



# Optimum Productivity and Performance at Work [in the ‘hybrid’ world]

Presented by Nick Thomas  
April 2025



# Introduction / Housekeeping

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Welcome and thankyou!

Webinar format – muted and video off. Interactive features – polls, Q&A

Slides and Recording will be made available post-session via the Council

## Nick Thomas

- Background in Insurance Broking Sector. Sales and Sales Leadership specialist
- Widely qualified coach and personal development specialist
- Coaching, training and consulting including Insurance M&A



## Nick Thomas & Associates

- Up to the minute training and coaching solutions addressing the challenges of the modern insurance professional
- Technical insurance; sales, communication and soft skills; management and leadership; customer service; performance, resilience and health

# Objectives

*Begin with the  
end in mind'*

Stephen R.  
Covey, The 7  
Habits of Highly  
Effective People'

- To understand the evolving challenges to workplace productivity and the need to take control of our own productivity
- To understand the key components of sustainable performance and how they underpin one another
- To explore the latest research on motivation and consider what drives each of us individually
- To explore the peak performance state of 'flow' and how to access it

# Distraction culture

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## Media Multi-tasking

- **Destroys productivity** - Media multi-taskers pay mental price' Stanford 2016
  - heavy multitaskers were worse at filtering out irrelevant information
  - organizing their memories
  - Switching from one thing to another
- **Reduces intelligence....**
- **May 'shrink the brain'**

*'...independent of individual personality traits, people who used a higher number of media devices concurrently also had smaller grey matter density in the part of the brain known as the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), the region notably responsible for cognitive and emotional control functions'*

University of Sussex

*'A study done at the University of London found that constant emailing and text-messaging reduces mental capability by an average of 10 points on an IQ test. It was five points for women, and fifteen points for men. This effect is similar to missing a night's sleep. For men, it's around three times more than the effect of smoking cannabis...it's really not that amusing that one of the most common "productivity tools" can make one as dumb as a stoner'*

**'Multi-tasking is making you stupid'**  
Inc. magazine. Author Jessica Stillman

# Distraction culture

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*'2018 Global Mobile Consumer Survey'* Deloitte

- People checked phones 52 a day on average
- Total 171 minutes
- Every three seconds doubles workplace error Johnson, Bailey 2018
- Every distraction takes twenty-three minutes to get back on task 'The cost of interrupted work' 2018
- After only twenty minutes of interrupted performance, people reported higher stress, frustration, workload, effort and pressure

## **Movement to remote/hybrid:**

- *Losing the structure of everyday office life*
- *Spending more time at our desks and on our screens, subject to the greater temptations of multi-tasking and distraction*
- *We need to take personal responsibility for our health, wellbeing, and workplace performance*

# Performance – mixed picture

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- **Increased Flexibility** - studies indicate enhanced productivity due to greater flexibility, allowing employees to work during their most productive hours
- **Reduced Commuting Time:** allows more time to work and personal well-being
- **Varied Impact by Role:** some jobs thrive in a remote setting, others benefit from in-person collaboration

## Other considerations:

- Effect on corporate culture and social cohesion
- Compliance challenges
- On-boarding and learning
- Remote and hybrid management

# Burnout

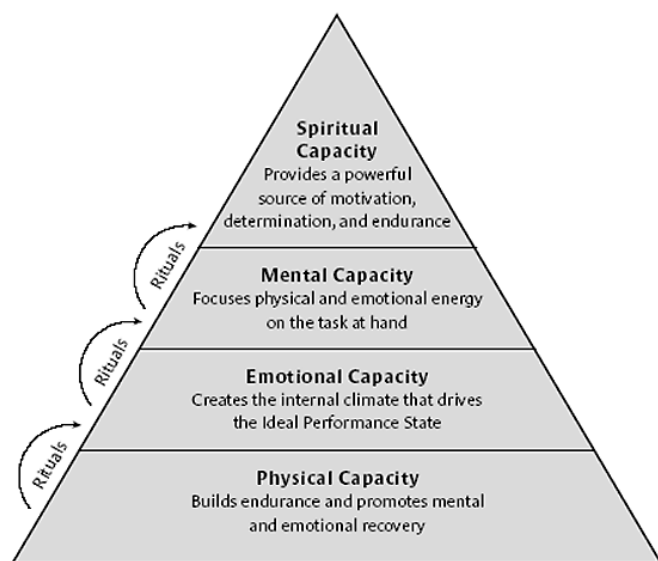
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- **Boundary Management** - hybrid work can blur the lines between personal and professional life.  
Longer hours/inability to switch off
- **Social Isolation** – stress and burnout
- **Zoom Fatigue**
  - Increased cognitive load – lack non-verbal cues.  
Harder to interpret communication
  - Visual overload
  - Harder to communicate effectively – lack non-verbal
  - Over stimulation – ‘closeness’

Burnout is included in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) by the WHO as an occupational phenomenon. It is not classified as a medical condition

*Burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions: feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and reduced professional efficacy*

# Supporting long-term Performance



‘The High-Performance Pyramid’ – **Loehr and Schwartz**

*‘The number of hours in a day is fixed but the quantity and quality of energy available to us is not’*  
**The Power of Full Engagement – Loehr and Schwartz**

## The Ideal Performance State

- **Jim Loehr** – the same systemic multi-level training approach as elite athletes can transform work performance, health and happiness
- **Not about primary competencies** – technical knowledge, communication, presentation, negotiation skills etc,
- The **mobilisation of energy** – defined as the capacity to do work - is key to the Ideal Performance State  
*‘Increasing capacity at all levels allows athletes and executives alike to bring their talents and skills to full ignition and to sustain performance over time – a condition we call the ‘Ideal Performance State’* **The Making of a Corporate Athlete – Loehr and Schwartz**
- **Inter-connectivity** - each level of the pyramid influences the other

# Oscillation

**Energy Management** – two characteristics:

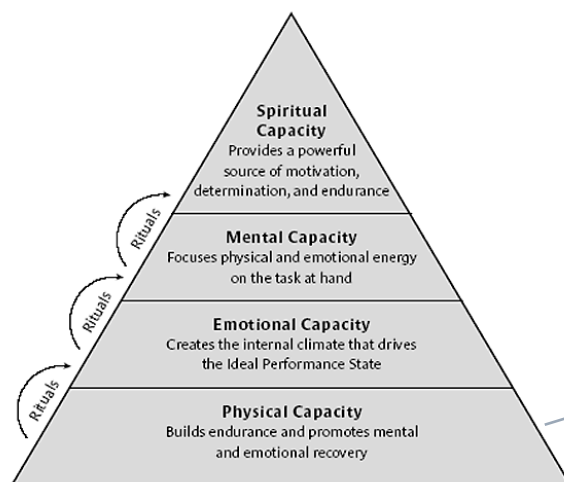
- **Oscillation** – rhythmic expenditure [stress] and recovery of energy. Stress is not the enemy of high performance but a potential stimulus for growth. The problem is lack of regular recovery and restoration
- **Rituals** – routines developed and regularly repeated to promote oscillation

**Supercompensation** - in weight training. An example and an analogy...

- No training = atrophy
- Overtraining and/or insufficient rest = breakdown of muscles, injury, illness



# High Performance Pyramid



## Physical Capacity...

### Movement

- Pumping mechanisms of body – venous return. Essential to get nutrients to and through our body, to move waste out of our bodies
- generate emotional stability and mental clarity
- Improved cognitive performance - neurogenesis and neuroplasticity

### Nutrition

- For consistent energy levels not blood sugar roller-coaster

**Sleep** – quality and quantity

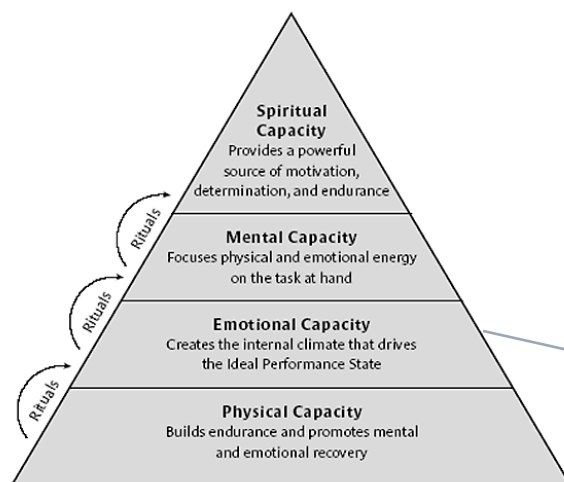
**Create Rituals** – per tennis players, batsmen, and golfers. Tiny habits?

**Hold yourself to account** – involve others...

‘Recent studies credibly have established that exercise stimulates the creation of new brain cells, pumps up existing ones, improves mood, aids in multi-tasking, blunts aging-related memory loss, sharpens decision making, dulls stress...and if you happen to be an elementary school student, improves your math grade’

**‘The first twenty minutes’** Gretchen Reynolds

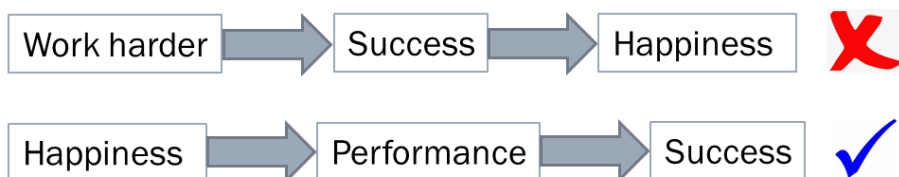
# High Performance Pyramid



## Emotional Capacity...

- Positive emotions ignite energy, negative emotions such as frustration, anger, fear and resentment become toxic over time
- Fight/flight response – hinders rational decision making and narrows options. See ‘The Chimp Paradox’, Dr Steve Peters
- Positive Psychology movement – ‘The Happiness Advantage’, Shawn Achor
- Brain performs significantly better in positive state than negative, neutral or stress [intelligence, creativity, energy, sales]
- Dopamine released when in positive state activates the learning centres of the brain. Widens your field of vision

## Traditional approach vs Happiness Advantage



# Building Emotional Capacity

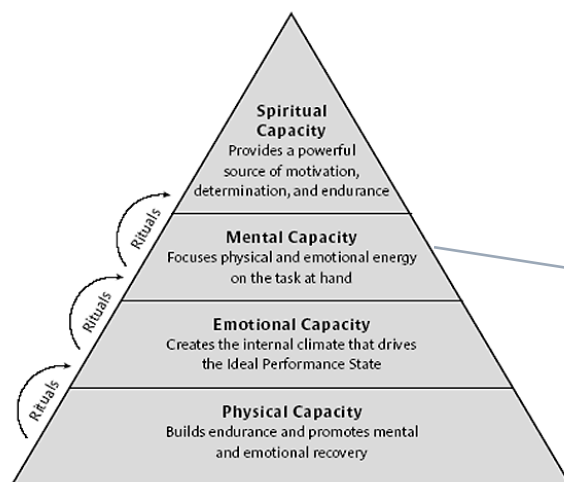
- Our feelings are created by the way in which we interpret our reality, NOT by reality itself
- We can chose to **shift emotional state** in the moment...
  - Recognise current state – does it serve me? What resourceful state do I need right now?
  - Thoughts, emotions and physiology are interconnected – use body language..‘**act as if**’...you are confident, happy, calm etc.
  - Where can I access these? Myself/others/just imagine
  - Movement, nature, shift focus, breathing, anchors
- **Rewire our brain TO BE POSITIVE** – practice gratitude, journaling, exercise, meditation, random acts of kindness [Achor]
- **Nurture human connections** – builds positive emotions, promotes recovery. Rituals?

Between stimulus  
and response  
there is a space.  
In that space  
is our power  
to choose our  
response. In  
our response  
lies our growth  
and our freedom.

Viktor E. Frankl



# High Performance Pyramid



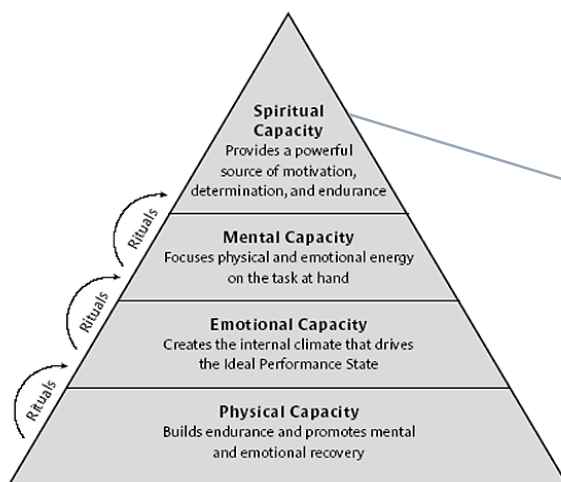
## Stinkin' Thinkin'

- Mental tennis – two parts in conflict. Back and forth
- Catastrophe/snowball thinking
- Self-battering – inner critic.
- Camel thinking – overload ourselves by trying to work through too many things

## Mental Capacity...

- Includes **Focus** – energy concentrated in the service of a particular goal
- **How to build? Mindfulness and meditation**
  - Trains attention, quiets mind and promotes recovery
  - Practises can be very short and simple – maybe one minute just noticing the breath
  - Slows brain wave activity – shift to right-brain [creativity]
- **Avoid unhelpful thought patterns** – promote negative emotions and unresourceful state. Fixed Mindset and Negativity bias.

# High Performance Pyramid



*'Every decision in your life is controlled by your values and beliefs. The first step in creating the life you desire is recognizing the power of your beliefs, and that it's your beliefs that shape your decisions, actions and destiny'*  
Tony Robbins



## Spiritual Capacity...

*'...the energy unleashed by tapping into one's deepest values and defining a strong sense of purpose. This capacity, we have found, serves as sustenance in the face of adversity and as a powerful source of motivation, focus, determination, and resilience.'* Loehr and Schwartz

## How?

- Time for **reflection** – establish your OWN value hierarchy. Typically values and beliefs are subconscious and formed by the external environment [media/parents/peer]...
- Connect your work with your values and purpose

## Take a moment:

- *What would you like your legacy to be?*
- *If you could lead your best life, what would your eulogy say?*

# The surprising truth about motivation

**Extrinsic motivation** – the Carrot and Stick approach has driven economic growth since 1900s.

**The Sawyer effect:** - recent research demonstrates that extrinsic rewards destroy intrinsic motivation, stifle creativity [narrow focus and encourage 'functional fixedness'] and encourage undesirable behaviours

- Assumes adequate base financial remuneration
- Extrinsic motivation can still work for routine tasks

**Intrinsic Motivation** – supports creative and cognitive tasks

- **Autonomy:** The desire for you to direct your own life. Choice makes task meaningful = psychological ownership
- **Mastery:** The pull to make progress and get better at something that matters.
- **Purpose:** The yearning to do what you want to do in the service of something greater than yourself



*'...[financial] rewards can perform a weird sort of behavioural alchemy: they can transform an interesting task into a drudge. They can turn play into work'*

*'...we have three innate psychological needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When those needs are satisfied, we're motivated, productive, and happy'*

*'When the reward is the activity itself—deepening learning, delighting customers, doing one's best—there are no shortcuts'*  
**'Drive', Dan Pink**



# Flow – the psychology of optimal experience

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi [*chick-sent-me-high*].

- **Action and awareness merge** – your actions feel automatic
- **Selflessness** – no self-consciousness or inner critic
- **Timelessness** – deeply immersed in present moment. Sense of time distorted
- **Effortlessness** – calm and relaxed but deeply focused
- **Intrinsic motivation** – the activity is its own reward
- **A sense of control and mastery**

**Feel good chemicals released** - boost motivation, learning, and creativity [the high-performance triangle]. E.g.

- Norepinephrine, Dopamine – heighten senses and focus, pattern recognition
- Anandamide – improves lateral thinking



*'...a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it'*

**Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**

# Flow – the psychology of optimal experience

Creating a 'Flow' state. TRIGGERS:

- **Intense Concentration** [Note] - total absorption in single task [not multi-tasking]. Avoidance of distraction even unconscious
- **Stretch** - the challenges slightly exceeds skill set
- **Clear Goals** – small and immediate goals. Clarity on where you are now and what to do to close the gap
- **Immediate Feedback** – allowing adjustment in the moment

*Note* - Attention is constant conflict between 'bottom up' [Environmental stimuli] vs. 'top down' [goals]. Attending and Ignoring – separate processes. Ignoring even unconsciously uses resources that could be used for attention. See '*Distracted Mind*'. Dr Adam Gazzaley



*'The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something that we make happen. For a child, it could be placing with trembling fingers the last block on a tower she has built, higher than any she has built so far; ...for a violinist, mastering an intricate musical passage. For each person there are thousands of opportunities, challenges to expand ourselves'*

# A high-performance day – setting yourself up for success

- Plan your day – cognitive/creative tasks when you are most productive
- Oscillation between expenditure and recovery of energy. Create rituals
- Bursts of activity – recovery every twenty to ninety minutes. Schedule and set a timer. Break:
  - Avoid social media ‘sink-holes’ and detox from tech
  - Move - stretch, breathing squats, short walk
  - Access the present – breathing, meditation
  - Nature – outdoor, indoor plants, screen saves
  - Play – animals, children
  - Bottom-up attention – allows better top-down focus.
  - Prepares for ‘flow’ - brain wave activity/release feel good neurochemicals
- Eliminate external distractions - turn off notifications, find a quiet, dedicated workspace. Turn-off or remove phone. Internal?
- Singular focus – one activity at a time
- Feed The Engine : STOP for a healthy lunch
- Create psychological separation if working at home



**Pomodoro Technique**  
*A series of sprints – not a marathon*



Home / Psychology & Psychiatry  
Home / Neuroscience



🕒 JULY 15, 2021

**Study shows that spending time outdoors has a positive effect on the brain**

by Kerstin Skork, Elena Hungerland, Max Planck Society

# Objectives - Revisit

- To understand the evolving challenges to workplace productivity and the need to take control of our own productivity
- To understand the key components of sustainable performance and how they underpin one another
- To explore the latest research on motivation and consider what drives each of us individually
- To explore the peak performance state of 'flow' and how to access it

# Thank you! Questions?

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## Contact:

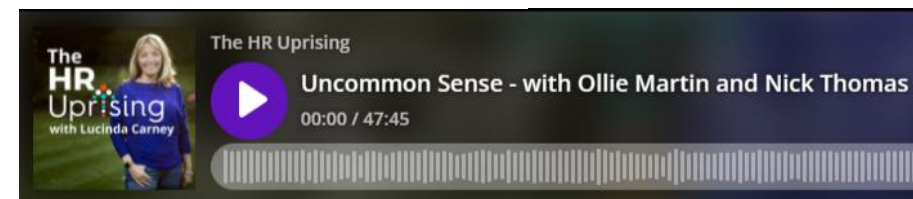
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*'Up to the minute training solutions addressing the challenges of the modern insurance professional'*

The logo for HRUprising, with 'HR' in blue and 'Uprising' in purple, featuring a stylized 'u' with a colorful dot pattern.

[Click here](#) to listen to Nick's latest podcast appearance on 'HR Uprising' talking about workplace performance, resilience and health