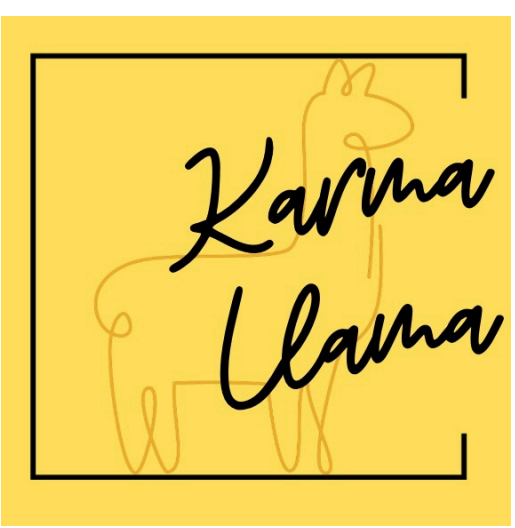




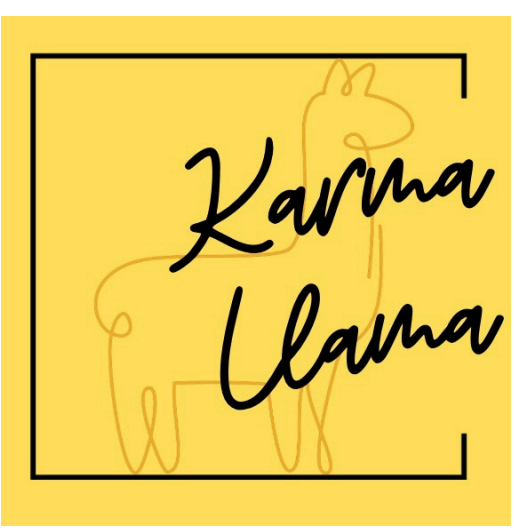
Sustainable performance doesn't come from pushing harder – it comes from designing work in a way that protects people's energy, cognition, and emotional bandwidth. If you need a repeatable system that improves wellbeing without burning people out, this guide gives you the tools to do exactly that.

Inside, you'll find practical tools to help managers reduce stress through better workload design and communication, and embed simple daily habits that actually stick.

Follow the steps and you'll move from vague "wellbeing initiatives" to a clear operating system that strengthens focus, resilience, and retention across hybrid, office, and remote teams.

What to expect

Architect vs Sponge, SMEAC, Recovery in SMART, protected cognitive space, and micro-habits that support daily regulation and clarity.



Manager Reset

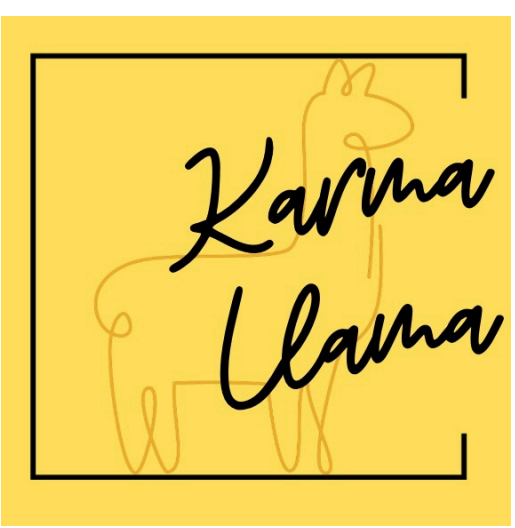
The Identity Shift: From Sponge to Architect

One of the most damaging beliefs I see in new managers is the idea that their job is to be a sponge – absorbing pressure from above so it doesn't hit their team. It's well-intentioned, but it's a fast track to burnout.

The shift we need to champion is this: From Sponge → Architect

- The Sponge absorbs pressure until saturated and ineffective.
- The Architect designs the workflow. They don't hold stress; they organise it, delegate it, and build structures that allow the team to function.

This mirrors the military principle of Mission Command – tasks delegated to the lowest capable level. Leaders create clarity, trust, and autonomy, protecting both performance and energy.



Communication

Implement SMEAC for clarity
(reduces anxiety fast)

Periods of pressure or change rarely overwhelm people because of workload alone – they overwhelm people because of uncertainty.

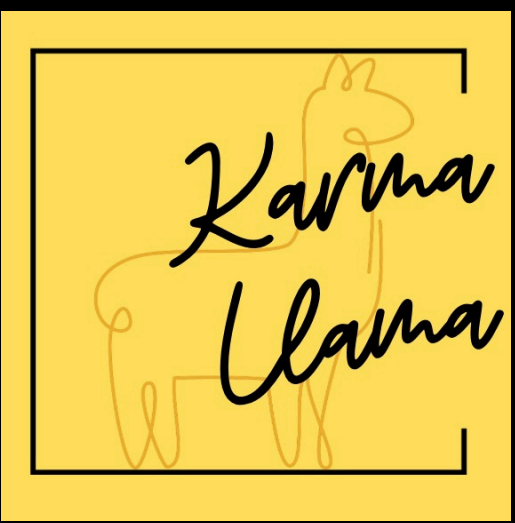
When briefings are vague, priorities unclear, or leaders assume shared understanding, employees are forced to fill in the gaps themselves. And under stress, those gaps are almost always filled with worst-case assumptions.

This is where SMEAC becomes essential.

Utilised as a standard Military communication tool daily in high-pressure environments, SMEAC replaces informal, inconsistent communication with a repeatable structure that removes ambiguity at the exact point where anxiety enters the system. It ensures people understand what's happening, why it matters, and what is expected of them – no guesswork, no cognitive load wasted, no spiralling assumptions.

By adopting SMEAC, leaders create clarity in moments where clarity is most needed, stabilising emotional wellbeing and strengthening team performance under pressure. It also has the added benefit of encouraging delegation - you know who you are!

So what exactly do you do...?



Communication

Situation *We are to...
What's happening right now?*

The over all aim - e.g The company needs to generate 50+ new clients

Mission *In order to...
Everyone is in on the 'why'.
The big picture!*

Continue to generate growth, remain relevant and develop a diverse portfolio.

Execution *We will achieve this by...
Clear tasks and timelines*

Giles - delivering a photoshoot and marketing campaign by X date.

Smith - releasing X funds to facilitate this and X overtime max £X.

Douglas - identify X volunteer staff for broadening opportunity with capacity for additional tasking. Both by X date.

Ask questions *bigger picture to smaller parts.*

Does anyone have any questions?

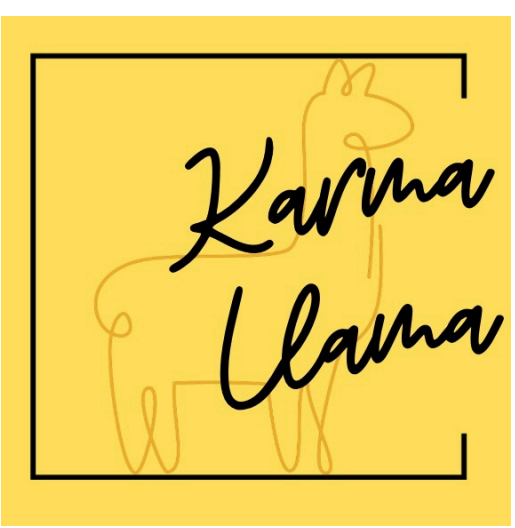
Put these dates in your diary with a reminder a week/few days before so you can check in.

Check understanding

Ask specific questions to specific people.

e.g Jones, who is leading the marketing campaign?

Smith, how many new clients does the company need to generate?



SMART

Set SMART Goals Replace Relevant with Recovery!

Redesign goal-setting so it drives sustained performance, not constant exhaustion.

Traditional SMART goals often create endless urgency—one deadline bleeding into the next with no planned release of pressure. Anxiety, cognitive fatigue, and declining quality show up long before burnout becomes visible.

Replacing "Relevant" with "Recovery" shifts leadership behaviour. It forces managers to plan how energy will be restored after intense delivery, turning recovery from a vague hope into a deliberate commitment. This isn't lowering standards; it's recognising that high performance comes in cycles, and unmanaged intensity erodes both output and engagement.

When recovery is built into goals, pressure becomes time-bound, predictable, and psychologically manageable. Weekends and leave aren't guaranteed rest—home life may not restore energy. Recovery planning creates a clear finish line that sustains focus.

Recovery isn't a perk. It's workload design—and it prevents chronic anxiety cycles.



SMART Goals

Specific

Vague goals create anxiety and rework. Specificity removes guesswork and prevents hidden scope creep. What exactly needs to be delivered? What is in and out of scope?

Measurable

Define how progress and completion will be judged, to create momentum. If progress can't be seen, confidence drops. What will we track? How will we know we're on or off course?

Achievable

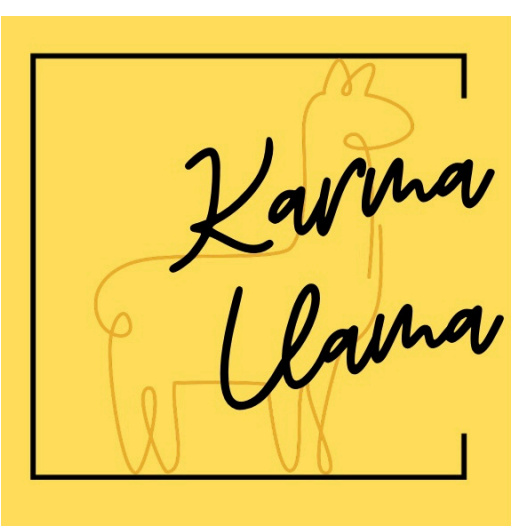
Confirm the goal fits capacity, not just ambition. Achievable does not mean easy. It means realistic given time, resources, and competing priorities. This is where honest workload conversations happen.

Restore / reset / recovery

Plan how the team will recover after the push. Recovery is what prevents sustained pressure turning into burnout. What eases after delivery? What space is deliberately created?

Time bound

Set a clear end point. Open-ended goals create ongoing stress. Deadlines provide structure and allow people to pace effort. When does this end? What decisions happen at the deadline?



Cognitive Space

Create protected Focus space

Ensure Execs lead by example by not demanding unnecessary time. This isn't about individuals "managing their time better"; it's about removing interruption at the system level.

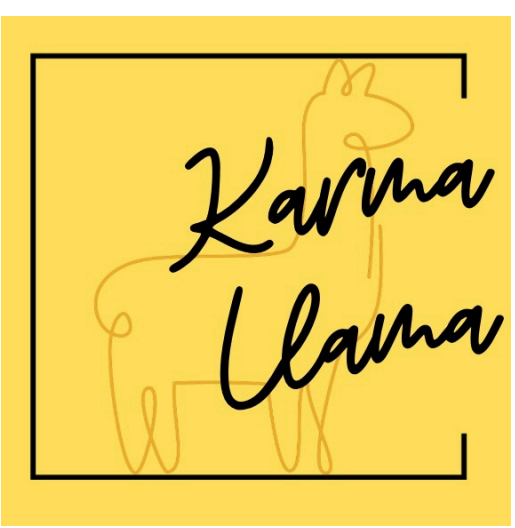
Constant meetings, notifications, and reactive requests fracture attention and push people into longer hours just to complete basic work. This drives stress, mistakes, and declining quality, no matter how capable or motivated employees are.

Protected cognitive space makes focus the default, not the exception. It provides an organisation-approved mechanism for uninterrupted work and removes the social penalty for not being instantly available.

Without this, every wellbeing initiative is undermined—people simply never get the time required to do the work they're measured on.

- Option A: One weekly no-meeting day
- Option B: Two 2-hour protected focus blocks per week, published and respected

If people don't get uninterrupted time to think and execute, stress rises and quality drops—even with wellbeing benefits in place.



Daily Habits

from annual campaign to daily habits

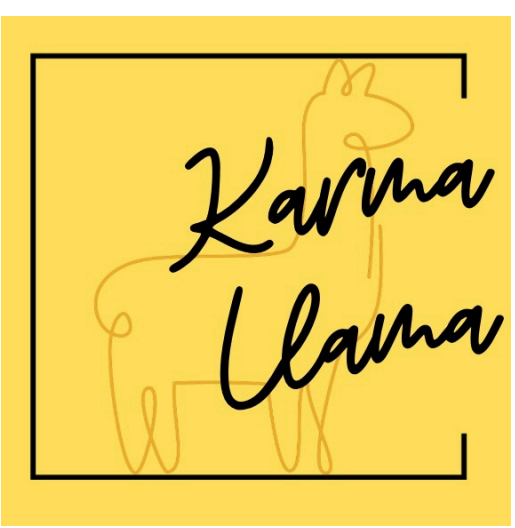
Shift wellbeing from one-off campaigns to everyday behaviour by standardising a few simple micro-habits. Awareness days don't change how work feels; repeated physical and social rituals do. They regulate stress, improve connection, and create natural moments of reset and closure.

By embedding a handful of low-effort, repeatable habits, wellbeing becomes automatic rather than optional—visible without adding workload or bureaucracy.

Three team rituals:

- Walking 1:1s Better conversation quality, mental reset, fresh air
- 2-minute nasal-breathing reset "Mouth closed, breathe through nose, eyes closed." Calms the nervous system before responding to stress triggers.
- End-of-day checkout (5 minutes, standing) Each person shares:
 - One thing that went well
 - One goal for tomorrow
 - One thing they're looking forward to at home

Rituals build culture faster than campaigns. They create connection and visibility without adding heavy process.



Architect vs Sponge, SMEAC, Recovery in SMART, protected cognitive space, and micro-habits that support daily regulation and clarity.

If you like the sound of some or all of this then congratulations!

You are on your way to a happier, healthy, more empowered and effective workforce.

And who knows - maybe if this happened to get printed out and left on a certain coffee table or two it could be just the beginning of something even more beautiful!

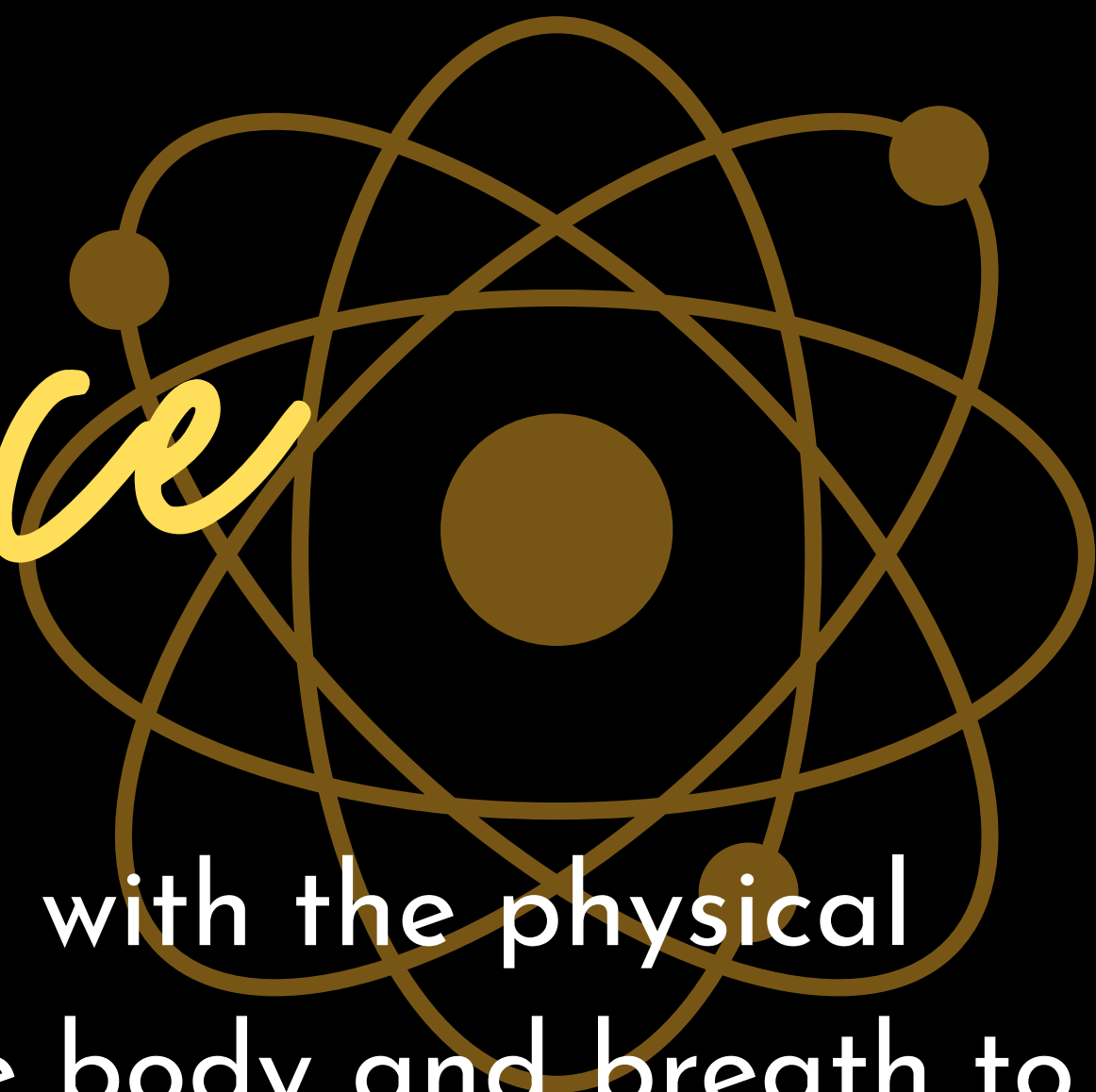
Let us know your thoughts;

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Science



Understanding and working with the physical symptoms of stress. Moving the body and breath to build resilience.



Spirit

Working on inner monologue and personal awareness, in order to effectively communicate, lead and be an integral part of any team.

Strategy

Creating capacity to step back and see the bigger picture. Utilising Mission Command, delegating efficiently and cultivating an environment where success and people thrive.

