

ARNO FOLKERTS

KEYNOTES | ADVISE

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THE TRANSFORMATION

Change consists of two components: structure and culture.

Adjusting the structure within an organization is necessary to keep up with all developments, such as digitalization, robotics, and artificial intelligence.

When it comes to change, the focus is often on structure rather than culture. This makes sense because structure is tangible and easy to modify. Changing culture, on the other hand, is quite complex—how do you alter people's thinking and behavioral patterns?

Of course, having a vision and strategy is important, but implementing them within an organization requires a solid understanding of neuroscience.

What remains timeless is that employees need to internalize a new way of working. Our brains need practice to do so. This process is often underestimated. In fact, it is so underestimated that the new way of working can start to erode the organizational culture. Sometimes brutally, but often in a subtle and hidden way. This can quickly lead to an atmosphere of misunderstanding, dissatisfaction, or even victimhood—hardly a solid foundation for a healthy culture.

It is essential to have some knowledge of how our brain works so that we can look at things differently...



THE TRUTH OF THE BRAIN

People think based on fixed structures and patterns. This allows our brain to conserve energy. We continuously draw conclusions based on past experiences and knowledge, and if we don't understand something based on these, we tend to create our own logic. That's why, during a change process, it is crucial to continuously consider the way communication is handled. A well-intended sentence can be completely misinterpreted and cause unnecessary friction. Therefore, it is essential to communicate clearly and unambiguously so that everyone within the organization understands.

A common mistake is that a vision, new strategy, or policy is communicated too abstractly. Over the years, I have heard phrases like: "We need to excel," "We

must strengthen collaboration," "Clear communication is our goal!" or "It's all about integrity!" These statements are well-intended, but everyone interprets these vague concepts differently. And without concrete examples, our brain doesn't engage. So, use specific examples and make behavior tangible.

Otherwise, it's just like New Year's resolutions. On January 1st, you might say: "I'm going to exercise more." That statement does nothing in our brain. What does work is: "Every Monday and Wednesday at 7:30 PM, I will run 5 kilometers." By making behavior concrete and scheduling it, the chances of success are much higher.



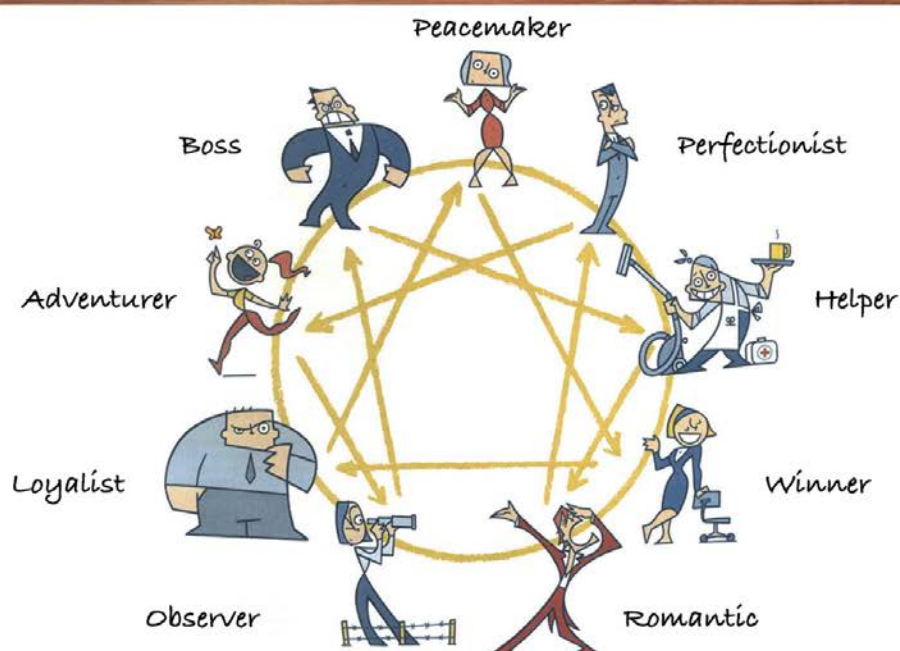
WE ARE ALL DIFFERENT

Clear communication is more difficult than it appears and depends on details. This is because we all interpret what we hear differently. We have different personalities, backgrounds, and conditioning. The Enneagram illustrates the nine different personality types that we all possess to some degree.

Among these nine types, one or two are usually the most dominant and visible to those around us. According to the Enneagram, we react in completely different ways to the same situation.

For example, simply saying "You look lovely today" to someone can result in a wide range of responses. The Adventurer might warmly thank you and excitedly share where they bought their outfit, while The Observer might wonder why you are saying this, and The Perfectionist might respond with: "Why? Did I not look good yesterday?"

For this reason, a seemingly simple statement like "We are going to change" can trigger vastly different reactions within a company.



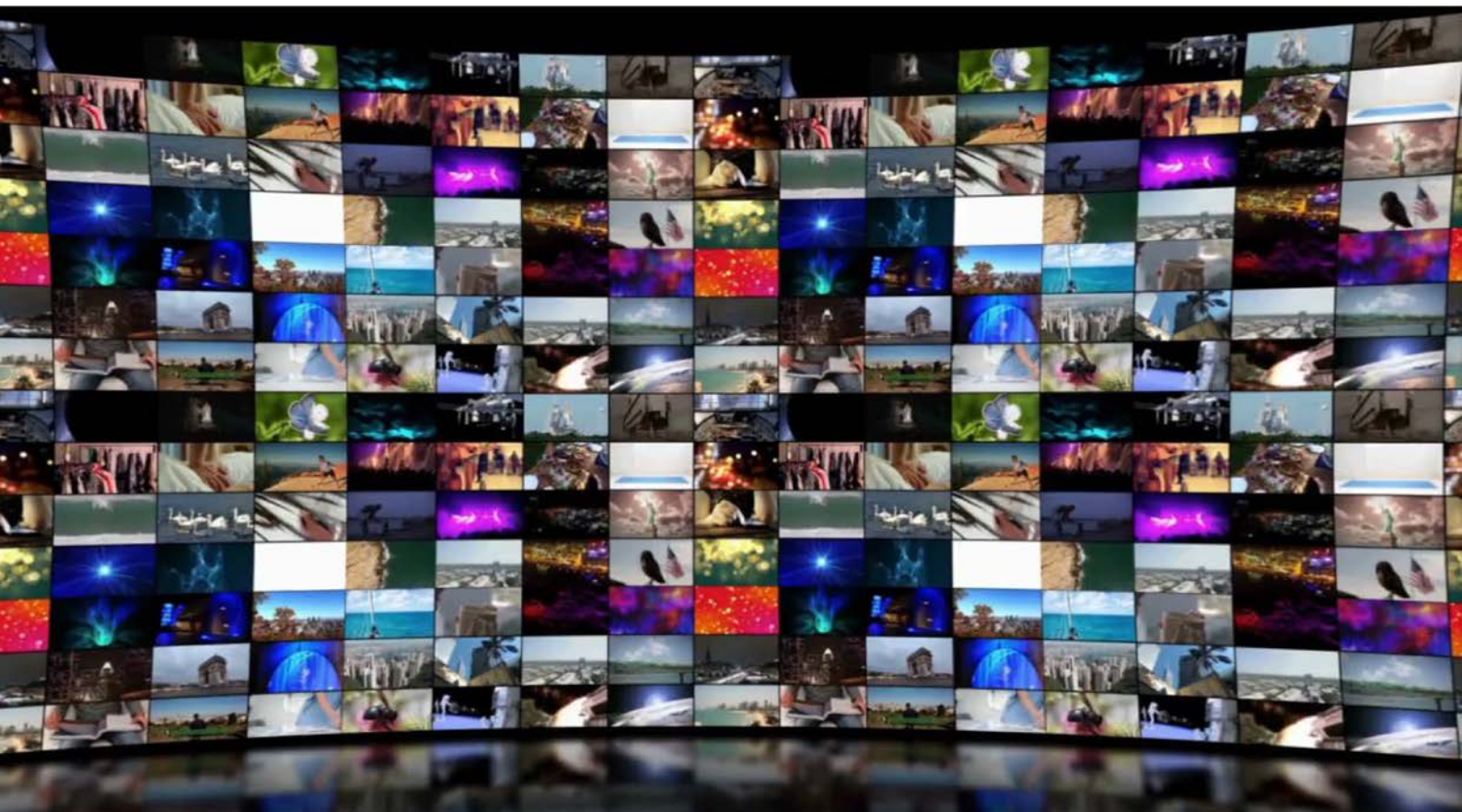
WE LOOK FOR THE MISTAKE

Every day, many people watch the news, where we are constantly shown what is going wrong in the world. If a plane crashes, it becomes major news. Yet, the tens of thousands of planes that take off and land safely every day are of no interest to anyone. So, after watching the news, you actually know exactly what is not happening in the world.

From a young age, we are trained to focus on what goes wrong. In school, the emphasis was never on how many answers you got right, but rather on how many mistakes you made. It would be far better to reverse this mindset.

The same applies to change processes.

Change always comes with mistakes. If we focus on those, our brain immediately confirms that it's not working. This leads to the usual reactions like: "That won't work here" or "See? It's failing." To avoid this, it's much more effective to highlight what is going well—often, that turns out to be much more than we realize. This makes progress visible and fosters a more positive mindset.



THE POWER OF REPETITION

Patterns and work methods are ingrained in the unconscious brain. This part of the brain is much larger, faster, and stronger.

Our feelings, history, trust, and character are stored in the unconscious brain, forming an immense library.

Once something is stored there, it cannot be removed. The brain cannot unlearn—the only thing it can do is create new connections.

Change, therefore, is a matter of repetition.

This allows the brain to form new connections and overwrite old patterns.

Our habits and routines reside in the unconscious brain and are much faster and more persistent than any newly learned structure. The only way to overwrite old work methods is through practice.

The power of repetition in adopting a new structure is inseparably linked to change, making time a crucial factor in any transformation.



STRESS BLOCKS

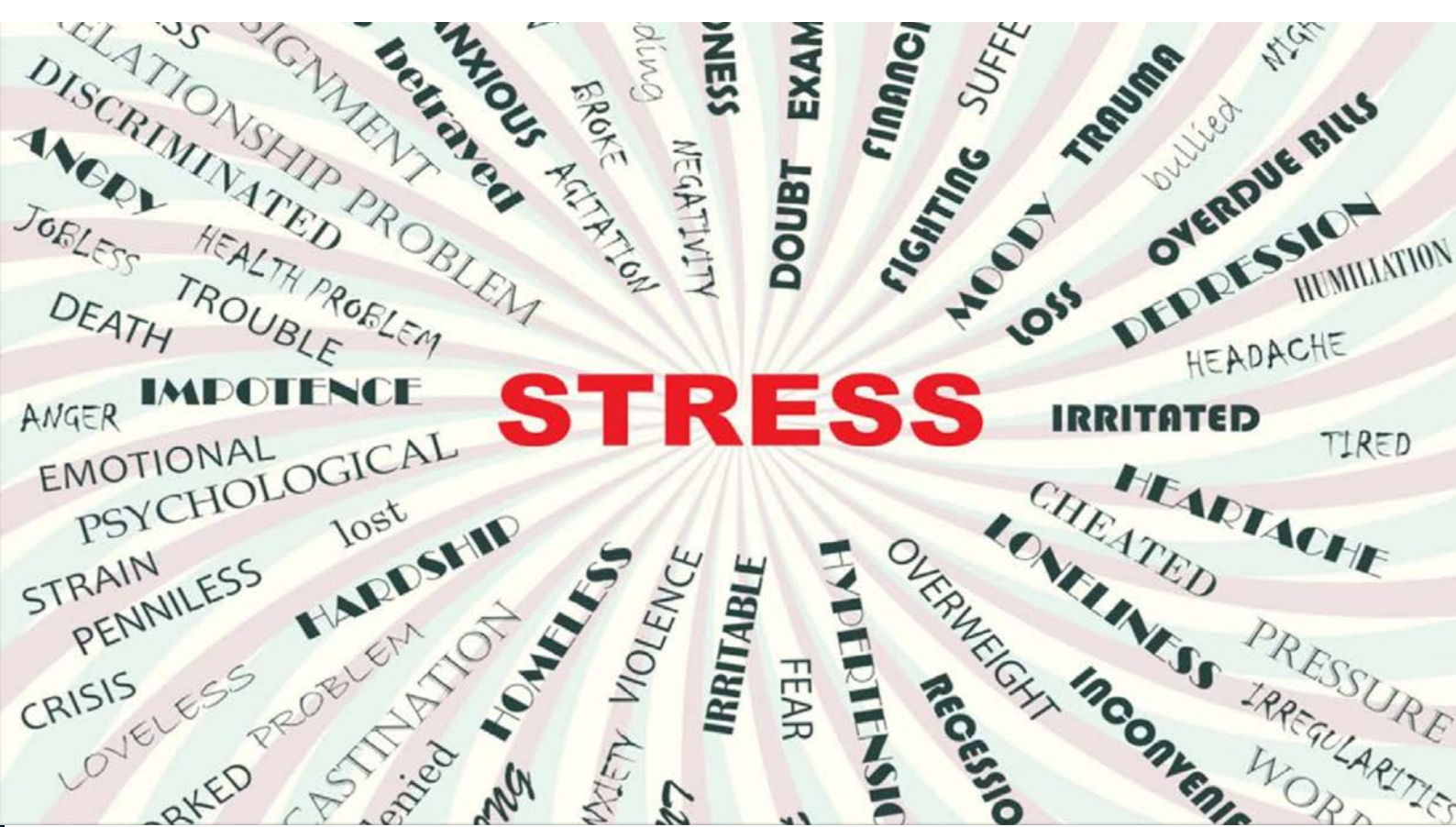
To successfully change and learn something new, it is wise to create the right conditions.

Many people struggle with change because of high work pressure and stress. That's why it is essential to clear the mind. This can be done by carefully analyzing the current way of working and making strong, strategic cuts. Employers should support employees in clearing their list of priorities as much as possible.

Think of it like running. When we run, we don't notice all the details around us—everything flashes by.

Only when we slow down or sit on a bench for a moment do we start to notice the finer details of our surroundings. When we are free from stress, clarity returns.

Only then, when we are relaxed, does our brain create space for creativity.



LEADERSHIP IS A CONSEQUENCE

Many organizations are searching for leaders. That's why there are so many training sessions and lectures on how to become a leader. But this is quite strange because leadership is not a goal—it is a consequence. It results from the right, trustworthy behavior combined with knowledge and expertise.

In ancient times, we followed leaders who were reliable, experienced, and empathetic enough to understand what their followers needed. People chose to follow a leader because it benefited them.

You are not a leader just because it says so on your business card. You are a leader because people want to follow you. A leader is trustworthy, supportive, and leads by example. A leader provides clear direction while also offering the safety and freedom for others to shape that path in their own way. This sense of security fosters ownership and innovation, as people feel empowered to develop their own ideas and take action.

To build the right culture, leadership doesn't have to be determined by hierarchy. After all, anyone can positively influence the culture through the right behavior.

For organizations, it is therefore essential to encourage as much leadership as possible.



OXYTOCIN AS DAILY NOURISHMENT

The connection and trust we feel with each other are fundamentally important. To foster this, it is essential for people to meet in person. Only when we shake hands, look each other in the eyes, talk, and laugh together does oxytocin get released, creating a sense of trust. This cannot be achieved through a tweet, an email, or a WhatsApp message.

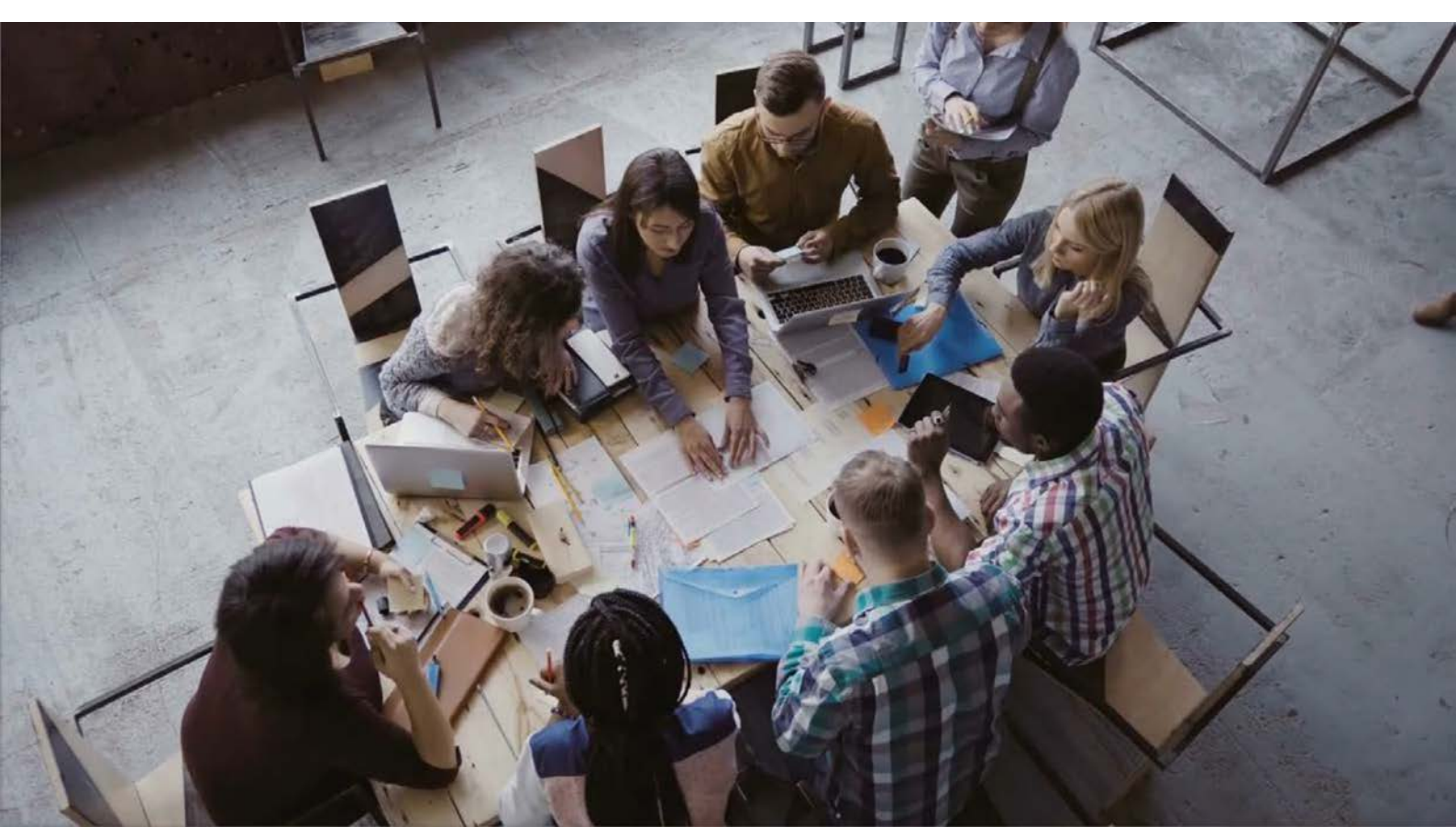
Especially in companies where a CC or BCC culture develops, the sense of connection gradually fades. In contrast, organizations where leaders are visible and actively lead tend to see rapid improvements in results.

This, in turn, strengthens mutual trust.

Want to improve customer satisfaction? Meet in person and share a cup of coffee—it works wonders.

Email is useful for sharing information, but it is not a communication tool. The moment emotions come into play, meet in person. Doing so prevents unnecessary gossip, overthinking, and misinterpretations.

Research also shows that employees in high-performing companies have higher levels of oxytocin in their blood.



JUST MAKE MISTAKES

Every change or collaboration process comes with mistakes—that's just part of the journey. Organizations that understand and embrace this reality move forward. But in organizations where a culture of fear exists, innovation and change become impossible. The brain then defaults to safety, which often means sticking to the old ways and avoiding attention.

Making mistakes is crucial for our brain because we learn faster from them. This happens because a major mistake is stored as a strong emotional experience, allowing us to learn from it. And experience, in turn, is one of the key characteristics of leadership.

If we accept mistakes and immediately shift our focus to what is going well, progress happens instantly.



ABOUT ARNO FOLKERTS

Arno Folkerts is a strong example of a modern, coaching-oriented director. Arno Folkerts is a hands-on leader who combines knowledge, intuition, humor, vulnerability, and determination to make change both simple and concrete at strategic and operational levels. He is known for his warm yet clear approach, allowing him to communicate effectively across all levels of an organization.

Following an international career, Arno Folkerts became the Managing Director of a leading automotive dealer group. He guided the company through a period of significant transformation, shifting it from a traditional “old school” car dealership to a cutting-edge, modern automotive group. Yet, the outcome could have been very different. Due to rapid and excessive growth, the company found itself in a severe crisis in 2016—missed targets, plummeting customer satisfaction, widespread fraud, and major financial losses. With his modern and decisive leadership style, he led the company back to the top of the automotive industry in the Netherlands. In 2019, this success was recognized when the company was named Audi Dealer of the Year.

That same year, he took a new path, transitioning into a career as a trainer, advisor, and keynote speaker specializing in change management, leadership, and collaboration. With his broad expertise, he now guides companies across various industries in implementing transformation. By approaching change through the lens of human brain function, he provides valuable insights for fostering a stronger organizational culture.

As a speaker, Arno engages audiences with his humor, signature energy, and inspiring style, covering topics such as change, influence, workplace happiness, agility, teamwork, and the (im)possibilities of the human brain. He opens people’s eyes to better collaboration, cultural improvement, and innovation. He also demonstrates that leadership is the result of authentic behavior and shows how ownership naturally emerges.

Because change is most powerful when driven by passion, his presentations are filled with humor, thought-provoking insights, self-reflection, and musical surprises. Using strong visual examples, he easily connects with his audience, making every session an engaging and memorable experience.



SHORT VIDEOS

(CLICK TO VIEW)



Keynote: The Transformation



Webinar from
Folkerts & Smit Studio

SCHEDULE CHANGE



TRAINING THE 7 LAWS OF THE BRAIN

More and more frequently, after our keynote, we receive the question: "Is there a follow-up?" or "Can we have a training session?" Therefore, we offer the training program "The 7 Laws of the Brain" as a deep dive into the keynotes!

In the "7 Laws of the Brain" training, we delve into topics like collaboration, leadership, change, and communication. Why is 70% of change management unsuccessful? What causes so much noise in communication? How can we achieve desired and widely embraced leadership within an organization? How can we enhance teamwork and connections? How do we achieve and maintain workplace happiness?

In the "7 Laws of the Brain" training we demonstrate how to take control. You will acquire a deeper understanding of the unconscious mind and receive practical tools you can apply right away. This lays the groundwork for a culture that strengthens organizations.



The training lasts for 3 hours and can be conducted in-company. It accommodates a group size of up to 40 individuals. Because the training addresses (unconscious) behavior, it is suitable for all levels within the organization. The client pays a fixed price per training (not per participant).

[MORE INFORMATION](#)

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