

VITAL WORK

IMPLEMENTATION SERIES • PREORDER EXCLUSIVE

EXECUTIVE WORKBOOK

The Leader's Workbook

Healthier people. Stronger teams. Higher performance.



A 50-PAGE EXECUTIVE IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

DR. PARTHA NANDI • AUTHOR OF VITAL WORK

A Letter to Leaders

Most organizations don't have a people problem. They have an energy problem.

Teams aren't burned out because they lack talent, commitment, or character. They're burned out because the way work is designed often ignores human biology. We schedule creative thinking into the hours when the brain is depleted. We fill calendars so completely that recovery becomes something people apologize for. We reward visible busyness over meaningful output — and then wonder why engagement fades.

Vital Work offers a different starting point: lead people the way biology actually works. Energy is not a personality trait. Focus is not a matter of willpower. Recovery is not a luxury. These are physiological systems, and they respond — quickly — when leaders design work around them.

This workbook turns those ideas into practice. Inside, you'll assess where your organization stands today, audit what builds and drains your team's energy, redesign the shape of the workday, and lead the conversations that make change stick. Every section ends with action steps, because insight without implementation is just reading.

You don't need a transformation budget or a change-management office. You need attention, a few honest conversations, and the willingness to go first.

Your team is watching how you work. Let's make it worth imitating.

— Dr. Partha Nandi

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PART ONE

Leading with Biology

Before you change your team, understand the constraint you're actually managing. It isn't time, and it isn't talent.

“People don't fail first. Systems do.”

The Energy Problem

Walk through any struggling organization and you'll hear the same diagnosis: we need better people, better tools, more accountability. But look closely at how the work itself is designed, and a different picture appears.

The average knowledge worker sits in meetings during their sharpest cognitive hours, answers email in the fragments between them, and saves their most important thinking for whatever energy remains at the end of the day. Nothing about that sequence is a talent problem. It is a design problem — and design is a leadership responsibility.

Three biological realities sit underneath every team's performance:



Focus is rhythmic, not constant.

The brain moves through predictable peaks and troughs each day. Work scheduled with the rhythm costs less and produces more; work scheduled against it costs more and produces less.



Recovery is where performance is built.

Attention, judgment, and emotional steadiness are all depleted by use and restored by rest. Teams that never recover don't become tougher. They become slower, tenser, and less creative.



Energy is contagious.

Leaders set the physiological tone of a team. Your pace, your breaks, your after-hours emails — people don't follow your policies. They follow your example.

Leader Reflection

Answer quickly and honestly. First instincts are usually the accurate ones.

Where does my organization treat an energy problem as a talent problem?

When during the day does my team do its most valuable thinking — and what usually occupies that time?

What does my own work rhythm teach my team about what I really expect?

Action Steps

Small commitments, made specific. Choose things you can begin this week.

START

One thing I will begin doing

STOP

One thing I will let go of

CONTINUE

One thing that's working and deserves protection

PART TWO

The Leader's Vitality Assessment

You can't design what you haven't measured. Score your organization candidly
— this page is for you, not for a report.

“Performance begins with biology.”

The Vitality Scorecard

Circle one number per statement. 1 = rarely true • 10 = consistently true

Our people have energy — mornings feel alive, not depleted.

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People feel psychologically safe raising problems early.

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Meetings are purposeful, short, and produce decisions.

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People take real recovery breaks without guilt.

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Leaders visibly model healthy work habits.

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People genuinely disconnect after hours and on weekends.

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10

The Vitality Scorecard (continued)

Circle one number per statement. 1 = rarely true • 10 = consistently true

Deep, uninterrupted focus time is protected on our calendars.

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Workloads are demanding but sustainable.

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We measure output and outcomes, not visible busyness.

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New ideas surface regularly from every level.

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Turnover and absence are low and stable.

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1

10

I end most weeks with energy left for my life outside work.

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1

10

My total score

out of 120

Reading Your Score

The number matters less than what it points to. Look for your lowest three statements.

96–120

Vital

Your organization already works with biology. Protect what's working — it erodes quietly under growth and pressure.

66–95

Capable but costly

Performance is real, but it's being purchased with energy reserves. Target your two lowest-scoring statements first.

36–65

Running on fumes

Talented people are compensating for a work design that fights them. Expect fast wins: recovery norms and meeting reform pay back in weeks.

12–35

Redline

This is a retention and health risk, not a productivity dip. Start with honest conversations before launching any initiative.

Where I'll Focus

Choose depth over breadth. Two areas, honestly addressed, beat six announcements.

My three lowest-scoring statements

What these low scores cost us — in output, health, or retention

The two areas I will address first, and why

Action Steps

Translate your lowest scores into first moves.

START

One thing I will begin doing

STOP

One thing I will let go of

CONTINUE

One thing that's working and deserves protection

PART THREE

The Team Energy Audit

Energy is a budget. This audit shows you where it's earned, where it's spent, and where it silently leaks.

“Health is the new hustle.”

Builders and Drains

Think in specifics: name the meeting, the tool, the habit, the hour.

WHAT GIVES OUR TEAM ENERGY

WHAT CONSISTENTLY DRAINS IT

Where do people get stuck waiting — for decisions, approvals, or answers?

If we deleted one recurring obligation tomorrow, which would nobody miss?

Early Warning Signs

Burnout announces itself quietly first. Check what you've noticed in the last month.

☐ Camera-off silence in meetings that used to have debate

☐ Rising sick days, or people working visibly unwell

☐ Sharp, uncharacteristic irritability in strong performers

☐ Work sent late at night as a norm, not an exception

☐ Fewer questions, fewer ideas, fewer volunteers

☐ “I’m fine” answers that don’t match the energy in the room

☐ Recovery time treated as something to apologize for

☐ Your best people quietly interviewing elsewhere

Three or more checks means the audit is no longer optional.

Action Steps

Pick the drain you control most directly. Start there.

START

One thing I will begin doing

STOP

One thing I will let go of

CONTINUE

One thing that's working and deserves protection

PART FOUR

Designing the Biological Workday

The order of a day matters as much as its contents. Put each kind of work where biology supports it.

“The best leaders design work around people, not people around work.”

The Shape of a Better Day

A biologically sound workday isn't exotic. It sequences ordinary work in the order the brain prefers: demanding thought while attention is fresh, collaboration while social energy is high, true recovery at the midpoint, and administrative work in the natural afternoon dip. Most teams do the reverse — and pay for it in rework, friction, and fatigue.



Protect a daily deep-work block

90–120 shared minutes with no meetings, no chat, no exceptions. One protected block outperforms a scattered day.



Cluster collaboration

Group meetings into a defined window instead of sprinkling them across the day. Fragmentation is the silent tax on thinking.



Make recovery visible

Real lunches, walking meetings, breaks taken openly by leaders. Recovery people can see is recovery people will take.



Batch the shallow work

Email, approvals, and scheduling belong in the energy dip — handled in one pass, not leaked across the day.

Map Your Team's Ideal Rhythm

Fill in the right column as if you were designing from scratch.

Time	Ideal activity
Morning	
Mid-morning	
Lunch	
Early afternoon	
Late afternoon	
End of day	

How closely does our current schedule match this ideal — and what's the biggest gap?

Action Steps

Change the sequence before you change anything else.

START

One thing I will begin doing

STOP

One thing I will let go of

CONTINUE

One thing that's working and deserves protection

PART FIVE

The Meeting Audit

Audit two of your most stubborn recurring meetings. Most calendars hide 20% of the week in meetings nobody would reinstate if they vanished.

“Every recurring meeting is a standing withdrawal from your team's energy account.”

Audit a Recurring Meeting

Run this page twice — once for each of your two largest recurring meetings.

MEETING 1

Name / purpose _____

Current length _____ Attendees _____

Does it produce decisions or information that require this group, live?

- ☐ Yes — keep with discipline ☐ Partly — redesign it ☐ No — replace it

IT COULD BECOME

- ☐ 15 min ☐ 30 min ☐ An email ☐ A channel post ☐ Nothing — eliminate

MEETING 2

Name / purpose _____

Current length _____ Attendees _____

Does it produce decisions or information that require this group, live?

- ☐ Yes — keep with discipline ☐ Partly — redesign it ☐ No — replace it

IT COULD BECOME

- ☐ 15 min ☐ 30 min ☐ An email ☐ A channel post ☐ Nothing — eliminate

Action Steps

The calendar is a leadership document. Edit it like one.

START

One thing I will begin doing

STOP

One thing I will let go of

CONTINUE

One thing that's working and deserves protection

PART SIX

Leadership Conversations

Five questions, asked one-to-one, will teach you more about your team's performance than any dashboard.

“The most underused leadership tool is a sincere question, followed by silence.”

The Five Questions

Ask them in order. Take notes. Resist the urge to solve anything on the spot.

01 What gives you energy at work?

Points to the work they should do more of — often invisible in role descriptions.

02 What drains your energy?

Surfaces friction people have quietly normalized. Expect meetings and interruptions.

03 When do you do your best thinking?

Tells you when to protect their calendar — and when not to schedule them.

04 What helps you recover?

Reveals whether recovery feels permitted. If they hesitate, that's the answer.

05 What one change would immediately improve your workday?

Ends with agency. Whatever they name, act on it visibly or explain why not.

Conversation Notes

One page per person. Copy as needed — every team member deserves this hour.

Name _____ Date _____

Energy comes from _____

Energy drains _____

Best thinking hours _____

Recovery looks like _____

The one change they named _____

MY FOLLOW-UP WITHIN TWO WEEKS _____

Name _____ Date _____

Energy comes from _____

Energy drains _____

Best thinking hours _____

Recovery looks like _____

The one change they named _____

MY FOLLOW-UP WITHIN TWO WEEKS _____

Action Steps

A question you act on builds trust. A question you file away spends it.

START

One thing I will begin doing

STOP

One thing I will let go of

CONTINUE

One thing that's working and deserves protection

PART SEVEN

The Team Discussion Guide

For leadership teams and book clubs reading Vital Work together. One session or several — the questions scale.

“A book discussed changes a team. A book merely read changes a bookshelf.”

Discussion Questions

Choose four to six per session. Depth beats coverage.

01 Which idea in Vital Work challenged your thinking the most — and why did it land?

02 Which biological principle would be easiest for us to implement this month?

03 Where is our workplace actively fighting human biology right now?

04 If we changed one shared habit tomorrow, what would create the biggest impact?

05 How can leaders here model healthier performance without announcing it?

06 What would a visitor conclude about our values just from watching our calendars?

07 Where do we reward busyness over outcomes — and what does it cost us?

08 What's one thing this team does well that we should protect at all costs?

From Discussion to Decision

End every session by writing, not just talking.

The one idea this group keeps returning to

One experiment we'll run before the next session

Who owns it, and how will we know it worked?

"People don't fail first. Systems do."

PART EIGHT

The 30-Day Vital Work Challenge

One month, four moves: observe, improve, protect, lead. Small scope, visible follow-through.

“Four weeks is long enough to change a habit and short enough to keep a promise.”

The Four Weeks

WEEK ONE

Observe

Change nothing yet. Track your energy, your meetings, and your interruptions. Ask your team the five questions.

Goal: an honest picture of how work actually happens here.

WEEK TWO

Improve

Fix the two cheapest, most obvious drains from week one — a meeting shortened, a notification silenced, a deadline moved off Friday night.

Goal: visible proof that things can change quickly.

WEEK THREE

Protect

Establish one shared deep-work block and one visible recovery norm. Defend both personally when they're tested.

Goal: the new rhythm survives its first busy week.

WEEK FOUR

Lead

Name what changed, thank the people who changed it, and decide what becomes permanent. Put it in writing.

Goal: momentum converts into standard practice.

Weekly Plan & Reflection

Copy this page for each of the four weeks.

Week _____ Theme _____

This week's goal

Three concrete actions

What I noticed

What we'll carry into next week

Weekly Team Check-In

Five minutes at the start of one meeting. Averages matter less than trends.

Team energy

1

10

Team focus

1

10

Team stress

1

10

Team recovery

1

10

Wins this week

Challenges we hit

One thing we'll improve next week

PART NINE

The 90-Day Team Transformation

Three months, three phases. Awareness becomes implementation;
implementation becomes the new normal.

“Culture is what you repeat after the enthusiasm wears off.”

Three Months, Three Phases



MONTH ONE

Awareness

Run the assessments and audits in this workbook. Hold the five-question conversations. Share what you learn openly — including what reflects on you.

What will we learn? _____



MONTH TWO

Implementation

Change the calendar: deep-work blocks, meeting reform, visible recovery. Expect friction in week two; that's the old culture defending itself.

What habits will change? _____



MONTH THREE

Optimization

Keep what worked, cut what didn't, and write the survivors into how the team operates — onboarding, norms, and your own weekly rhythm.

What becomes our new normal? _____

Milestones & Measures

Decide now how you'll know it worked. Vague goals produce vague quarters.

BY DAY 90, SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

The two numbers we'll track (e.g., meeting hours per person, vitality score)

Our check-in dates — day 30, day 60, day 90

Who else needs to be part of this for it to stick?

Action Steps

A roadmap only counts once the first mile is scheduled.

START

One thing I will begin doing

STOP

One thing I will let go of

CONTINUE

One thing that's working and deserves protection

PART TEN

Commitments & Team Charter

Make it personal, make it shared, and make it visible.

“A commitment in writing survives a busy quarter. A commitment in memory rarely does.”

My Leadership Commitment

Complete the sentence honestly. Specific beats sweeping.

As a leader, I commit to...

Signature _____

Date _____

The person I'll ask to hold me to this

How I want them to call it out when I slip

Our Team Charter

Read aloud, discussed, and signed together.

Together, we will...

- Prioritize recovery — and take it where others can see it.
- Respect focus time as we would any other meeting.
- Move more, sit less, and never apologize for a walking call.
- Meet with intention: an owner, an agenda, an end.
- Communicate clearly, in daylight hours, without false urgency.
- Support one another before performance becomes a problem.
- Celebrate progress out loud.

TEAM SIGNATURES

PART ELEVEN

The Monthly Review

Thirty minutes, once a month, protects everything you've built in the last ninety days.

“What gets reviewed gets repeated.”

This Month in Review

Month of _____

What improved?

What surprised us?

Which habits stuck?

Where do we still struggle?

What will we improve next month?

The Vital Signs

Score the month, then compare with last month. Trends, not verdicts.

Energy	110
Meetings	110
Communication	110
Recovery	110
Focus time	110
Overall momentum	110

“Health is the new hustle.”

PART TWELVE

The Executive Team Workshop

A complete 90-minute session your leadership team could run tomorrow. No consultant required.

“The best strategy session your team will have this year might be about how you work, not what you work on.”

The 90-Minute Agenda

One facilitator, six to ten leaders, phones away, one flip chart or shared doc.

0:00

10 min

Opening: the energy problem

Facilitator frames the premise: we're not here to work harder — we're here to redesign how work uses our people's energy.

0:10

15 min

Individual scorecards

Everyone completes the Vitality Scorecard from Part Two in silence. No discussion yet.

0:25

20 min

Compare and surface

Go around: each person shares their lowest-scoring statement and one story behind it. Facilitator lists themes.

0:45

20 min

The energy audit

In pairs, complete the Builders and Drains page from Part Three for the whole organization. Reconvene; combine into one shared list.

1:05

15 min

Choose two

As a group, choose exactly two drains to eliminate and one builder to invest in over the next 30 days. Fewer, done fully, beats many, half-done.

1:20

10 min

Commitments and close

Each leader states one personal Start / Stop / Continue aloud. Schedule the 30-day follow-up before leaving the room.

Facilitator Notes

Your job is honesty and forward motion — not consensus on everything.

Go first, and go honestly.

Share your own lowest score before asking anyone else to. The candor ceiling of the room is set by the most senior person in it.

Protect the quiet voices.

After each theme, ask directly: “Who sees this differently?” The most useful data often arrives last and reluctantly.

Ban solutions until 1:05.

Leaders leap to fixes. Park them visibly on a list and return at the decision step — premature solving shuts down the diagnosis.

Watch for the flinch.

When a sacred meeting or an after-hours habit is named, the room will flinch. That flinch marks your highest-leverage change.

End with dates, not intentions.

The session succeeds only if the follow-up is scheduled before anyone stands up.

Decision Worksheet

Complete as a group at the 1:05 mark. This page is the output of the session.

THE TWO DRAINS WE WILL ELIMINATE IN 30 DAYS

1.

Owner
2.

Owner

THE ONE ENERGY BUILDER WE WILL INVEST IN

Owner

FOLLOW-UP

30-day review date

Facilitator

How we'll share outcomes with the wider team

VITAL WORK

Lead the way you want them to work.

You now have what most leaders never take the time to build:
an honest assessment, a redesigned week, a team that has been
asked the right questions — and a plan with dates attached.

*The organizations that win the next decade won't be the ones
that extract the most hours. They'll be the ones that design
work their people can sustain — and love.*

Thank you for preordering Vital Work.

Work with your biology. Perform at your best.