

# Metacognitive Skills at Work

Improve How People **Manage Themselves** to Drive Performance, Relationships and Wellbeing

A practical, evidence-based session for building metacognitive skills that create real impact at work.



90 MINUTES



#### AUDIENCE

Managers, leaders, professionals and teams who want to improve performance, relationships and wellbeing at work.



#### PURPOSE

Understand and apply metacognitive skills to manage attention, emotions, thinking, behaviour and motivation—at work.



#### FORMAT

Interactive presentation, practical tools, real-world examples and discussion.



#### OUTCOME

Participants leave with practical skills and a clear plan to use them in their everyday work.



*Better self-management. Better impact. Better workplace.*

Keep it simple and grounded

→ this is not theory-heavy, it's practical

Position the session:

→ “This session is about one thing — improving how people manage themselves at work”

Clarify scope:

- not stress management
- not wellbeing programmes
- not adding more tools

→ it's about **building a core skill**

Briefly define what that means:

- managing attention
- managing reactions
- managing thinking under pressure

Set expectation:

→ “We'll look at how this actually works as a skill, and how it shows up in day-to-day work”

Reassure:

→ no jargon, no theory for the sake of it  
→ everything ties back to real situations

Close intro:

→ “If people get better at this, you'll see it immediately — in decisions, behaviour, and performance”

[Meta-Awareness Vs Meta-Cognition](#)

**Meta-awareness is noticing.**

**Metacognition is doing something with what you notice.**

# 1

## The Problem

The issue isn't just workload —  
it's how people respond under pressure.

People get stuck in:



### Unhelpful thinking

Negative loops,  
worst-case thinking,  
self-criticism



### Reactive patterns

Emotional reactions,  
impulsive responses,  
snap, withdraw, avoid



### Attention drift

Easily distracted,  
mental drift,  
hard to refocus



These patterns drain energy, reduce clarity,  
and get in the way of doing good work.

## The problem: Mental patterns slowing progress

- Start grounded: everyone is busy — that's not new
- The issue is **how people respond internally under pressure**
- Walk the three patterns:
  - Unhelpful thinking → overthinking, worst-case, self-criticism
  - Reactive patterns → snap, withdraw, avoid
  - Attention drift → losing focus, constant switching
- Make it real:
  - shows up in meetings, decisions, follow-through
- Impact:
  - drains energy
  - reduces clarity
  - affects performance and relationships
- Transition:
  - “This is where metacognition comes in — the ability to manage these patterns in real time”

## 2

# Reframing Wellbeing

Wellbeing isn't just about reducing stress.

**It's about how people manage their internal state at work.**



### Traditional view

Focus on what's happening **to** people:

- Stress
- Burnout
- Workload
- External pressures



### Our focus

Focus on what people **can** influence:

- Thinking
- Attention
- Emotions
- Reactions and behaviours



**When people manage their internal state well,  
they perform better, relate better and feel better.**

## Slide 2 (Reframing Wellbeing)

- Shift the conversation:
  - from fixing stress
  - to building capability
- Make it practical:
  - we can't always change workload or environment
  - but people can change how they respond
- Emphasise control:
  - thinking
  - attention
  - emotions
  - reactions
- Link to outcomes:
  - when people manage these well
    - performance improves
    - relationships improve
    - wellbeing improves
- Position the idea:
  - "This is about strengthening what people can influence day-to-day at work"

# 3

## What is Metacognition

The ability to **monitor** and **control** thinking, attention, and emotion.



### Monitor

Notice what's happening inside in real time.



### Control

Adjust your thinking, attention, and emotions on purpose.



### Improve

Choose responses that support your goals.



Metacognition is a **trainable skill**, not just awareness.

### Slide 3 (What is Metacognition)

- Keep it simple — don't over-explain
- It's not abstract:
  - it's what people are already doing, just not deliberately
- Emphasise the three parts:
  - **Monitor** → noticing what's going on (thoughts, emotions, focus)
  - **Control** → adjusting it in real time
  - **Improve** → choosing better responses aligned to goals
- Make it real:
  - in meetings → noticing reaction before speaking
  - in work → catching distraction and refocusing
  - in pressure → managing emotional response
- Key point to land:
  - this is not awareness alone
  - **it's a skill that can be trained and improved**
- Transition:
  - "So if it's a skill, the next question is — how does that skill actually develop?"

Note: Too advanced but worth noting (from Kahneman)

### 2. There are two levels of cognition

- **Object level** → doing the task (e.g. solving a problem, driving, working)
- **Meta level** → managing your internal state (e.g. focus, emotions, thinking)

- Meta level = internal goals (how you think/feel while doing it)

### **3. Two types of metacognition**

#### **Type 1 (automatic / fast)**

- Gut feelings (“I know this”, “something feels off”)
- Not really trainable

#### **Type 2 (deliberate / slow)**

- Strategies, instructions, conscious control
- Example: reframing a situation, focusing attention
- **This is what gets trained into skill**

# 4

## Two Levels of Work

High performance depends on **both**.



### Slide 4 (Two Levels of Work)

- This is a simple but important distinction
- Everyone focuses on:
  - **doing the job**
    - tasks
    - outputs
    - delivery
- But there's a second layer:
  - **how you do the job**
    - focus
    - reactions
    - emotions
- Make it real:
  - two people can have the same role
  - same workload
  - very different experience and results
- Why?
  - one manages their internal state better
- Key point:
  - performance is not just about capability
  - it's about **how you manage yourself while working**
- Link back to metacognition:
  - this second layer is exactly what we're training
- Transition:
  - "So if this matters, what difference does it actually make in practice?"

**Note:** Opens the door to Job Crafting thinking

# 5

## Why It Matters (Business)

Stronger self-management drives **better results** for individuals and the organisation.



### Better decisions under pressure

Clearer thinking leads to smarter choices when it matters most.



### Less reactivity

Respond thoughtfully instead of reacting automatically.



### Faster recovery

Bounce back quicker from setbacks, stress, and challenges.



### More consistent performance

Sustain focus, energy, and results over time — not just in spurts.



When people manage themselves well, teams perform better — and so does the **business**.

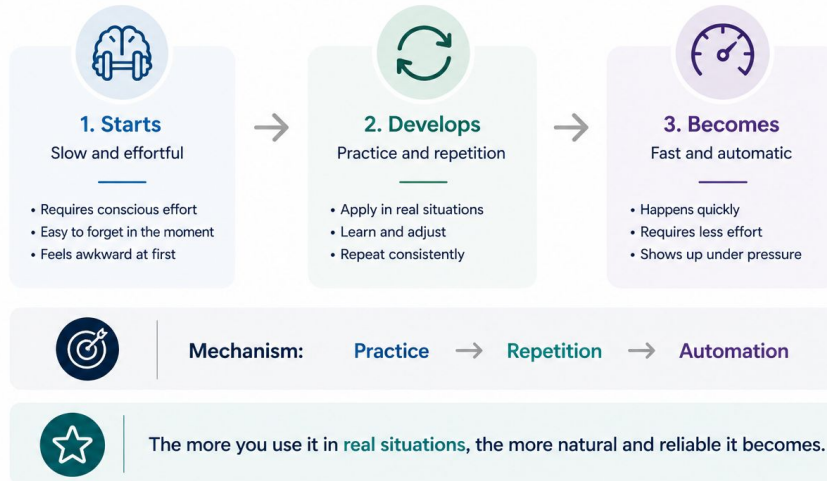
### Slide 5 (Why It Matters – Business)

- Keep this grounded — no theory here
- This is the **business case**, not wellbeing language
- Start with decisions:
  - under pressure, thinking degrades
  - better self-management → **clearer decisions when it matters**
- **Reactivity:**
  - **most workplace issues come from reactions, not intent**
  - **this reduces:**
    - **conflict**
    - **poor communication**
    - **escalation**
- **Recovery (resilience):**
  - **people will get stressed — that's normal**
  - **the difference is:**
    - **how quickly they recover and reset**
- **Consistency:**
  - **not about peak performance**
  - **about showing up well, repeatedly**
- **Land the point:**
  - “This isn’t abstract — it directly affects how people think, act, and perform day-to-day”
- **Optional close line:**
  - “When people manage themselves better, the quality of work improves”

# 6

## How the Skill Develops

Like any skill, metacognition develops with practice.  
It starts slow and effortful, then becomes fast and automatic.



### Slide 6 (How the Skill Develops)

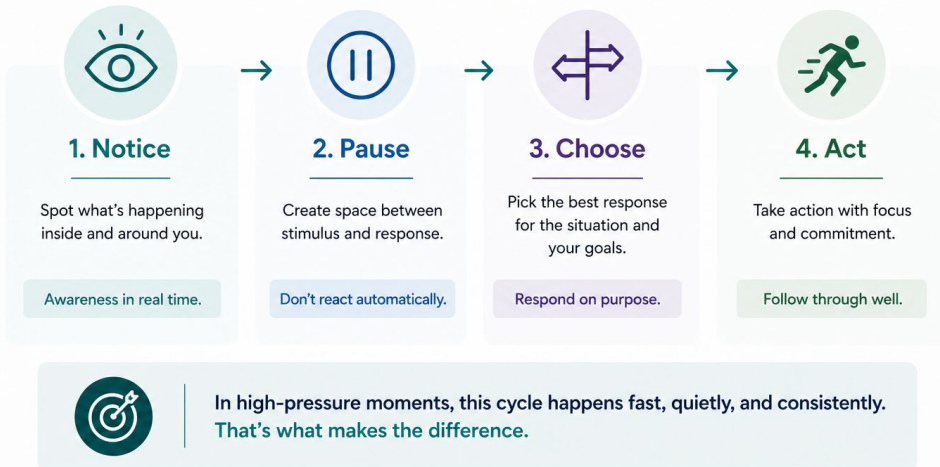
- Keep this grounded — everyone understands skill development  
→ driving, sport, learning anything
- Walk the progression:
  - early stage → slow, effortful, easy to forget
  - with use → faster, more reliable
  - later → automatic, low effort
- Emphasise the mechanism:  
→ **practice** → **repetition** → **automation**
- Make the key point:  
→ this is not about learning more techniques  
→ it's about **using the same ones repeatedly in real situations**
- Link to work:
  - meetings
  - pressure moments
  - everyday interactions
- Important insight:  
→ as it becomes automatic:
  - less mental effort
  - faster response
  - more flexibility
- Close the idea:  
→ “This is how people move from knowing what to do... to actually doing it under pressure”

**Note:** Leads into Deliberate Practice and Peak Performance

# 7

## What Good Looks Like

Metacognition in action is a simple cycle.  
Done quickly and reliably — even under pressure.



### Slide 7 (What Good Looks Like)

- Keep it simple — don't over-explain the model
- This is the **core loop in action**:
  - Notice → Pause → Choose → Act
- Emphasise:
  - not a checklist
  - not step-by-step thinking
  - it happens **quickly and almost automatically**
- Link to skill:
  - this is what gets trained over time
  - starts slow, becomes fast and effortless
- Make it real:
  - in a meeting → notice reaction, pause, respond differently
  - under pressure → less automatic reacting, more deliberate action
- Key point:
  - the difference is **speed + reliability under pressure**
- Land it:
  - "This is what we're trying to build — not knowledge, but this kind of response pattern"

# 8

## The Gap

The real challenge isn't learning the right things —  
it's **applying them** in real situations.



### Slide 8 (The Gap)

- Start blunt:
  - “The issue isn’t that people don’t know what to do”
- Call out reality:
  - people have read the books
  - done training
  - understand the concepts
- But:
  - in real moments → they don’t use it
  - they fall back into default reactions
- Make the gap clear:
  - **knowing vs doing**
- Use examples:
  - knows to pause → reacts anyway
  - knows to reframe → keeps looping
  - knows to focus → gets distracted
- Land the key point:
  - knowledge isn’t the problem
  - **application is**
- Final line before transition:
  - “So the question becomes — what actually helps people apply this in real situations?”

# 9

## What Actually Trains It

Skill doesn't come from learning more.

It comes from using simple strategies in real situations — repeatedly.



### 1 Use simple strategies

- Keep it simple
- Use proven strategies (e.g., pause, reframe, refocus)



### 2 Apply in real situations

- In meetings, under pressure, in everyday work
- Not in theory — in context



### 3 Repeat → becomes automatic

- Repetition builds familiarity
- Familiarity builds speed
- Speed builds automaticity



This is how declarative knowledge becomes procedural.

Practice → Repetition → Automation



Most people stop at learning.  
Real change requires real-world repetition.

### Speaker Notes

- Start blunt:
  - learning more techniques is not the answer
- Core idea:
  - **skill = using simple strategies repeatedly in real situations**
- Walk the three parts:
  - Use simple strategies → keep it basic (pause, reframe, refocus)
  - Apply in real situations → meetings, pressure, everyday work
  - Repeat → this is what builds automaticity
- Emphasise:
  - this is how declarative knowledge becomes procedural
- Make the failure point clear:
  - most people stop at learning, not applying
- Land the point:
  - “There is no magic technique — just repeated use until it becomes automatic”
- Transition:
  - “So what are the main areas people actually train?”

# 10

## Core Training Areas

These are the main evidence-based areas people train to strengthen emotional self-regulation.



## Slide 10 (Core Training Areas)

- Keep this high-level — don't turn it into a lecture
- Point:
  - there's no single technique
  - these are **families of approaches that train the same underlying skill**
- Walk quickly:
  - **CBT** → structured thinking and behaviour change
  - **Mindfulness** → awareness and attention control (Ref: Goldstein 229)
  - **Reappraisal** → changing meaning of situations
  - **Attention training** → directing and sustaining focus
- Then add:
  - **If-Then rules** → make behaviour automatic
  - **Behavioural activation** → act rather than overthink
  - **Physiological regulation** → calm the system (breathing etc.)
- Key point:
  - different methods, same goal
  - **improving control over thinking, attention, and emotion**
- Land it:
  - "We're not short of techniques — the issue is using them consistently"

# 11

## Practical Examples

Three simple tools you can use in real situations.



### Reappraisal

Change the meaning to change how you feel.

#### STEPS

- 1 Ask: "What else could this mean?"
- 2 Generate 2 alternative interpretations.
- 3 Pick the least negative / most useful.
- 4 Act from that version.

#### EXAMPLE



Someone gives critical feedback.  
→ Maybe they're trying to help me improve, not attack me.

#### USE WHEN

Emotions are rising because of how you're interpreting a situation.



### If-Then

Pre-decide your response to a trigger.

#### STEPS

- 1 Define trigger: "If X happens..."
- 2 Define action: "...then I will Y."
- 3 Rehearse once mentally.
- 4 Execute when triggered.

#### EXAMPLE



If I feel stress before a meeting, then I will take 3 slow breaths and focus on one objective.

#### USE WHEN

The situation is predictable and you want an automatic response.



### Attention reset

Break the loop and return to what matters.

#### STEPS

- 1 Notice: "Looping."
- 2 Pick a single anchor (breath / sound / task).
- 3 Hold focus for 10–20 seconds.
- 4 If distracted → restart.

#### EXAMPLE



Mind keeps replaying?  
Focus on your breath for 15 seconds, then continue.

#### USE WHEN

Your mind is stuck in rumination, worry, or distraction.



Use these tools repeatedly in real situations. Over time, they become automatic.

## Slide 11 (Practical Examples)

- Keep this tight — just make it concrete
- Pick 3:
  - **Reappraisal** → "What else could this mean?"
  - **If-Then** → "If X happens, I do Y"
  - **Attention reset** → notice drift, bring it back
- Emphasise:
  - these are **simple on purpose**
  - the value comes from **repetition in real situations**
- Make the contrast:
  - knowing them ≠ using them
  - using them once ≠ building the skill
- Key point:
  - "These are just entry points — the skill is applying them under pressure"
- Transition:
  - "So where does this actually show up in day-to-day work?"

# 12

## Where This Shows Up

Metacognitive skills influence everything you do.  
They show up across all core areas of your daily life.

	<b>Attention</b> → focus / distraction	You choose where to place your attention.	→	Stay focused on the task or pull yourself back from distractions.
	<b>Emotion</b> → reactions	You manage emotional reactions, not just feel them.	→	Respond calmly instead of reacting impulsively.
	<b>Thinking</b> → decisions	You guide your thoughts and evaluate options.	→	Make clearer, more rational decisions.
	<b>Behaviour</b> → action	You choose behaviours that align with your goals.	→	Take consistent action instead of defaulting.
	<b>Motivation</b> → follow-through	You regulate drive and stay committed.	→	Keep going even when it's hard or boring.



When you train your metacognition, all five areas get stronger. **That's how real change happens.**

### Slide 12 (Where This Shows Up)

- Keep it practical — this is the “day-to-day” slide
- Walk each one quickly:
  - **Attention** → **focus / distraction**  
→ staying on task, recovering when distracted
  - **Emotion** → **reactions**  
→ how people respond under pressure, not just what they feel
  - **Thinking** → **decisions**  
→ clearer thinking, less bias, better judgement
  - **Behaviour** → **action**  
→ starting, following through, not avoiding
  - **Motivation** → **follow-through**  
→ persistence, staying with things when they get difficult
- Emphasise:  
→ this cuts across everything people do at work
- Key point:  
→ “It’s not one area — it’s how people operate across all areas”

# 13

## What People Actually Do Differently

Metacognitive skills change how you think, feel, and act every day.



### Adjust how they approach tasks

They plan better, focus intentionally, and adapt strategies when needed.



**Example:** Switch from rushing to prioritising and blocking time.



### Respond differently to others

They manage emotions, listen better, and choose more helpful responses.



**Example:** Pause before reacting and respond with empathy.



### Interpret situations differently

They reframe setbacks, see opportunities, and stay perspective.



**Example:** See feedback as a chance to improve, not a threat.



Often referred to as **job crafting**.

### Slide 13 (What People Actually Do Differently)

- Keep it grounded — avoid theory
- Point:
  - this isn't abstract
  - it shows up in small, everyday differences
- Walk the three:
  - **Adjust how they approach tasks**
    - break work down, start quicker, avoid overthinking
  - **Respond differently to others**
    - less reactive, more measured, ask rather than react
  - **Interpret situations differently**
    - don't jump to worst-case, reframe more quickly
- Emphasise:
  - same environment, different response
- Optional line:
  - "Some people refer to this as job crafting" (don't dwell on it)
- Key point:
  - these small shifts compound over time

[Job Crafting deck](#)

# 14

## Organisational Impact

When people strengthen their metacognitive skills, the entire organisation benefits.



### Better performance

- People make clearer decisions.
- They focus on what matters most.
- They deliver higher quality results.
- Consistency and reliability improve.



### Better relationships

- People communicate more effectively.
- They respond, not react.
- Trust and collaboration increase.
- Conflicts are managed constructively.



### Faster learning

- People reflect and adapt more quickly.
- They apply feedback better.
- Mistakes become learning opportunities.
- Skills grow faster and stick.



### Lower stress

- People regulate emotions more effectively.
- They stay calmer under pressure.
- Burnout risk decreases.
- Wellbeing and resilience improve.



Stronger metacognitive skills create a **high-performing, adaptive, and resilient** organisation.

### Slide 14 (Organisational Impact)

- Move from individual → organisation
- Point:
  - when enough people do this, it scales
- Walk the outcomes:
  - **Better performance**
    - more consistent execution
  - **Better relationships**
    - less friction, fewer reactive exchanges
  - **Faster learning**
    - people adapt and improve quicker
  - **Lower stress**
    - better regulation, faster recovery
- Emphasise:
  - this isn't a wellbeing "add-on"
  - it directly affects how work gets done
- Land it:
  - "This is what sits underneath culture, performance, and wellbeing"

15

## Close

The role of wellbeing at work is not to fix people.  
It's to build their metacognitive skills.



**“You don’t improve wellbeing directly”**

Wellbeing is the outcome,  
not the intervention.



**“You improve how people manage themselves at work”**

Stronger metacognitive skills lead to  
better decisions, better relationships,  
better performance, and lower stress.



Our goal is simple:  
Build the skills that help people **thrive at work.**

### Slide 15 (Close)

- Keep this simple — don’t add anything new
- Re-anchor:
  - most wellbeing conversations focus on:
    - stress
    - burnout
    - workload
- Reframe:
  - this is about something deeper
- Land the two lines:
  - “You don’t improve wellbeing directly”
  - “You improve how people manage themselves at work”
- Pause after each — let it land
- Final point:
  - “If you improve that, wellbeing, performance, and relationships all move with it”