

# The changing demands of working life – How to optimise my cognitive performance?

October 12, 2023

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Aalto freshmen introduction



# Flow of today

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**01.**  
Intro

**02.**  
Creativity as a skill

**03.**  
Emotional intelligence as a  
skill

**04.**  
Own energy management  
as a skill

# 01. Introduction

OUR ORIGINS

# Rethinking Success

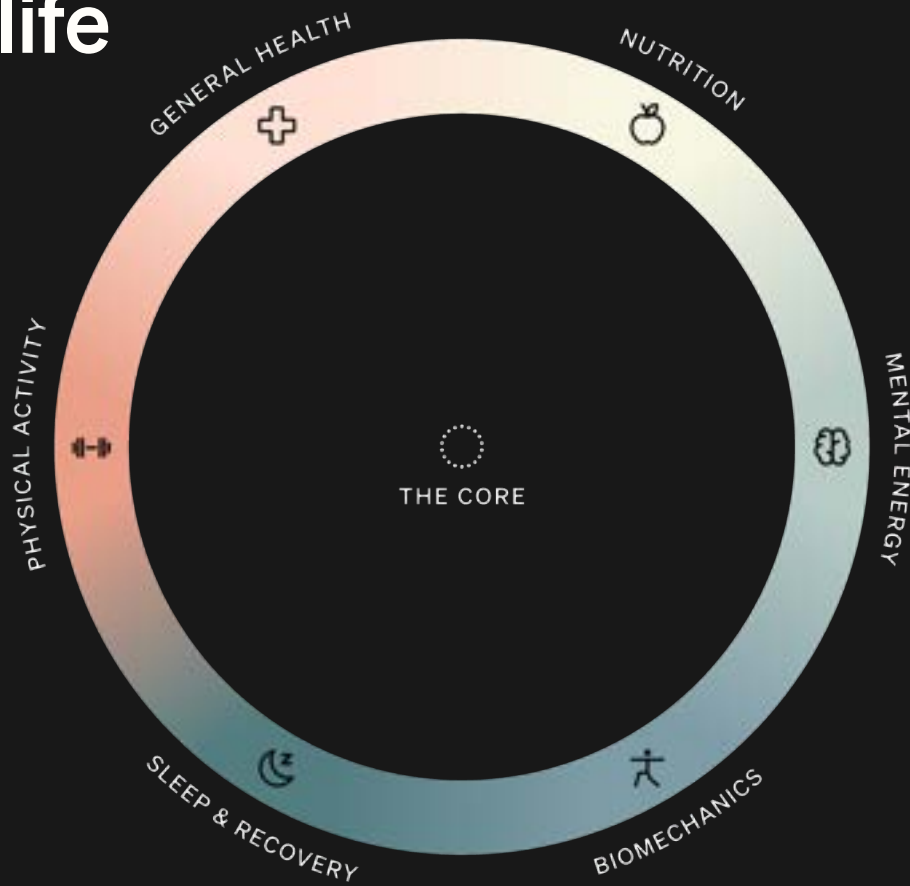
While observing elite Ethiopian distance runners, Dr Aki Hintsa realised their dominance was propelled by a profound sense of purpose and meaning.



**“Doctor, it’s just running.”**

Haile Gebrselassie’s comment before an ankle operation that could’ve potentially ended his career as an elite runner.

Holistic wellbeing is the foundation of good life and success.



**“How can I maximise my performance...?”**

**“Optimize,  
don’t maximise.”**



**Aki Hintsa**  
Founder, Hintsa Performance

MODERN IDEAL: A RELAXED SUPERHUMAN

Loving spouse

Dedicated parent

Faithful friend

Top performer at work

Best sister/brother/daughter/son

Perfect backhand

Blues guitar wiz

Exciting keynote speaker

Next level skier

...





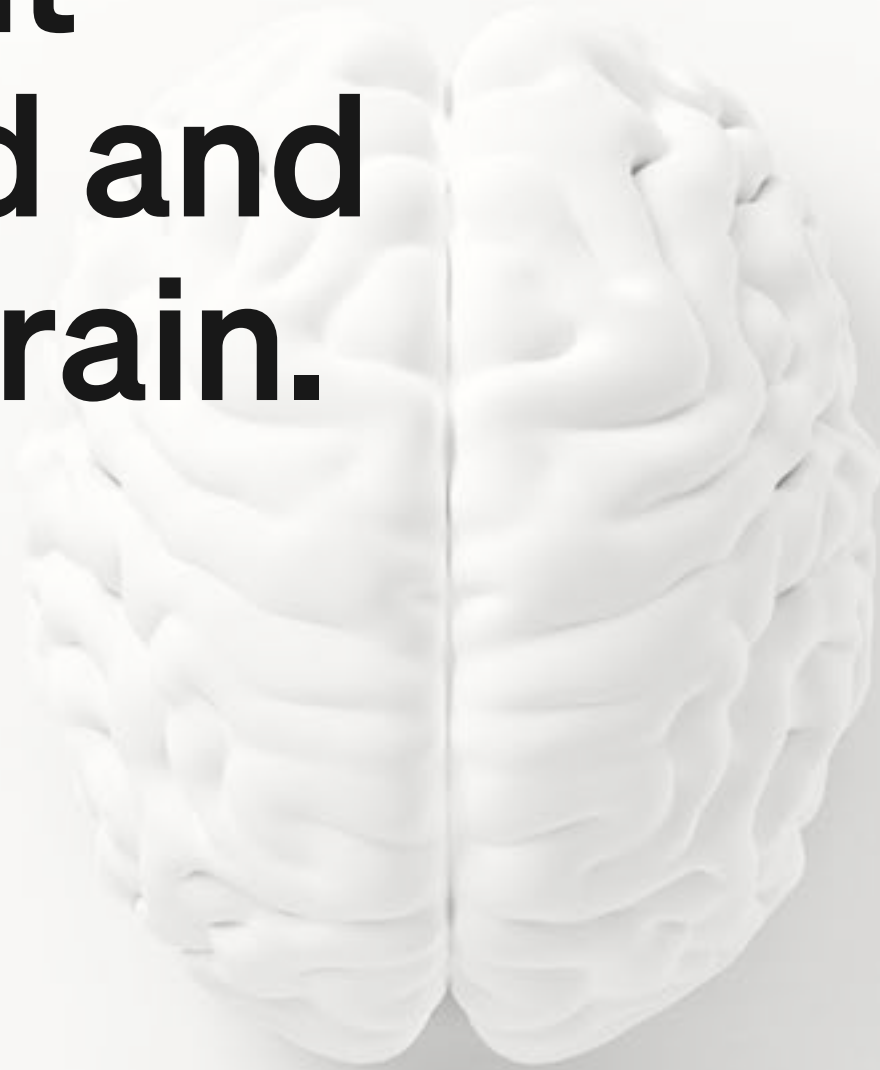
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The requirements of a modern  
cognitive work professional

1. **Complex  
problem solving**
2. **Collaboration**
3. **Creativity**



**The output  
of a rested and  
focused brain.**



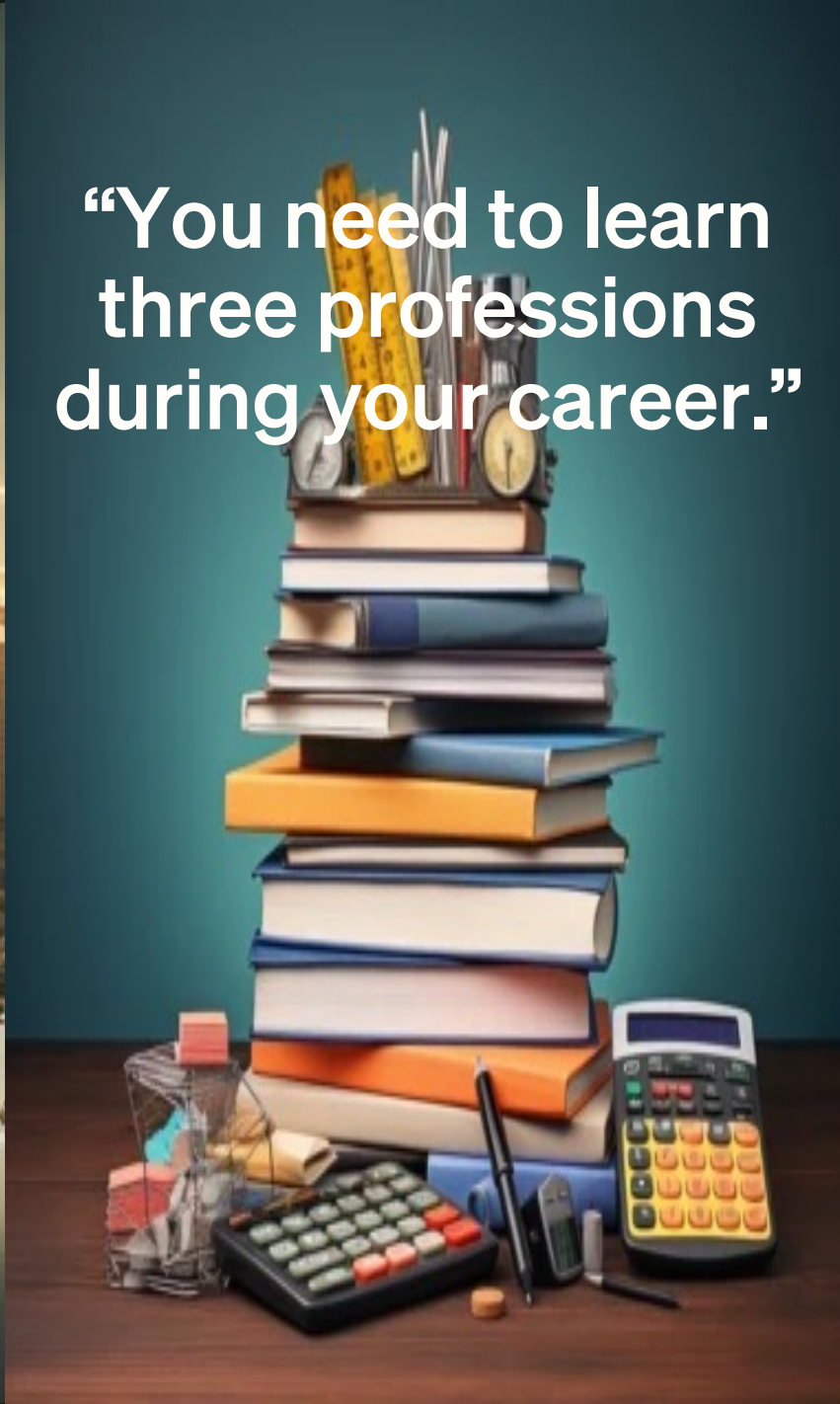
# Year 1987



**“The only stable  
thing is change.”**



**“You need to learn  
three professions  
during your career.”**



**“Computers will  
take your  
job.”**



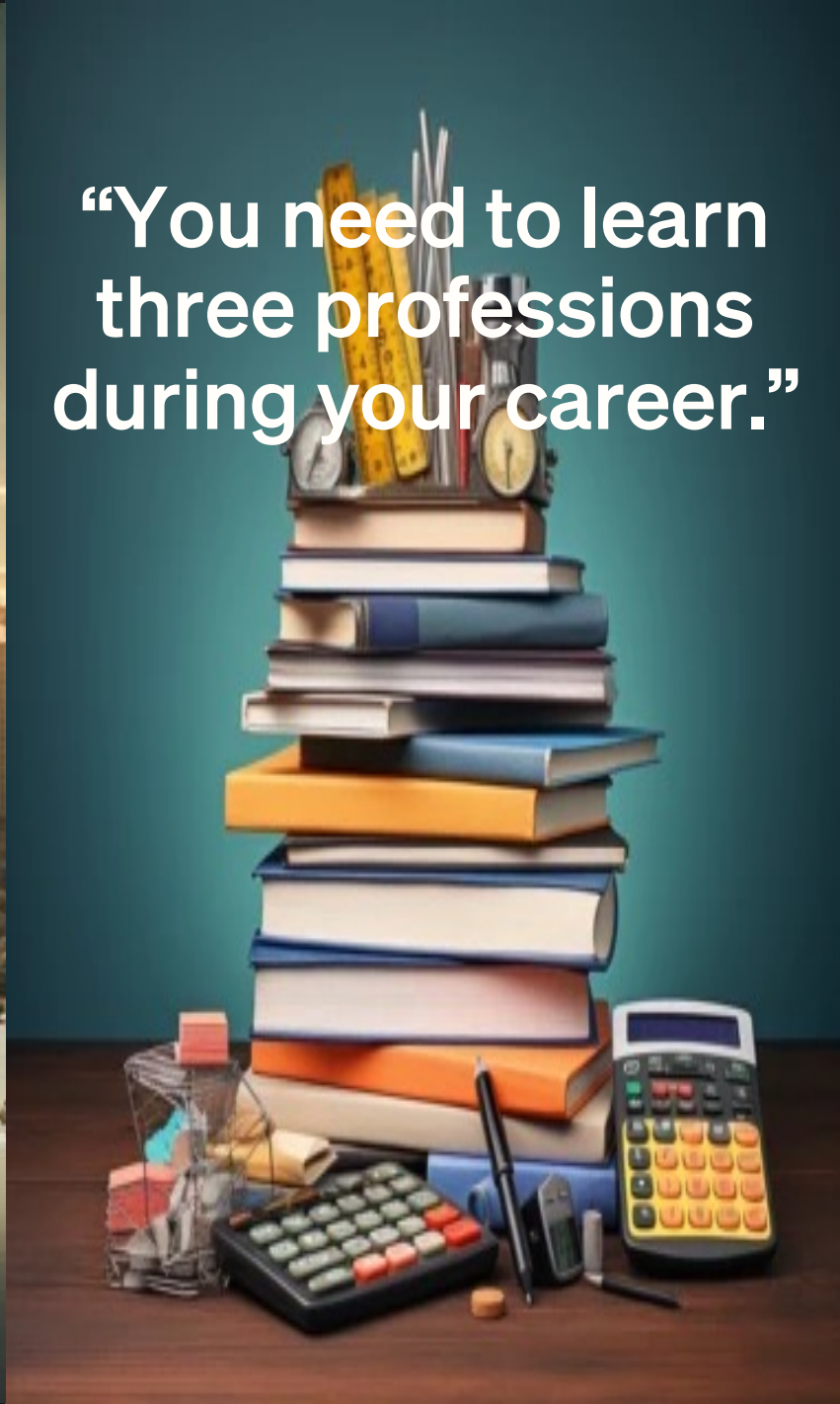
# Year 2023



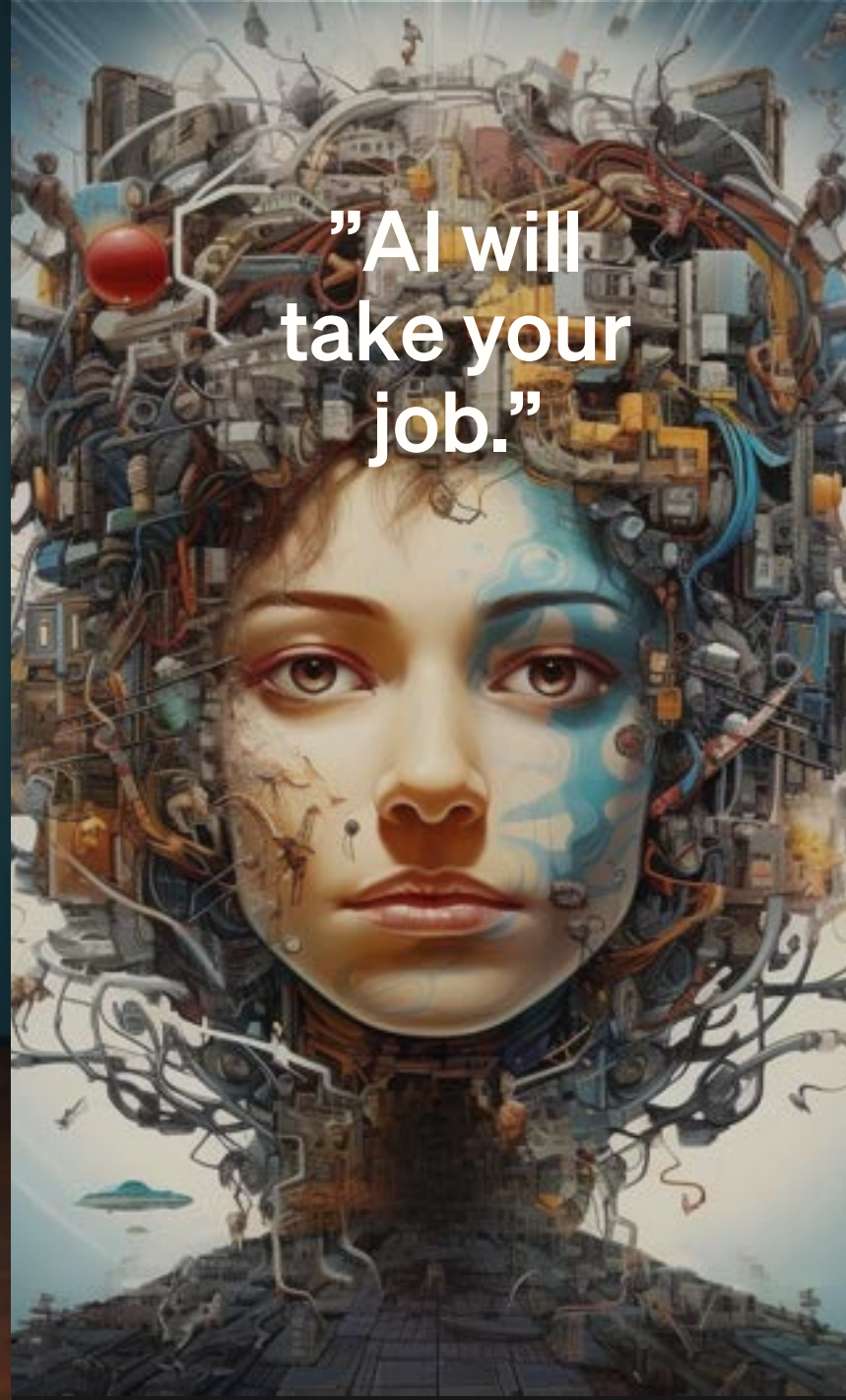
**“The only stable  
thing is change.”**



**“You need to learn  
three professions  
during your career.”**



**“AI will  
take your  
job.”**



**Two solutions:  
Wellbeing and creativity.**

02.

# Creativity as a skill.





**In a new and  
better way.**







”Feels difficult,  
let’s do it  
anyway.”

**VAIKEALTA  
TUNTUU**

*tehdäänkö silti?*

# 03. Emotional intelligence as a skill.

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KEY CAPABILITIES

# “Leader 2024”

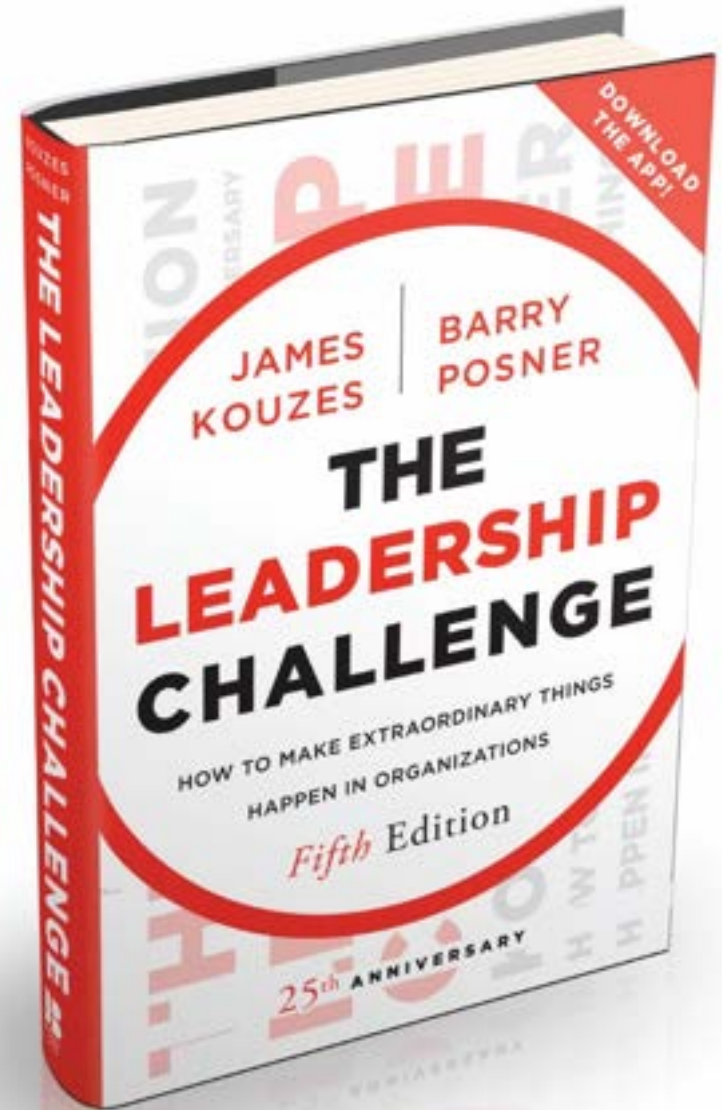
01.  
Practice emotional agility – exercise self-reflection
02.  
Create a clear meaning and purpose
03.  
Practice openness and transparency
04.  
Build on strengths and care authentically
05.  
Foster creativity and manage your attention



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## The 10 most admired leadership traits show that 80% are EQ-based

- **Honest**
- **Forward-looking**
- **Competent**
- **Inspiring**
- **Intelligent**
- **Fair-minded**
- **Broad-minded**
- **Supportive**
- **Straightforward**
- **Dependable**

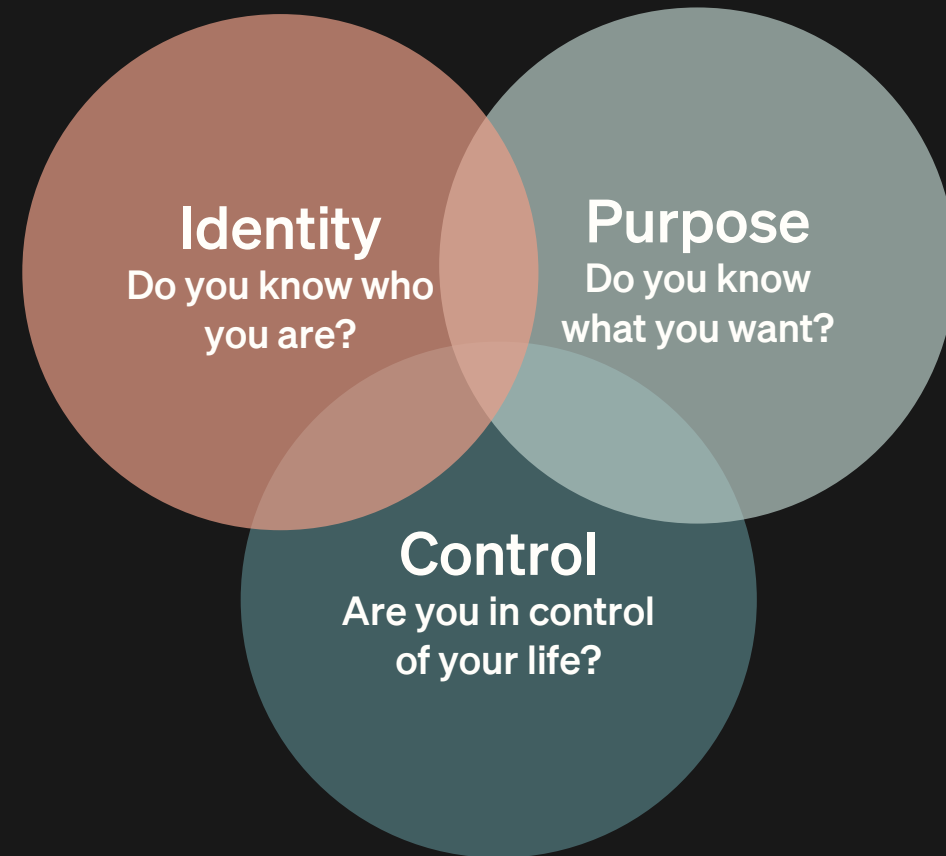




# EQ-i 2.0 model for emotional intelligence



**Reflection can start at  
any stage of life.  
Also today.**



04.

Own energy  
management  
as a skill.

# Stress = Instinctive response pattern

Evolution has given us the “fight or flight” response (= stress response), which gives us the **physical energy and mental focus** to remove us from danger



# Chronic stress makes us...

## 1 ...Less Sharp

Impaired creativity, problem solving and working memory

## 2 ...More Moody

Mood swings like anger, depression, fear, aggression

## 3 ...Less Human

Difficulties with empathy and impulse control

## 4 ...Live shorter, unhealthier lives

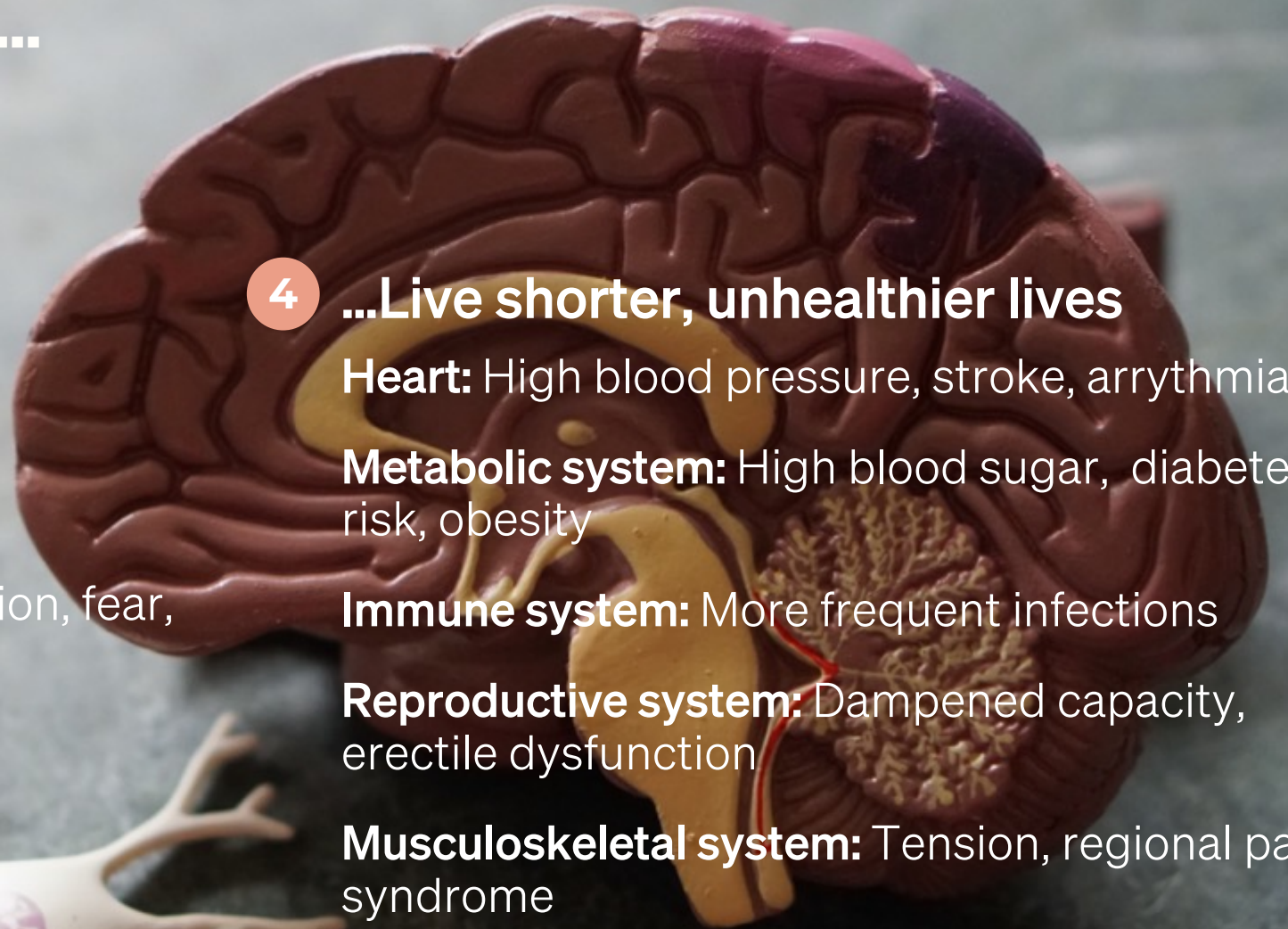
**Heart:** High blood pressure, stroke, arrhythmias

**Metabolic system:** High blood sugar, diabetes risk, obesity

**Immune system:** More frequent infections

**Reproductive system:** Dampened capacity, erectile dysfunction

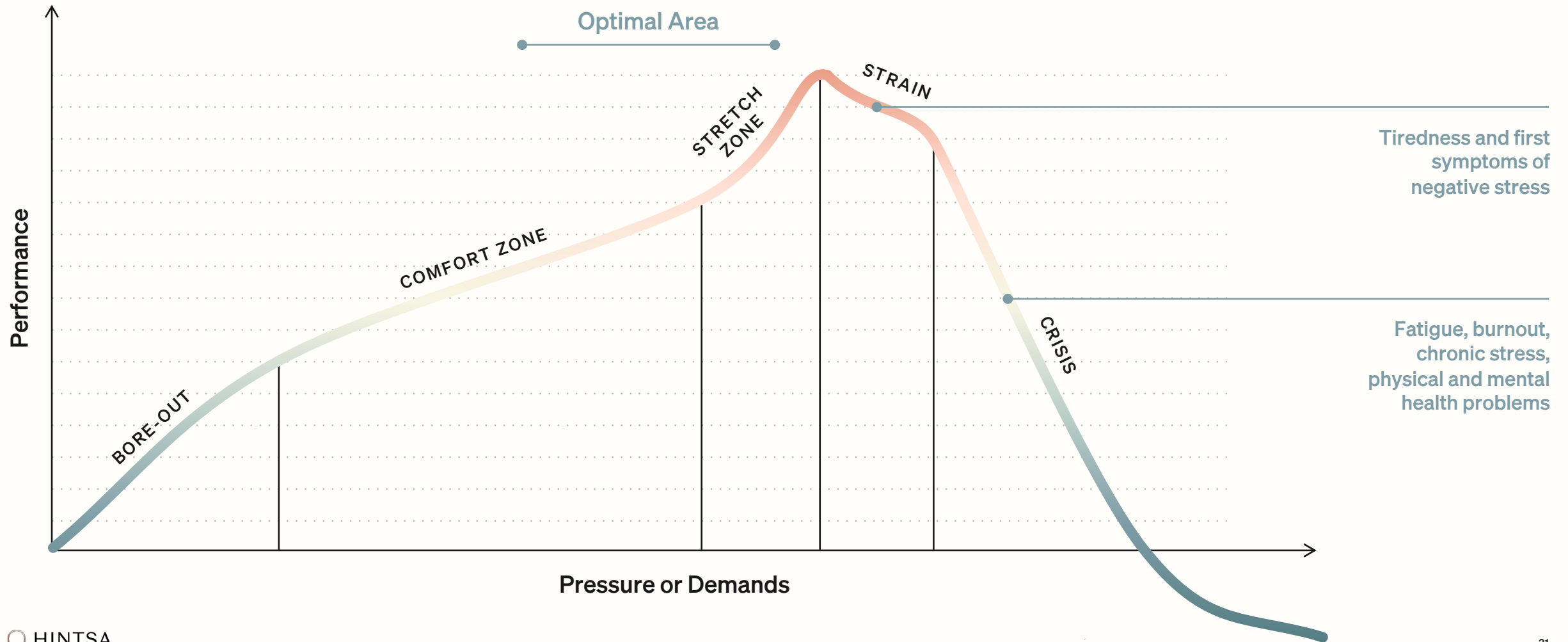
**Musculoskeletal system:** Tension, regional pain syndrome



**Burnout = a syndrome of “chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed”**



# Pressure vs. Performance Scale



# What is your body's 'stress tell'?

Our body has a unique reaction to stress. When you think back to stressful moments in the past, what signs did you experience?

- **Physical** – e.g. a headache, stomach ache, a racing heart, ...
- **Behavioural** – e.g. nail biting, bossiness, drinking, over-eating, forgetting to eat, phone scrolling, ...
- **Emotional** – e.g. crying, anxiousness, irritation, ...
- **Mental** – e.g. unclear thinking, forgetfulness, ...





# In a busy life progress is about implementing micro-habits

## Micro-habits

- Stretching between calls & 1-2 walking calls a day
- 1 minute breaks with breathing exercises during the day
- Phone management during weekends and vacation
- Focus on sleep: deep sleep + duration
- Meditation & gratitude
- Morning & evening routines
- Focus on nutrition (intermittent fasting, carbs)

## Results

- **Lost 15 kilos** and maintains optimal weight
- Increased daily steps from 5,000 on average to **about 15,000** on average... much fitter, much more energy during the day
- Increased average sleep from 5.5 hours in 15 min increments to now **an average of 7 hours** → much more productive, much happier
- Starts and ends day with gratitude – does 4-8-4 breathing during day, can cope much **better with stress, much less anxiety, much more happiness, much more joy**



# 4 elements of mental recovery

## Control

*"I determine for myself how I will spend my free time"*



## Relaxation

*"I do relaxing things in my free time"*



## Detachment

*"I distance myself from my work in my free time"*



## Mastery

*"I seek out intellectual challenges in my free time"*



Example statement from Aalto University's Future of Work research

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OPERATING UNDER PRESSURE

## Tips from Navy Seals

- Clarify meaning
- Give and ask for help
- Celebrate small wins
- Find a way to laugh



# Sleep is recovering our body and cleaning our brain

**1.**  
**Deep sleep**

Recovery of the body,  
regeneration of our cells

**2.**  
**REM Sleep**

Learning & creativity

**3.**  
**Duration**

Grown ups need  
7-8 hours of sleep

# Physical activity is essential to our health and performance

A person is shown performing a backbend in a pool of water. The person's back is arched over their head, and their hands are touching their feet. The background is a sunset over a body of water, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The person is wearing a dark wetsuit.

**1.  
PROTECTS  
US**

Decreases both physiological and psychological issues

**2.  
MAKES US  
SMARTER**

Improves our cognitive performance

**3.  
BALANCES  
STRESS**

Helps us to cope with difficult situations

# Good nutrition supports cognitive work

## 1. Hydration

Even 2% reduction affects attention and memory

## 2. Blood sugar

Stable blood sugar levels help to avoid energy to crash

## 3. Boosters

Adequate nutrition can raise productivity up to 20%

**“True success is not a single  
isolated achievement.  
Do small things consistently  
well, every day.”**

80/20







HINTSA