T H E 5 K N O W I N G S

Building a Leading Workplace Using the 5 Knowings

A practical guide for leaders, managers and HR professionals

Grounded in positive psychology · Informed by leading research · Built for every level

🪞 **KNOW YOURSELF**
🤝 **KNOW YOUR TEAM**
🧭 **KNOW YOUR BUSINESS**
⚖️ **KNOW THE RULES**
📊 **KNOW THE SCORE**

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About This Handbook

This handbook is written for anyone who leads people, manages teams or shapes the culture of an organisation. Its central argument is straightforward: most workplaces are built around the wrong question. They ask, 'What are people doing wrong and how do we fix it?' The 5 Knowings asks something different: 'What does excellent look like, and how do we build the conditions for it?'

That shift — from deficit to possibility, from correction to growth, from judgment to development — is not merely philosophical. It is grounded in decades of research from positive psychology, organisational science and neuroscience, and it has measurable, significant consequences for performance, retention and wellbeing.

The 5 Knowings framework organises the conditions for leading performance into five interconnected areas. Each Knowing represents a domain of awareness and capability that, when cultivated together, creates the kind of workplace where people consistently do their best work — and know it.

Research Insight *Employees who use their strengths every day are six times more likely to be engaged at work and 8% more productive.*

Gallup, State of the Global Workplace (2023)

This handbook is structured in seven parts. It opens with the case for positive psychology as the philosophical foundation of performance management, then moves through each of the Five Knowings in depth — what it means, why it matters, what the research says, and what it looks like when it is fully embedded in a leading workplace. It closes with practical guidance on implementation and measurement.

The framework is designed to be cascading: the same Five Knowings apply at every level of an organisation, from individual contributors to the most senior leaders. What changes is the scale, the complexity and the depth of application — not the principle.

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PART ONE

The Case for Positive Psychology in the Workplace

For most of the twentieth century, psychology focused primarily on what goes wrong with human beings. The dominant diagnostic frameworks catalogued mental illness, dysfunction and deficit. The implicit model of the human mind was a machine that could break down — and the job of the professional was to identify the breakdown and fix it.

Performance management in organisations followed the same logic. Annual appraisals measured shortfalls against targets. Competency frameworks described the absence of skills. Development plans were built around weaknesses. The question was almost always some version of: 'What needs to be fixed?'

In 1998, Martin Seligman used his presidential address to the American Psychological Association to challenge this paradigm. He called for a 'positive psychology' — a science of human flourishing, not just human suffering. His argument was that psychology had neglected the vast territory of what makes life worth living: strengths, virtues, meaning, engagement and wellbeing. The same neglect, he and colleagues argued, existed in organisations.

> *"The good life consists in deriving happiness by using your signature strengths every day in the main realms of living."*
>
> **— Martin Seligman, Authentic Happiness (2002)**

From Deficit to Possibility: A Paradigm Shift

The shift from deficit-focused to strengths-focused performance management is not about ignoring problems. It is about changing the starting point. A deficit model begins with the gap between where someone is and where they should be. A strengths model begins with the question: where are you already excellent, and how do we build from there?

The practical difference is profound. Research consistently shows that people who are aware of and actively using their strengths are more engaged, more productive and more resilient. Gallup's analysis of 1.7 million employees across 101 companies found that individuals who have the opportunity to use their strengths every day are significantly more productive and far less likely to leave their roles.

Research Insight *Teams whose managers focus on strengths show 12.5% greater productivity and 14.9% lower turnover than teams whose managers focus on weaknesses.*

Gallup, StrengthsFinder 2.0 (2007); Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, Journal of Applied Psychology

The PERMA Model and Organisational Flourishing

Seligman's PERMA model — Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement — provides a useful map of the conditions for human flourishing. Each element has direct organisational relevance. Positive emotion at work is associated with broader thinking, greater creativity and better decision-making (Fredrickson, 2001). Engagement — what Csikszentmihalyi called 'flow' — is the state of deep absorption in meaningful, stretching work. Relationships at work predict retention,

collaboration and psychological safety. Meaning connects individual contribution to something larger. Achievement, appropriately framed, motivates rather than diminishes.

The 5 Knowings framework is, in essence, an organisational translation of PERMA. Each Knowing maps onto one or more of its elements, and together they describe the conditions under which people and organisations genuinely flourish.

Research Insight *The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions demonstrates that positive emotional states expand cognitive and behavioural repertoires — enabling more creative, resilient and resourceful responses to challenges.*

Barbara Fredrickson, The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology (2001)

What Gallup Taught Us About Engagement

Gallup's decades-long study of employee engagement — spanning more than 100,000 teams in over 50 countries — produced some of the most robust and consequential findings in workplace science. Their research established that engagement is not merely a measure of employee satisfaction; it is a significant predictor of business outcomes including productivity, profitability, customer satisfaction and safety.

Their meta-analysis also revealed something crucial about what drives engagement. It is not primarily pay, benefits or working conditions — though these matter. The strongest predictors of engagement are relational and developmental: the quality of the manager-employee relationship, the clarity of expectations, the opportunity to do what you do best, the experience of recognition, and the sense that someone at work cares about you as a person.

Every one of these drivers maps directly onto the Five Knowings. Clarity of expectations lives in Know The Score. Opportunity to do what you do best lives in Know Yourself. The quality of relationships lives in Know Your Team. Care for people as human beings lives across all five. The 5 Knowings framework is, in this sense, an operational architecture for what the engagement research has been pointing toward for thirty years.

Research Insight *Worldwide, only 23% of employees are engaged at work. The economic cost of low engagement is estimated at $8.9 trillion in lost productivity — approximately 9% of global GDP.*

Gallup, State of the Global Workplace (2023)

Why Traditional Performance Management Fails

The dominant model of performance management — annual reviews, forced rankings, deficit-focused competency frameworks — has been extensively studied, and the evidence against it is damning. Research published in the Harvard Business Review found that annual performance reviews are considered ineffective by 58% of HR executives and 45% of employees. Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends report identified performance management as the area of HR practice most urgently in need of disruption.

The reasons are structural. Annual reviews look backwards, when development requires looking forward. They conflate assessment with development, when research shows these functions require different psychological conditions. They often create anxiety and defensiveness — the psychological states least conducive to learning. They measure outputs rather than the behaviours and capabilities that produce them. And they almost universally rely on managers rating their people on subjective competency scales with minimal shared understanding of what each rating means.

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The 5 Knowings does not simply improve this model. It replaces it — with a framework grounded in what the evidence says actually drives high performance: self-awareness, collective conditions, strategic connection, confident autonomy and growth-oriented feedback.

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PART TWO

The 5 Knowings: An Integrated Framework

The 5 Knowings is not a checklist, a competency dictionary, or a performance rating system. It is an integrated framework — a set of five interconnected domains of awareness and capability that together describe the conditions under which people do their best and most sustained work.

The framework is designed on three core principles. First, it is strengths-based: it begins from what is already working and builds from there. Second, it is cascading: every Knowing applies at every level of an organisation, with increasing scope and complexity as responsibility grows. Third, it is integrative: the Five Knowings are not independent modules but an organic whole. Growth in one Knowing tends to amplify growth in others.

Knowing	Core Question	What It Builds
Know Yourself	*Who am I and how do I perform at my best?*	Self-awareness, strengths, values, emotional intelligence and sustainable energy
Know Your Team	*How do we create conditions for collective excellence?*	Psychological safety, trust, appreciation of difference and recognition
Know Your Business	*How does my work connect to the bigger picture?*	Strategic literacy, customer empathy, commercial awareness and change readiness
Know The Rules	*How do I operate with confidence, ethics and autonomy?*	Policy fluency, ethical judgment, decision confidence and fairness
Know The Score	*How do I use feedback and data to grow?*	Performance literacy, feedback fluency, goal ownership and growth mindset

The Cascading Principle

One of the most distinctive features of the 5 Knowings is that it applies consistently across every level of an organisation. The same five domains matter whether you are a frontline team member, a middle manager or a chief executive. What changes is the scope of application and the complexity of the context.

For an individual contributor, Know Yourself means identifying personal strengths and applying them daily. For a team leader, it means recognising the strengths of each team member and designing roles and responsibilities accordingly. For a senior leader, it means building a whole organisation that is explicitly strengths-led — designing systems, cultures and practices that surface and deploy human capability at scale.

This cascading principle creates vertical alignment — a shared language and shared set of expectations from the boardroom to the frontline. It eliminates the gap that so often exists between leadership development programmes (which talk about values, purpose and culture) and operational performance management (which talks about outputs, ratings and improvement plans). In a 5 Knowings organisation, these are not separate conversations.

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P A R T T H R E E

KNOWING 1 OF 5

Know Yourself

Why Know Yourself Comes First

Self-awareness is the precondition for everything else. Without it, strengths go unnoticed and unused. Values are violated without understanding why. Emotional reactions drive decisions that reflection would have moderated. Energy depletes without recognition until it becomes a crisis. Learning stalls because feedback is received as threat rather than information.

The research on self-awareness is striking. Tasha Eurich's research, drawing on surveys of nearly 5,000 people, found that while 95% of people believe they are self-aware, only 10–15% actually are, as measured against external observation. The gap between perceived and actual self-awareness is one of the most consequential blind spots in organisational life. Leaders who overestimate their self-awareness are less effective, make poorer decisions and create more dysfunctional team dynamics — while remaining unaware of their impact.

Research Insight *Leaders with high self-awareness make 33% better decisions and are rated by their direct reports as significantly more effective than those with low self-awareness.*

Eurich, T., Insight: The Surprising Truth About How Others See Us (2017)

Strengths: The Foundation of Sustainable High Performance

The most extensively researched area within Know Yourself is strengths awareness. The Clifton StrengthsFinder, developed by Don Clifton at Gallup, has been administered to more than 26 million people worldwide, making it the most widely used strengths assessment in history. Its foundational insight is simple: people have far greater potential for growth in areas of natural strength than in areas of weakness. Time invested in developing a strength produces exponential returns compared to the same time spent shoring up a weakness.

This is not a counsel of complacency — organisations must ensure people meet minimum standards across essential competencies. But it is a powerful argument for building roles, teams and cultures around what people are naturally excellent at, rather than designing everyone to the same specification.

> *"The most effective leaders are always investing in strengths. In the workplace, when an organisation's leadership fails to focus on individuals' strengths, the odds of an employee being engaged are a dismal 1 in 11."*
>
> **— Tom Rath & Barry Conchie, Strengths Based Leadership (2008)**

Values Clarity and Authentic Performance

Beyond strengths, Know Yourself encompasses values clarity — the ability to name what matters most and to recognise when those values are being honoured or compromised. Values are not aspirational

posters on a wall. They are the deep motivational architecture of human behaviour. When people work in environments that align with their values, they experience what psychologists call 'psychological authenticity' — the sense of being genuinely oneself. Research by Wood et al. (2008) found that authenticity at work is significantly associated with higher wellbeing, lower stress and greater job satisfaction.

In a leading workplace, values clarity is actively cultivated. Leaders model it by articulating their own values and making them visible in their decisions. Team conversations about values happen not in annual away-days but in the regular rhythm of team life. And the organisation's stated values are subject to genuine scrutiny: are they lived, or merely laminated?

Research Insight *Authenticity — the sense of behaving in accord with one's values and true self — is one of the strongest predictors of psychological wellbeing and job satisfaction, independent of pay or position.*

Wood, A. M., Linley, P. A., Maltby, J., Baliousis, M., & Joseph, S. (2008). The authentic personality. Journal of Counseling Psychology.

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness

Daniel Goleman's research on emotional intelligence (EI) introduced the concept to mainstream organisational thinking, and subsequent research has substantiated its importance. His five components — self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skill — map closely onto several of the Know Yourself sub-competencies.

Goleman's analysis of competency data from 188 companies found that EI was twice as important as technical skills and IQ in differentiating star performers from average performers, with the effect especially pronounced at senior levels. For leaders in particular, the capacity to recognise one's own emotional states, regulate responses under pressure and read the emotional climate of a team is not a 'soft' skill — it is a core leadership competency with measurable performance implications.

Research Insight *Emotional intelligence accounts for 67% of the abilities deemed necessary for superior performance in leaders, and matters twice as much as technical expertise or IQ.*

Goleman, D., What Makes a Leader? Harvard Business Review (1998)

The Six Sub-Competencies of Know Yourself

Sub-Competency	What it looks like in a leading workplace
Strengths Awareness	The organisation actively identifies and deploys people's strengths. Role design, team composition and development conversations begin with 'what are you best at?'
Values Clarity	People can name their core values and the organisation's values are genuinely lived — visible in decisions, behaviours and priorities, not just on walls.
Emotional Intelligence	Leaders and team members can name and manage their emotional states. Difficult conversations are handled with composure, empathy and skill.

Self-Limiting Beliefs	The culture actively challenges fixed-mindset thinking. Mistakes are reframed as data. Growth is the default narrative.
Energy & Wellbeing	Sustainable performance is a cultural norm. People are not rewarded for burning out. Energy management is as valued as output management.
Learning Agility	Feedback is sought, welcomed and acted on. Reflection is built into the rhythm of work. Failure is treated as intelligence.

What This Looks Like in a Leading Workplace

In a leading workplace, Know Yourself is not a one-off activity — a strengths assessment done at onboarding and never revisited. It is a continuous practice woven into the fabric of everyday work.

New team members complete a structured strengths and values discovery in their first 30 days. This is not a box-ticking exercise — it is the starting point of a development conversation with their manager about how their role can be shaped to deploy their strengths. Team meetings include regular moments of 'strengths in action' recognition — naming specifically how a colleague's natural strength made a difference. Development plans are built around strengths to leverage and values to honour, not just skills to acquire.

Leaders model the Knowing publicly. They share their own values. They name their own triggers and blind spots. They talk about what they are learning. And they create an environment in which it is safe — even celebrated — to say 'I don't know' and 'I got that wrong'.

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🤝 KNOWING 2 OF 5

Know Your Team

The Conditions for Collective Excellence

Individuals rarely perform alone. The research is consistent: team environment is a stronger predictor of individual performance than individual capability. A highly capable person in a dysfunctional team will underperform. An ordinarily capable person in a high-functioning team will often exceed expectations. Building a leading workplace means understanding what makes teams work — and deliberately building those conditions.

Research Insight *Google's Project Aristotle, a study of 180 teams across the organisation, found that psychological safety was the #1 predictor of team effectiveness — more important than team composition, individual skill or any other factor.*

Duhigg, C., What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team, New York Times (2016)

Psychological Safety: The Bedrock of Team Performance

Amy Edmondson, Professor of Leadership at Harvard Business School, has spent over two decades studying psychological safety in teams. Her foundational definition is precise: psychological safety is 'a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.' It is not comfort, niceness or the absence of challenge. It is the presence of genuine interpersonal trust.

Edmondson's research, later corroborated by Google's Project Aristotle study, consistently shows that psychological safety is the single most important condition for team learning and performance. In a psychologically safe environment, people surface problems early — when they can still be fixed. They share dissenting views — which improves the quality of decisions. They ask for help — which accelerates learning. And they take the interpersonal risks that innovation requires.

The implication for leaders is powerful and sometimes uncomfortable: psychological safety is not something your team either has or doesn't have. It is something you create — or destroy — through your own behaviour. Every time a leader reacts badly to a concern raised, dismisses an idea without engagement, or publicly criticises a mistake, they make their team fractionally less safe. Every time they invite challenge, acknowledge their own errors and reward honesty, they make it fractionally safer.

> *"Psychological safety is the belief that you won't be punished when you make a mistake. Studies show that psychological safety allows for moderate risk-taking, speaking your mind, creativity — the kinds of behaviours that lead to market breakthroughs."*
>
> **— Amy Edmondson, The Fearless Organization (2018)**

Trust: The Currency of High-Functioning Teams

Patrick Lencioni's work on team dysfunction identified trust as the foundational layer of team effectiveness. In the absence of trust, team members conceal weaknesses, avoid productive conflict,

withhold genuine commitment, dodge accountability and fail to focus on collective results. Trust, in Lencioni's model, is not blind faith. It is vulnerability-based trust — the willingness to be honest about limitations, mistakes and concerns.

Research by Maister, Green and Galford articulated the components of trust as credibility (I trust your word), reliability (I trust your actions), intimacy (I trust that you keep confidence and care) and self-orientation (I trust that your interests do not override mine). The single most damaging trust factor, their research found, is high self-orientation — the perception that someone is primarily serving their own interests. This has direct implications for leadership: visible self-interest in leaders corrodes team trust faster than almost any other behaviour.

Research Insight *High-trust organisations outperform low-trust organisations by nearly 3x in total return to shareholders, and report 74% less stress, 76% more engagement and 50% higher productivity among employees.*

Zak, P., The Neuroscience of Trust, Harvard Business Review (2017)

Appreciating Difference: Beyond Diversity as Compliance

Know Your Team encompasses what many organisations call diversity and inclusion — but it goes further, and it frames it differently. The emphasis is not on compliance with demographic targets. It is on the operational advantage of cognitive diversity: the measurable performance benefit that comes from teams with genuinely different ways of thinking, processing and problem-solving.

Research by McKinsey consistently shows that companies in the top quartile for diversity on executive teams are more likely to have above-average profitability. Deloitte's research found that inclusive teams make better decisions 87% of the time. But the mechanism is not demographic diversity per se — it is the creation of environments where diverse perspectives are genuinely heard and engaged, rather than merely present.

Research Insight *Teams that score high on inclusion make better decisions 87% of the time, twice as fast, and with half as many meetings.*

Bourke, J. & Dillon, B., The Diversity and Inclusion Revolution. Deloitte Insights (2018)

The Six Sub-Competencies of Know Your Team

Sub-Competency	What it looks like in a leading workplace
Psychological Safety	Team members speak up without fear. Mistakes are surfaced, not concealed. Dissent is welcomed. The leader models vulnerability and rewards honesty.
Appreciating Difference	Diverse thinking styles and backgrounds are actively sought and heard, not merely tolerated. Cognitive diversity is treated as competitive advantage.
Trust Building	Commitments are honoured. Communication is transparent. Self-interest is visibly subordinated to collective interest. The trust equation is actively managed.

Conflict as Opportunity	Productive disagreement is normalised. Teams debate ideas without attacking people. Silence in meetings is treated as a warning signal, not harmony.
Contribution Awareness	Every team member knows how their work contributes to the collective mission. No one feels invisible or dispensable.
Recognition Practice	Recognition is specific, genuine and frequent. Appreciation is a team rhythm, not a quarterly event. People feel seen, valued and motivated.

What This Looks Like in a Leading Workplace

In a leading workplace, Know Your Team is visible in the texture of everyday interaction. Team meetings open with moments of genuine connection — not forced fun, but purposeful relationship-building. Leaders check in on the human experience of team members, not just their task progress. Psychological safety is measured (through pulse surveys, team health checks or direct conversation) and treated as a performance indicator.

Conflict is handled by naming it constructively: 'I notice we are not debating this. Why is that?' Mistakes are examined without blame: 'What can we learn from this?' Recognition is given publicly, specifically and regularly — not as an HR exercise but as a genuine leadership practice. And team retrospectives look not just at what was delivered, but at how it was delivered: what conditions enabled our best work? What conditions got in the way?

KNOWING 3 OF 5

Know Your Business

Strategic Literacy as a Performance Driver

One of the least discussed drivers of individual performance is strategic literacy — the ability to connect daily work to organisational purpose and value creation. Research consistently shows that people who understand why their work matters, and how it connects to something larger than themselves, perform better, persist longer under difficulty and experience significantly higher levels of wellbeing.

Yet most employees cannot make this connection with any specificity. Gallup's research finds that fewer than half of employees strongly agree that they know what their organisation stands for and what makes it different from its competitors. This is not simply a communications failure. It reflects a structural gap between the conversations that happen at senior levels (strategy, purpose, competitive positioning) and the conversations that happen in team meetings (tasks, deadlines, outputs). Know Your Business bridges that gap deliberately.

Research Insight *Purpose-oriented employees are 3x more likely to stay with their organisation, 1.4x more engaged and demonstrate 17% higher performance scores than those who lack a clear sense of purpose.*

McKinsey & Company, Purpose: Shifting from Why to How (2020)

Self-Determination Theory and the Power of Meaningful Work

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT), one of the most extensively validated motivational frameworks in psychology, identifies three universal psychological needs that must be met for people to be intrinsically motivated: autonomy (the sense of volition in one's actions), competence (the sense of effectiveness) and relatedness (the sense of connection to others).

Of particular relevance to Know Your Business is the SDT finding on 'internalisation' — the process by which external goals and values become genuinely one's own. When people understand and endorse the reason behind their work, they pursue it with the same intrinsic motivation they would bring to personally chosen goals. But this internalisation only happens when the purpose is clearly communicated, genuinely meaningful and consistently reinforced by the behaviour of leaders.

> *"The most important distinction in motivation research is not between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, but between autonomous motivation — acting from genuine interest or endorsed values — and controlled motivation, acting from pressure or reward."*
>
> **— Edward Deci & Richard Ryan, Self-Determination Theory (1985)**

Line of Sight: From Individual Work to Organisational Impact

The concept of 'line of sight' — the ability to trace a direct path from one's daily actions to the organisation's purpose and results — is one of the most powerful and underutilised tools in

performance management. Research by Boswell and Boudreau (2001) found that line of sight clarity was significantly associated with job performance, particularly for complex, knowledge-based work.

Building line of sight requires active effort at every level. At the organisational level, strategy must be communicated not just as a set of targets but as a narrative: what are we trying to achieve, why does it matter, and what role does each part of the organisation play? At the team level, managers must regularly make explicit the connection between team work and organisational priorities. At the individual level, people need regular conversations that help them see their own contribution clearly — not taken for granted.

Research Insight *Employees who can draw a clear line between their daily work and the organisation's strategy demonstrate significantly higher job performance and are 2.5x more likely to be rated as high performers by their managers.*

Boswell, W. R., & Boudreau, J. W. (2001). How leading companies create, measure and achieve strategic results through 'line of sight'. Management Decision.

The Six Sub-Competencies of Know Your Business

Sub-Competency	What it looks like in a leading workplace
Strategic Literacy	People at every level can articulate the organisation's direction and priorities. Strategy is not a document but a living narrative.
Customer Empathy	The end customer or stakeholder is kept front of mind in every decision. Teams ask: how does this serve the person we are ultimately here for?
Line of Sight	Every person can trace a direct line between their daily work and organisational outcomes. This connection is made explicit in regular conversations.
Commercial Awareness	People understand how the organisation creates value. Financial and operational context is shared openly, not hoarded at senior levels.
Stakeholder Awareness	Key stakeholder relationships are actively managed at every level, not just by leaders. People know who they need to serve and how.
Change Readiness	The organisation moves through change with transparency, support and pace. People understand the reasons for change and feel equipped to navigate it.

What This Looks Like in a Leading Workplace

In a leading workplace, strategy is not an annual PowerPoint. It is a continuously told story — referenced in team meetings, visible in decision-making, connected to individual goals. Leaders at every level invest time in making the 'why' of the work clear. Customer voices are brought into team spaces, not just boardrooms. Operational updates include context: not just 'here is what we delivered' but 'here is how that affected the people we serve'.

Commercially, people are treated as intelligent adults capable of understanding how value is created and measured. Financial information appropriate to each level is shared openly. And when change

happens — as it invariably does — people are given honest, timely explanations of why, supported through the transition and invited to contribute to how it is implemented.

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KNOWING 4 OF 5

Know The Rules

Confidence, Ethics and the Freedom of Knowing Your Boundaries

Know The Rules is the most counterintuitive of the Five Knowings. The word 'rules' carries connotations of constraint, compliance and bureaucracy — exactly the opposite of what a positive psychology framework might be expected to promote. But the research on autonomy, ethical behaviour and decision-making tells a different story. Knowing the rules — understanding them deeply, including why they exist — is the precondition for confident, autonomous, ethical action. Ignorance of boundaries does not create freedom. It creates paralysis, risk and inconsistency.

The positive reframe of Know The Rules is simple but powerful: rules are not constraints on performance. They are the structure within which excellent performance becomes possible. The most autonomous, effective people in any organisation are those who know the rules well enough to act at the edge of them — and to know precisely when to step back.

Research Insight *Ethical cultures outperform their less ethical counterparts by up to 40% on measures including employee engagement, customer satisfaction and financial performance.*

LRN, The HOW Report: A Global Study of Values, Culture and Business (2016)

Autonomy and the Psychological Need for Structure

Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on autonomy might seem to argue against rules and structures. In fact, the research is more nuanced. SDT distinguishes between 'autonomy-supportive' structures — which provide clear guidance and reasons — and 'controlling' structures — which simply mandate compliance without explanation. The former enhance autonomous motivation; the latter undermine it.

The practical implication is significant: people are more likely to engage authentically with rules and policies they understand. When organisations explain why a policy exists — what risk it manages, what value it protects — people comply with genuine understanding rather than reluctant submission. And when they understand the purpose of a rule, they are far better equipped to navigate edge cases, grey areas and novel situations that no policy ever quite anticipated.

> *"Providing a meaningful rationale for why a rule or policy exists is not just polite. It is one of the most powerful predictors of voluntary compliance and genuine ethical behaviour."*
>
> **— Deci, E. L., Koestner, R., & Ryan, R. M. (1999). A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation.**

Ethical Judgment in Practice

Ethics in the workplace is frequently addressed through compliance training — a programme that teaches people what they must and must not do. The evidence suggests this approach has limited effectiveness for the most consequential ethical decisions, which invariably occur in grey areas that no training manual covers.

James Rest's Four Component Model of moral behaviour identifies four capacities that ethical action requires: moral sensitivity (noticing that an ethical issue is at stake), moral judgment (determining what is right), moral motivation (prioritising ethical values over competing interests) and moral character (following through despite resistance). Training programmes typically address only the second component. A genuine ethical culture — the kind Know The Rules describes — develops all four.

This means creating environments where people can raise ethical concerns without fear of consequences. Where the stories leaders tell celebrate people who did the right thing under pressure, not just people who hit their targets. Where the implicit message is not 'results at any cost' but 'results in the right way'.

Research Insight *Only 31% of employees report that their organisation's leaders set a good example of ethical behaviour. Yet ethical leadership has a greater impact on employee trust than any other leadership behaviour.*

Ethics & Compliance Initiative, Global Business Ethics Survey (2021)

The Six Sub-Competencies of Know The Rules

Sub-Competency	What it looks like in a leading workplace
Policy Fluency	People know the relevant policies that govern their work — not as a compliance burden but as enabling structure. They understand the why, not just the what.
Ethical Judgment	The culture creates conditions for ethical concerns to be raised, debated and acted on. Leaders are known for doing the right thing, not just the expedient thing.
Decision-Making Confidence	People make sound decisions within their authority without unnecessary escalation. Clarity of authority enables speed without recklessness.
Risk Awareness	Risk is managed intelligently, not avoided reflexively. People can identify, articulate and appropriately escalate risks relevant to their work.
Boundaries & Autonomy	Everyone knows the scope of their authority and operates confidently within it. Delegation is clear, genuine and appropriately supported.
Fairness & Consistency	Standards are applied equally. Preferential treatment is the exception that is noticed and challenged, not the rule that is accepted.

What This Looks Like in a Leading Workplace

In a leading workplace, Know The Rules is not a compliance function managed by HR and Legal. It is a living practice of ethical, confident, consistent behaviour that flows from genuine understanding rather than fear of consequence.

Policy rollouts are accompanied not by mandatory e-learning modules but by facilitated conversations: 'Here is the policy, here is why it exists, here is how it applies to your specific situation, and here is what you do when a situation arises that it doesn't quite cover.' Decision-making authority is clearly mapped and regularly reviewed. People who raise ethical concerns are recognised, not marginalised.

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And fairness — the experience of being treated consistently, equitably and transparently — is measured and monitored as a key cultural indicator.

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KNOWING 5 OF 5

Know The Score

Feedback, Growth and the End of the Annual Verdict

The annual performance review is perhaps the most widely criticised management practice of the modern era. Studies show that it is dreaded by employees, doubted by managers, and regarded with deep scepticism by HR professionals who know its limitations. And yet it persists — partly out of habit, partly from legal caution, and partly because nothing compelling has been offered to replace it.

Know The Score is that replacement. It does not tinker with the format of the review — it changes the underlying philosophy. Performance is not something that is measured once a year and judged. It is something that is built continuously, through a cycle of clarity, feedback, growth and recognition. The score is not a verdict. It is a compass.

Research Insight *Only 14% of employees strongly agree that their performance reviews inspire them to improve. 29% of employees say their last review was so unfair it caused them to seek a new job.*

Gallup, The Damage Inflicted by Poor Managers (2019); Corporate Executive Board research

Growth Mindset: The Foundation of Learning Organisations

Carol Dweck's research on growth mindset has become one of the most influential bodies of work in educational and organisational psychology. Her foundational distinction is between a fixed mindset — the belief that intelligence, talent and ability are fixed traits — and a growth mindset — the belief that capabilities can be developed through dedication, learning and effort.

The implications for performance management are profound. In a fixed mindset culture, people avoid challenges (which might reveal their limitations), ignore useful feedback (which threatens their self-image) and feel threatened by the success of others. In a growth mindset culture, people embrace challenges as learning opportunities, value feedback as development information and find inspiration in the success of others. The cultural shift required is significant — and it begins with leaders modelling the mindset they want to see.

Microsoft's cultural transformation under Satya Nadella provides perhaps the most prominent corporate example of this shift. Nadella explicitly credited Dweck's work as a foundational influence on his effort to move Microsoft from a 'know-it-all' culture to a 'learn-it-all' culture — with demonstrable results in innovation, engagement and financial performance.

> *"In a growth mindset, challenges are exciting rather than threatening. So rather than thinking, oh, I'm going to reveal my weaknesses, you say, wow, here's a chance to grow."*
>
> **— Carol Dweck, Mindset: The New Psychology of Success (2006)**

Feedback: The Most Underused Development Tool

The research on feedback is nuanced and sometimes counterintuitive. Not all feedback improves performance. Kluger and DeNisi's landmark meta-analysis of feedback interventions found that more than one-third of feedback interventions actually decreased performance. The reason: feedback that focuses on the person's self-concept (their identity, their worth, their standing) activates threat responses that interfere with learning. Feedback that focuses on the task, the behaviour and future possibilities for growth is far more effective.

Marshall Goldsmith's feedforward technique — a practice in which people give suggestions for the future rather than critiques of the past — operationalises this insight elegantly. By removing the past from the conversation entirely, feedforward bypasses the defensiveness and blame dynamics that make conventional feedback unproductive. It is not a replacement for all forms of feedback, but its widespread adoption in teams consistently reduces the friction that makes honest performance conversation so difficult.

Research Insight *A meta-analysis of 131 feedback intervention studies found that 33% of interventions decreased performance, and that feedback focused on the self — rather than the task — was the most likely to harm rather than help.*

Kluger, A.N. & DeNisi, A. (1996). The effects of feedback interventions on performance. Psychological Bulletin, 119(2).

Goal Setting: Ownership, Stretch and Alignment

Decades of research on goal setting, led by Edwin Locke and Gary Latham, demonstrate that specific, challenging goals lead to higher performance than vague or easy goals. Their Goal Setting Theory, one of the most replicated findings in organisational psychology, identifies several conditions that make goals effective: specificity (precise rather than 'do your best'), challenge (stretching but achievable), commitment (genuinely owned, not merely assigned), feedback (knowing how you're doing against the goal) and task complexity management.

The modern evolution of goal-setting practice — exemplified by the OKR (Objectives and Key Results) framework popularised by Intel and Google — builds on these foundations while addressing their limitations. OKRs separate aspirational direction (objectives) from measurable progress (key results), encourage transparency and enable bottom-up contribution. When implemented well, they exemplify Know The Score at organisational scale.

Research Insight *Specific, challenging goals led to higher performance in 90% of the studies reviewed across multiple decades of research, making goal-setting theory one of the most replicated findings in industrial-organisational psychology.*

Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2002). Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation. American Psychologist.

The Six Sub-Competencies of Know The Score

Sub-Competency	What it looks like in a leading workplace
Performance Literacy	Everyone understands how their performance is measured, what good looks like, and how their results connect to team and organisational outcomes.

Feedback Fluency	Feedback is frequent, specific, growth-oriented and two-way. Leaders actively seek feedback on their own performance, not just their team's.
Goal Setting	Goals are stretching, owned and aligned. People set goals they are motivated to pursue — not targets they are compliant with.
Progress Awareness	People regularly review their own progress and adjust accordingly. Self-monitoring is a habit, not a quarterly report.
Data Confidence	Performance data is used as a tool for conversation and growth, not as ammunition for judgment. People can interpret their data with confidence.
Growth Mindset in Review	Performance conversations look forward as much as backward. The question is not 'how did you do?' but 'what did you learn and what will you grow next?'

What This Looks Like in a Leading Workplace

In a leading workplace, performance conversations happen weekly — not annually. Check-in conversations between managers and team members are brief, focused and forward-looking: what are you working on, how is it going, what do you need, and what did you learn this week? The annual review still exists, but it holds no surprises — because everything it contains has already been discussed in the preceding twelve months.

Feedback is a cultural norm rather than a formal event. People give specific, real-time recognition when something goes well. They offer constructive feedforward when something could be done differently. And they ask for both — not waiting for formal structures but seeking it in everyday conversation. The result is a team that continuously learns, continuously adjusts and continuously grows.

PART FOUR

The Cascading Model: Alignment from Boardroom to Frontline

The 5 Knowings is designed as a cascading model — applicable at every level of an organisation, with increasing depth and breadth as responsibility grows. This section describes how each Knowing is expressed at three levels: individual contributor, team leader and senior leader. Understanding this cascade is essential for building genuine alignment.

Know Yourself

Level	What it looks like
Individual Contributor	Identifies and applies personal strengths daily. Recognises own values and notices when they are compromised. Manages emotional responses under pressure.
Team Leader	Maps team members' strengths and designs work accordingly. Aligns team norms with shared values. Reads team emotional climate and responds appropriately.
Senior Leader	Builds a culture that is explicitly strengths-led. Ensures organisational values are lived, not laminated. Regulates own presence and impact at scale.

Know Your Team

Level	What it looks like
Individual Contributor	Contributes honestly and takes interpersonal risks without fear. Follows through on commitments. Recognises and appreciates colleagues' contributions.
Team Leader	Actively builds psychological safety. Leverages diverse perspectives in decision-making. Makes recognition a team rhythm, not a periodic event.
Senior Leader	Champions safety as an organisational standard. Builds inclusive systems that actively disrupt homogeneity. Creates cultures of recognition at scale.

Know Your Business

Level	What it looks like
Individual Contributor	Understands how their work connects to organisational purpose. Keeps customer or stakeholder perspective in mind. Adapts positively to change.

Team Leader	Translates strategy into meaningful team goals. Maintains customer focus in team decisions. Leads team through change with transparency.
Senior Leader	Shapes and communicates strategy with clarity and conviction. Embeds customer-centric thinking in organisational design. Drives transformational change.

Know The Rules

Level	What it looks like
Individual Contributor	Understands relevant policies and works confidently within them. Makes sound decisions within their authority. Treats colleagues equitably.
Team Leader	Ensures team operates within appropriate frameworks. Makes timely, considered decisions. Creates conditions where ethical concerns can be raised safely.
Senior Leader	Ensures policies are fit for purpose and consistently applied. Models ethical leadership. Designs structures that empower people within clear boundaries.

Know The Score

Level	What it looks like
Individual Contributor	Understands how their performance is measured. Seeks and acts on feedback openly. Sets meaningful goals and monitors own progress.
Team Leader	Communicates expectations clearly. Gives growth-oriented feedback regularly. Co-creates motivating goals and reviews progress consistently.
Senior Leader	Designs fair and motivating performance frameworks. Builds feedback-rich cultures. Ensures review processes centre on growth, not judgment.

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PART FIVE

Implementing the 5 Knowings: A Practical Guide

A framework is only as valuable as its implementation. The 5 Knowings is not a poster campaign or a training event. It is a system of practice — a set of ongoing habits, rituals, conversations and processes that collectively create a different kind of workplace. This section describes a practical pathway to implementation, from initial diagnosis to full cultural embedding.

Phase 1: Diagnose (Weeks 1–4)

Before introducing the framework, understand where you currently are. The 5 Knowings diagnostic tool enables individuals to self-assess across all 30 sub-competencies. The 360 version enables team members, peers and managers to contribute their perspective. At the organisational level, aggregate data from the diagnostic reveals systemic patterns — which Knowings are strong across the organisation, and which represent the most significant development opportunity.

- Deploy the individual self-assessment to all participants
- Invite 360 feedback from raters across all levels
- Aggregate diagnostic data to identify organisational patterns
- Present findings to leadership team — without blame, with curiosity
- Identify the one Knowing where focused attention will create the greatest leverage

Phase 2: Introduce (Weeks 4–8)

The full-day workshop programme introduces all Five Knowings to a mixed-level audience. Its purpose is not to train people in new skills — it is to give the whole organisation a shared language for performance, and to create a collective experience of what it feels like to work within the framework's philosophy. The workshop should be run for all levels, including senior leaders — who experience it as participants, not observers.

- Run the full-day programme across all cohorts, starting with senior leaders
- Create cross-level cohorts wherever possible — the mixed experience is part of the design
- Distribute the participant workbook and individual commitment cards
- Brief line managers on how to hold 30-day follow-up conversations
- Communicate the commitment to the broader organisation: this is how we talk about performance now

Phase 3: Embed (Months 2–6)

Introduction without embedding is activity without change. The Knowings must become part of the rhythm of organisational life — present in team meetings, one-to-one conversations, hiring decisions, promotion criteria and recognition practices.

- Integrate the 5 Knowings language into regular performance check-in conversations
- Update job profiles and role descriptions to reference the cascading Knowings model
- Rebuild performance review templates around the Know The Score framework
- Train managers in feedback fluency and growth-mindset performance conversations
- Introduce regular team health checks using the Know Your Team sub-competencies
- Embed Know Yourself practices into onboarding — strengths discovery within 30 days

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Phase 4: Sustain and Measure (Month 6 onwards)

Cultural change is measured over years, not weeks. Sustaining the 5 Knowings requires deliberate measurement, visible leadership commitment and regular renewal.

- Run the diagnostic annually — track progress against baseline across all Knowings
- Include 5 Knowings measures in manager effectiveness surveys
- Feature Knowings stories in internal communications: people doing the five things well
- Build Knowings development into leadership pipeline programmes
- Review and refresh the framework periodically — the principles are stable; the practices evolve

Common Implementation Risk	The most common reason the 5 Knowings fails to embed is senior leader disengagement after the launch. If leaders do not visibly practise the Knowings — modelling Know Yourself vulnerability, creating Know Your Team safety, maintaining Know The Score conversations — the framework becomes a programme for other people, not a culture for everyone.

PART SIX

Measuring What Matters

'If you can't measure it, you can't manage it' is one of the most misapplied aphorisms in organisational life. Applied crudely, it leads to the measurement of the easily countable rather than the genuinely important. Applied wisely, it points to the discipline of making the conditions for high performance visible, trackable and actionable.

The 5 Knowings measurement architecture operates at three levels: individual (the self-assessment and 360 diagnostic), team (the team health check and aggregated diagnostic data) and organisational (engagement surveys, retention data and performance outcomes correlated with Knowings scores). Together, these create a layered picture of where the Knowings are strong, where they are developing and where they need focused investment.

What to Measure	Leading Indicator	Lagging Outcome
Know Yourself	Strengths-use frequency (self-report); EI 360 scores	Manager effectiveness ratings; wellbeing scores; absence rates
Know Your Team	Psychological safety pulse scores; recognition frequency	Team performance ratings; voluntary turnover; collaboration quality
Know Your Business	Line of sight clarity scores; strategy literacy assessment	Engagement scores; goal alignment quality; customer satisfaction
Know The Rules	Decision confidence self-assessment; policy fluency scores	Ethics incident rates; escalation speed; audit outcomes
Know The Score	Feedback frequency; check-in completion rates	Performance improvement rates; goal achievement; retention

PART SEVEN

Key References and Further Reading

The 5 Knowings framework draws on the following bodies of work. Where specific findings are cited in this handbook, the source is noted in context. The following references provide a foundation for deeper exploration of the research underpinning each Knowing.

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