideas with a beginner's mind can be confronting to those who 'know' a great deal. Challenging existing ways of doing and thinking can often be uncomfortable.

No one likes to be thought of as doing something wrong that they may be judged for.

Yet broadening perspective with a raft of alternative ideas and viewpoints facilitates critical thinking, innovation and new insight. It opens up the mind to possibility thinking.

Following a path of discovery promotes new learning and greater understanding, and encourages the exploration and implementation of new ideas.



A fully engaged organisation exudes energy, enthusiasm and excitement. Here challenge is seen as opportunity for growth, failure as a learning tool and change as not only inevitable but highly desired.

This is a workplace environment that:

- encourages those at work to share their ideas without fear of ridicule or judgement
- facilitates honest and transparent communication
- rewards effort
- stimulates continuing personal and professional development
- provides the autonomy and level playing field to enable all to shine.



Commitment is the long-term view for a brighter future. It feels good to be part of something bigger than ourselves, something that we can contribute to in a meaningful way when the shared vision and values resonate with our own belief systems.

Having this intention and focus demonstrates integrity and mutual trust. This leads to more effective communication and greater positive experiences, and helps reduce the frequency and intensity of potential disagreement or conflict.

Collegiality and a sense of community make this an appealing place to work, attracting and retaining great talent. Commitment provides safety in knowing others are looking out for you, will support you and will step up to deliver on their side of the bargain. It's a win-win scenario.



Poorly managed individual performance reviews reduce confidence and performance. Done well they provide the opportunity for positive feedback on what is going well, what needs further review and what needs to stop. Evaluating organisational performance works in exactly the same way.

Regular organisational health reviews ensure everything is on track to achieve the desired outcomes, whether projections and targets need to be reconsidered, tweaked or abandoned and to check what else is needed to move towards continuing adaptability, flexibility and growth.

This is an organisation that doesn't take anything for granted, and continues to reflect on and refine what else can add to continuing improvement.



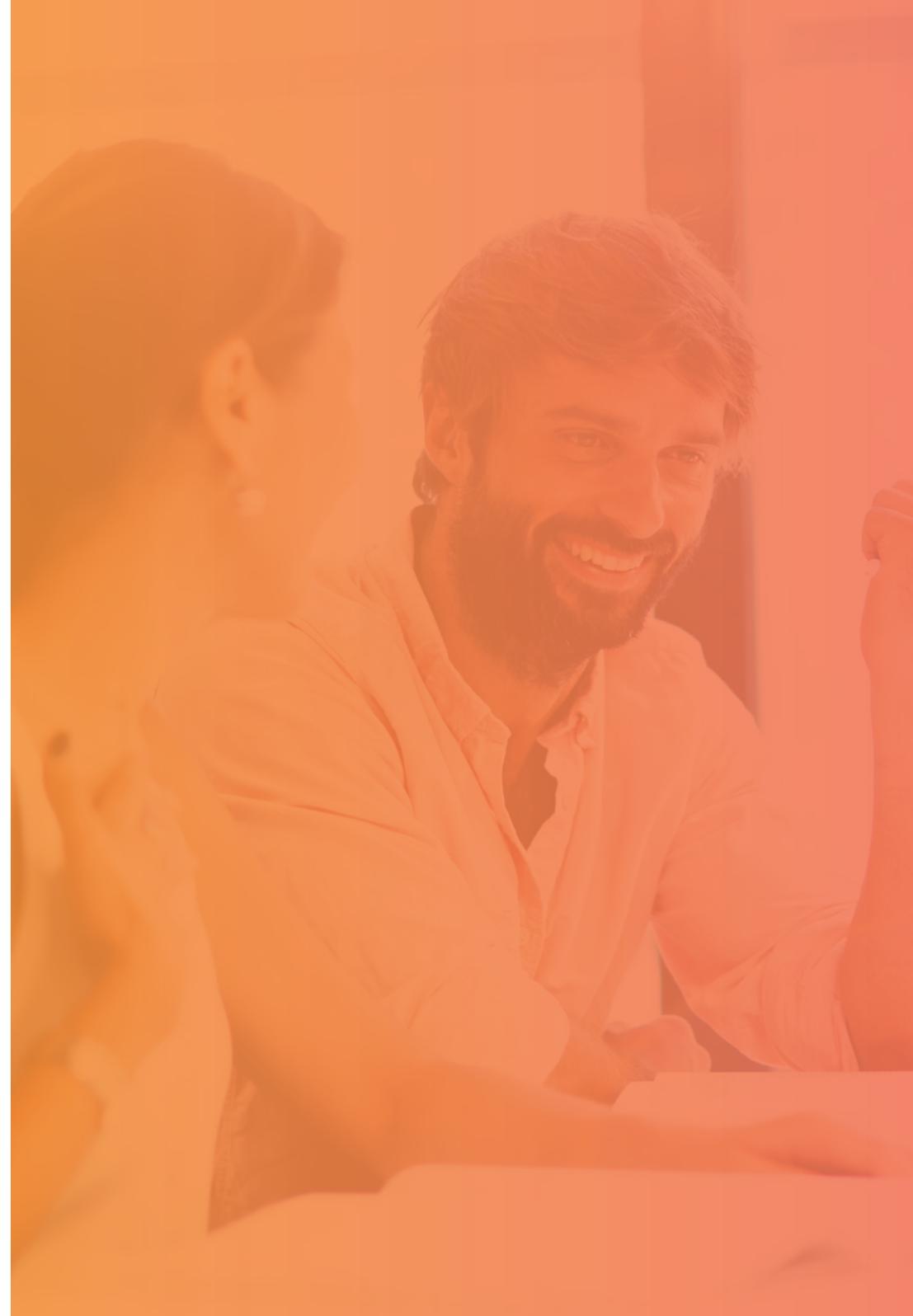
## High performance

This is all about quality. A high-performance workplace cares about the individuals who work there. Being treated as a person, feeling respected, valued and acknowledged for what you bring to a business is empowering and a strong motivator to want to always deliver our best.

It's about having a leadership that leads by example, provides a clear vision for the future and a visible pathway to achieve the desired goals.

A high-performance workplace will be determined by the continuing investment in developing the potential of every employee, along with the provision of a (cognitively) safe working environment that maximises efficiency and effectiveness.

Enjoying good health and happiness are fundamental to our wellbeing and essential to the creation of a great place to work. When our people feel passionate about their work and fired up to do their very best, then relationships improve and collaboration happens. This is the engine of a high-performing organisation!



When you optimise the thinking skills, energy and focus for every individual in your team and organisation, then you drive real results and real impact over the long term.

*The 'Future Work Skills 2020' report by the Institute for the Future for Apollo Research Institute revealed 10 essential skills for success in the workforce, including:*

- 1. **novel and adaptive thinking** - the ability to come up with solutions and responses beyond that which is rule-based*
- 2. **cognitive load management** - the ability to effectively filter and focus on what is important and turn the massive influx of data into an advantage.*

*So it is your brainpower that is your competitive advantage in the modern workplace.*

# Energy to optimise results

We must get the hardware of every individual brain right, so that the software that makes up the entire organisation runs efficiently and effectively.



Laying the foundation for enduring and positive change is based on shifting mindsets and behaviours based on common shared values and a vision for the future. This requires nurturing the right minds and mindsets in your team to promote curiosity, problem-solving and possibility.

It's not what we know anymore,  
but how well we think that counts.

There are 12 keys to a high-performing workplace, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: 12 Keys to High-Performance Thinking



# Create (ENERGY)

*High-performance keys:*

1. Nutrition
2. Physical activity
3. Sleep
4. Mental stretch



It's normal to want to dive immediately into fixing the perceived problems in your organisation, but Usain Bolt wouldn't expect to rock up to a world series race without preparing and training first, so nor should you!

Becoming aware of how our brain and body operate is a crucial first step to working well together. Lifestyle choices are important in determining mood, memory and cognition, and everyone in the organisation must learn to place a higher value on them.

For example, if your organisation's existing culture is built around surviving on high pressure, little sleep, and a lot of coffee, then this will need to be changed. You must cultivate a culture that values and rewards nutrition, exercise, quality sleep and the mental energy that is required for focus, quality decision-making and emotional regulation.

This is about becoming brain aware and preparing your organisation for high performance, so that you can facilitate it and thrive.

# Operate (OPTIMISE PERFORMANCE)

*High-performance keys:*

5. Mindset
6. Focus
7. Healthy stress
8. Mindfulness

Next, you must review your workplace practices to see what's working and what's not – i.e. just because that's the way things have always worked doesn't mean there isn't room for improvement.

This is about maximising efficiency and effectiveness, while minimising the impact of stress and poor workplace practice. It's about creating the optimal workplace environment that limits multitasking. You also have to review the structure of how meetings are held, the value (or not) of performance reviews, and the hiring and firing process.

It involves engendering curiosity and cultivating a growth mindset that seeks out how things can be improved at the individual, team and organisational level.

This includes learning how to pay better attention and to be more effective at learning and retaining information, as well as developing critical thinking skills and managing our emotional state when at work in high-stress situations.



# Integrate (AMPLIFY RESULTS)

*High-performance keys:*

9. Change ability
10. Collaboration
11. Innovation
12. Leadership

What really motivates us to want to come to work, to work well with others and deliver our best?

It's less about seeking 'engagement' and more about looking for ways to acknowledge and reward effort, building social bridges that connect people to their purpose and others by starting conversations, inviting dialogue, and showing that you care.

Leading change starts with the creation of a safe environment that allows everyone to speak up and voice an opinion, share an idea or try something out without the fear of ridicule, public humiliation or being chastised for being wrong.

The buzz around the need for greater innovation and creativity comes from developing the skill set of effective collaboration, creating a mindset of generosity, acceptance of difference and elevating happiness.



A man in a light-colored shirt and dark trousers is sitting on the grass, leaning against a large tree trunk. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a soft-focus field of grass. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red and orange gradient.

Happy, healthy people  
are more productive, less  
stressed and happier in life  
and work – which is good  
for business, too.



# Play the long-term game and thrive

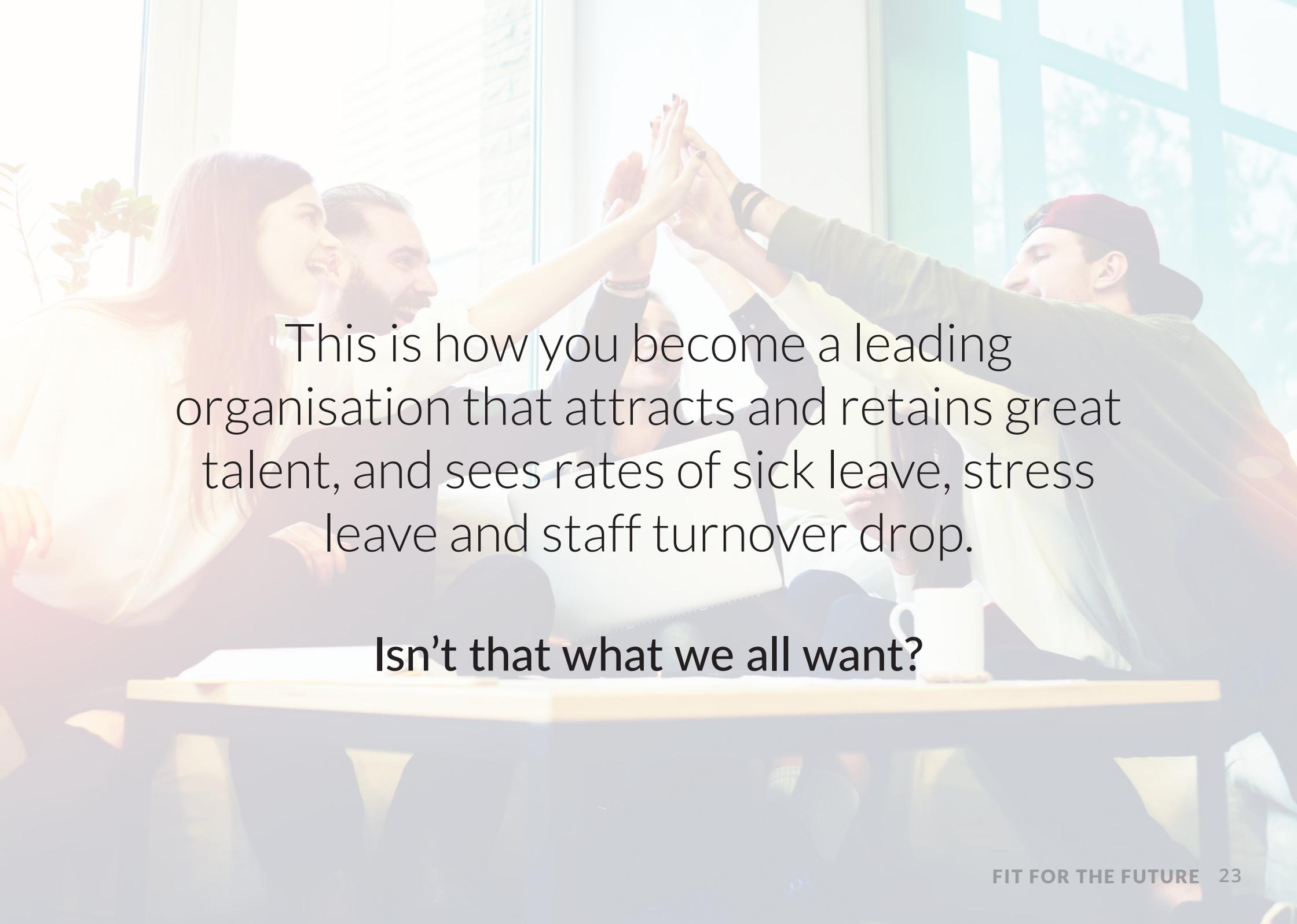
The fast pace and volume of organisational change drives the need for a workplace culture that is people focused and value driven. This will always be a work in progress, which is why it's so important to invest in it.

It's a long-term game that requires effective leadership, effort and attention to achieve.

When we feel enthused about the work we do, enjoy the company of those we work with and feel excited for our future, then our contribution and our willingness to step up to the next challenge will increase. This leads to the development of effective teams, strong positive interpersonal relationships and true collaboration.

So when you meet the needs of your people then you drive engagement and motivation, and productivity, performance and happiness add to the bottom line.

A high-performing and high-thinking workplace is what leads to positive change and greater long-term results.



This is how you become a leading organisation that attracts and retains great talent, and sees rates of sick leave, stress leave and staff turnover drop.

**Isn't that what we all want?**



# About Jenny

I am passionate about people, performance and practical solutions that improve our health and wellbeing.

As an award-winning speaker, mentor, facilitator and trained medical practitioner, I make the latest neuroscience easy – and even fun! – to help us understand why we think and act the way we do, and then implement effective behaviour change to turn around some of the biggest performance issues in organisations today.

High stress, silo thinking, overwhelm and mental fatigue – this is what we suffer in organisations every day. So we need workplaces that enable everyone to operate at their true potential.

When our brains and bodies are doing our best work then we increase our ability to work with other people, think critically and deliver innovative results. This leads to happy and healthy workplaces – not to mention lifestyles.

In 2009, I swapped my consulting room for the boardroom and have since helped individuals, teams and clients like PepsiCo, Downer Energy, RACWA and many more, to improve organisation-wide productivity, efficiency and collaboration; to deliver better, more innovative business results.

I love writing about my learnings and have authored three books including the best-selling *Future Brain* (published by Wiley), which was a finalist in the 'Best You Personal Development Author Awards 2017'.

I'm also a regular contributor to *CEO Magazine*, the *Age*, *Fairfax*, *GLOSS*, *Chief of Staff Magazine* and the *Great Health Guide*, as well as a regular guest on talkback radio and TV shows like the *Today Show*.

I believe the greatest investment you can ever make in life is your own cognitive health, as well as those you are responsible for.

I'm sure you'll agree!

## How I can help

The Future Brain Program is run over 6 to 12 months to ensure effective and sustainable change.

### Organisations learn how to:

- enhance creativity and innovation through the higher mental performance of teams
- manage modern-day workplace distractions for everyone
- manage stress levels to keep them in a healthy range and boost organisational wellbeing
- improve critical thinking across the entire organisation
- discover the untapped potential of your workplace
- use the business of relationships to better progress and amplify results.

## Interested?

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