State of Mind:
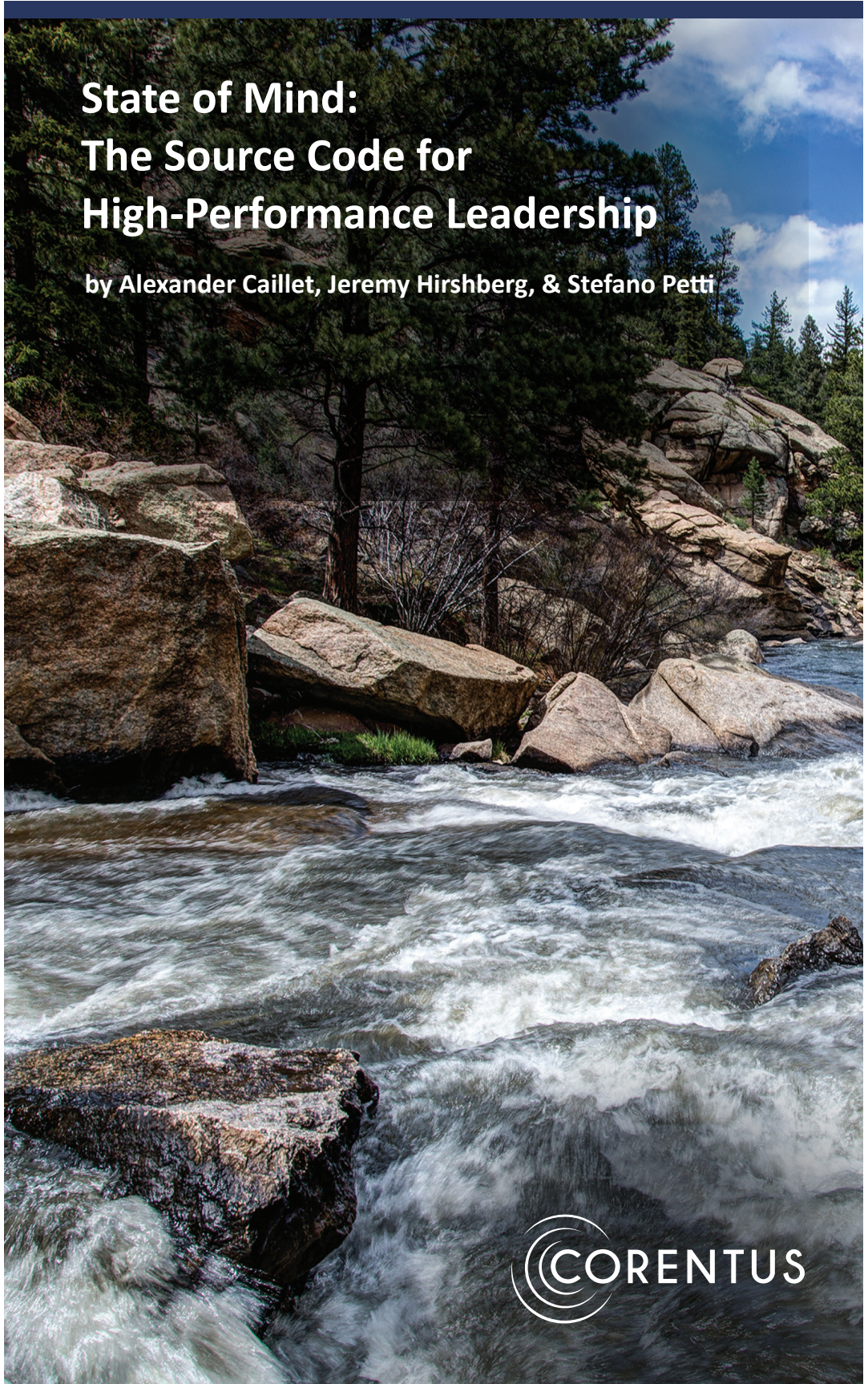# The Source Code for
High-Performance Leadership

by Alexander Caillet, Jeremy Hirshberg, & Stefano Petti

CORENTUS

> *"I believe that all organizations reflect the strengths and weaknesses of their leaders. And so the tone the leadership sets at the top soaks into the organization and becomes part of the culture. A CEO who runs around and yells at people is not a CEO in my mind and therefore loses some of the moral right to lead."*

—Jim Daniell, COO, Oxfam America

INTRODUCTION

Davida Fedeli is a former regional Vice President for Western Union. In 2011, her organization chose to move into new business lines through large-scale global acquisitions. Eager to support this strategic initiative, Davida joined the Integration Core Team as the HR representative for her region. It soon became apparent that the sheer scale of the required change, combined with the active involvement of many internal and external stakeholders, made this initiative extraordinarily complex. Adding to this complexity, many internal stakeholders had misunderstood the importance of the initiative and were not supporting the change in a meaningful or consistent way.

KEY INSIGHTS

- State of mind is defined as "our moment-to-moment experience of life as generated by our thinking and feelings."

- State of mind plays a significant role in leadership effectiveness, relationships, and performance.

- The most effective states of mind are calm, happy, and energized.

- The most ineffective states of mind are hopeless, angry, and depressed.

- Stress, anxiety, and frustration can be effective in the short term but are detrimental in the long term.

- In-the-moment state of mind shifts are best accomplished with an integrative approach that addresses physiology, thinking, and feeling.

As a result, Davida found her role on the Integration Core Team challenging, and her state of mind fluctuated widely. She recalls, *"During the project, I experienced many different states of mind—both high and low. Although most were high, there were a few low states of mind that I did experience often. These were frustration, anxiety, and even anger. The problem with these is that when I spent too much time in them, I was not effective, and I was not getting the results I wanted."*

We've spent more than two decades, across five continents, coaching and consulting to leaders like Davida who are experiencing intense professional challenges—from extreme competitive pressures to mismanaged mergers

and acquisitions. Throughout this work, we've observed a consistent link between leaders' states of mind and their effectiveness, relationships, and performance. In particular, we've repeatedly witnessed the positive impact of higher states of mind and the adverse impact of lower states of mind. These observations inspired us to conduct more systematic research to validate and explore the patterns that seemed to be emerging.

In the following pages, we clarify the concept of state of mind and examine its impact on leadership effectiveness, relationships, and performance. We share data from our recent *Global Leadership & State of Mind Study,* which provides evidence of this impact, and we share insights from executives who understand the importance of state of mind and observe its effects every day. We also discuss practical solutions for shifting state of mind.

WHAT IS STATE OF MIND?

We deliberately use the term *state of mind* in our work because of its unique connotations and the accessibility of the concept. Unlike *mood* (which is mainly used to refer to emotion) or *mental state* (mainly used to refer to cognition), the term *state of mind* can encompass both thinking and feelings. This is important because the phenomena we're looking at with leaders combine both emotional and cognitive aspects. At the same time, *state of mind* indicates a temporary condition, a *state*, that can change from moment to moment—unlike a more lasting *disposition* or *temperament*. What we observe, and what leaders report, is that patterns of thoughts and feelings can vary greatly even in a short period of time.

With these considerations in mind, our definition of state of mind is as follows:

Our moment-to-moment experience of life as generated by our thinking and feelings

Some leaders add their own spin on the concept. Megan Griffault, Global HR Director for FMC Corporation, describes state of mind as *"the headspace that you are in at any given moment."* Davide Paganoni, Director of Worldwide Learning & Development at Gucci, refers to it as *"an ensemble of thoughts and emotions and feelings linked to a specific moment."* Most of our clients are quick to grasp this idea and recognize its relevance to their leadership challenges.
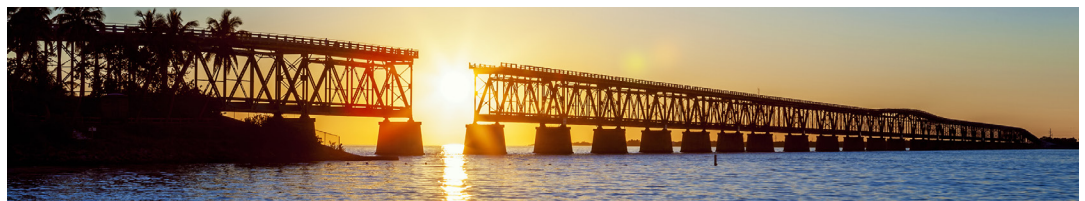
STATE OF MIND PATTERNS & IMPACT: CLIENT APPLICATIONS

After several years of using the state of mind concept with our clients, we began to apply it in a more structured way. Beginning in 2003, in our consulting, coaching, facilitation, and training work, we started using two simple exercises: the State of Mind Chart and State of Mind Impact Chart. To date, we have run these exercises with more than 1,400 professionals. These professionals hail from organizations in more than 40 countries, including businesses of all sizes across multiple industries; universities and other academic settings; nonprofits and NGOs; and government agencies.

STATE OF MIND CHART

In the first exercise, we introduce the State of Mind Chart (see Figure 1). We orient participants to the basic structure of the chart:

Figure 1: Blank State of Mind Chart

- Each row corresponds to a level of state of mind.
- The dark line in the middle is called the "neutral line."
- The rows labeled +1, +2, and +3 are described as being "above the line."
- The rows labeled -1, -2, and -3 are "below the line."

(Note that we use the terms *plus* and *minus* rather than *positive* and *negative*, so +1 is "plus one" and -2 is "minus two.")

We then ask participants to identify descriptive words corresponding to each row of the chart, starting at the bottom (-3) and moving up. After transcribing those words, we end up with a completed chart resembling Figure 2.

There are no right or wrong answers in this exercise. Among the 1,400 participants we tracked, more than 260 words were used across the six levels, with the 18 words displayed in Figure 2 showing up most frequently.

Figure 2: Sample Completed State of Mind Chart

Following this exercise, we ask participants to reflect on their experience with different state of mind levels. In particular, we ask about the range of levels they have experienced and the frequency with which their state of mind shifts. These discussions consistently reveal four key insights:

- **State of mind is variable.** Participants report that they've experienced various levels of state of mind, with most having experienced each of the six levels at some point in their lives.

- **Everyone experiences lower states of mind.** Participant feedback confirms that we all dip below the line from time to time; this is part of life for all human beings.

- **States of mind influence how we see the world.** The same circumstances may look vastly different from a +2 versus a −2 state of mind.

- **State of mind can shift frequently.** Many participants report moving up and down through the levels within short periods of time—sometimes within hours or even minutes.

STATE OF MIND IMPACT CHART

The second exercise, the State of Mind Impact Chart, examines the impact of state of mind on specific aspects of individual or group functioning. Participants select a domain that interests them, such as decision making, strategic planning, or conflict resolution. They then consider how that domain is affected by six states of mind—one from each level of the State of Mind Chart they created in the first exercise. See Figure 3 for a completed State of Mind Impact Chart focused on decision making, generated by one of our clients.

Again, we follow the exercise with a discussion, which tends to yield a consistent set of insights. Participant reports confirm the following:

- **Levels +1 and +2** tend to have a positive impact. However, since a +1 state of mind may have lower intensity than a +2 state of mind, it can be less desirable for situations that require higher energy.

- **Level +3** often has a positive impact but can sometimes have undesirable effects (such as "overambitious decisions" in Figure 3).

- **Level -1**, while bearable, can have adverse effects.

- **Levels -2 and -3** tend to have significant adverse effects.

Some of the top leaders we've worked with shared similar insights regarding the impact of state of mind on leadership performance. (See sidebar on next page.)

DOMAIN: DECISION MAKING		
+3	Passionate	High energy ● Quick decision making ● Overambitious decisions
+2	Engaged	Focused attention ● Collaboration ● Thoughtful decisions
+1	Content	Exploratory conversations ● Patience ● Balanced participation
-1	Tired	Lack of engagement ● Impatience ● Snap decision
-2	Worried	Hesitation and hedging ● Reactivity ● Heavy risk mitigation
-3	Despair	Decision avoidance ● Fear of failure ● Abdication of power

Figure 3: Sample Completed State of Mind Impact Chart

"My job is external, talking to donors, talking publicly, standing up in front of groups. And when I am happy, when I am feeling really good, it always comes off the best. I don't need scripts or talking points; the words just come out. It really comes from the heart when I am feeling good like that. And I don't think I'm very effective when I'm angry because it takes so much energy, and I tend to be less understanding when I am angry, so I don't get a full picture of what the problem is. I just get so mad I have to walk away from it."

(Karen Nelson, CEO, Planned Parenthood of Western New York)

"I would say that I'm most effective when I am energized and content. I think that state of mind puts me in a place where I can respond more thoughtfully to the people I work with."

(Megan Griffault, Global HR Director, FMC Corporation)

"When you are in a positive mood, it is easier to transmit your vision and the outcomes. The visionary has to be energized in order to ensure that people are aligned."

(Philippe Barrois, CEO, Novartis France)

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP & STATE OF MIND STUDY

Intrigued by the patterns we observed in our client reports on state of mind—both in our two exercises and in other coaching and consulting conversations—we wished to find more solid evidence of a link between state of mind and leadership effectiveness, relationships, and performance. To that end, in the summer of 2012, we launched a global study. We developed both an online survey and a structured interview protocol. The survey and the interviews focused on:

1. **Levels of Awareness:** How aware leaders are of their states of mind

2. **Frequency of Experience:** How frequently leaders experience each of the 18 most commonly identified states of mind

3. **Ease of Shifting:** How easy or difficult it is for leaders to shift out of these states of mind

4. **Impact on Leadership:** How each state of mind affects leadership effectiveness, performance, and interactions with others

5. **Impact on Results:** How each state of mind affects the achievement of specific performance goals

6. **Managing States of Mind:** Which approaches, methods, and techniques leaders use to manage their states of mind

We administered the survey during 2013 and reached out to more than 2,000 leaders across the globe. By mid-2014, we had received more than 740 responses from leaders in 44 countries. The respondents hail from businesses of all sizes and from multiple industries; universities and academic settings; nonprofits and NGOs; and government institutions. Their leadership roles range from front-line manager to CEO. In the following sections, we share the survey data along with selected findings and quotations from the interviews.

1. LEVELS OF AWARENESS

The survey asked leaders to report their awareness of their states of mind in general and individual states of mind specifically. The data show the following:

- 97% of leaders said they *agree* (47%) or *strongly agree* (51%) that they are **aware of their general state of mind.**

- 71% said they *agree* (45%) or *strongly agree* (26%) that they are **aware of the specific state of mind they are in.**

- 78% said they *agree* (52%) or *strongly agree* (26%) that they can **identify what triggers their states of mind.**

- 88% said they *agree* (49%) or *strongly agree* (39%) that they are **aware of how often they change their states of mind.**

- 66% said they *agree* (48%) or *strongly agree* (18%) that they can **shift their states of mind.**

In our interviews, leaders emphasized two related points:

1. **Below-the-line states of mind may be more challenging to notice.**
   "When you're stressed and frustrated, it is much harder to see the state of mind you are in." (Jim Daniell)

2. **Successful leadership requires both awareness of state of mind and the ability to shift it.**
   "Who can say 'I've never been angry in my life'? Probably no one. The importance is to realize when you are angry and that it is not worth it. It is what you do to shift and the speed of shifting out of anger that will produce good results." (Davida Fedeli)

2. FREQUENCY OF EXPERIENCE

Leaders also reported how frequently they experienced each of the 18 most commonly identified states of mind. Table 1 shows the percentage of leaders who reported experiencing each state of mind *often* or *regularly*:

Level	State of Mind	% Often or Regularly
+3	Ecstatic	14%
	Elated	24%
	Euphoric	14%
+2	Happy	73%
	Excited	59%
	Energized	79%
+1	Content	63%
	Calm	65%
	Satisfied	67%

Level	State of Mind	% Often or Regularly
-1	Anxious	25%
	Tired	35%
	Stressed	42%
-2	Frustrated	29%
	Disappointed	18%
	Angry	7%
-3	Depressed	4%
	Hopeless	5%
	Desperate	4%

Table 1: Frequency of Experience

Several findings stand out from this data:

- The states of mind reported by the most leaders as occurring *often* or *regularly* were the +2 states of *energized* (75%) and *happy* (73%).

- All of the other +1 and +2 states of mind were reported as occurring *often* or *regularly* by at least 59% of respondents (59% *excited*; 63% *content*; 65% *calm*; 67% *satisfied*).

- The below-the-line states of mind reported by the most leaders as occurring *often* or *regularly* were *stressed* (42%) and *tired* (35%), followed by *frustrated* (29%) and *anxious* (25%).

- The states of mind reported by the fewest leaders as occurring *often* or *regularly* were the -3 states of *depressed* (4%), *desperate* (4%), and *hopeless* (5%), followed by the -2 state of *angry* (7%).

- The above-the-line states of mind reported by the fewest leaders as occurring *often* or *regularly* were the +3 states of *ecstatic* (14%) and *euphoric* (14%).

3. EASE OF SHIFTING

Leaders reported the degree of ease or difficulty they experience in shifting out of each of these 18 states of mind. Table 2 shows the percentage of leaders who said that shifting out of a particular state of mind was difficult or very difficult:

Level	State of Mind	% 'Difficult' or 'Very Difficult'
+3	Ecstatic	21%
+3	Elated	19%
+3	Euphoric	22%
+2	Happy	30%
+2	Excited	28%
+2	Energized	35%
+1	Content	29%
+1	Calm	28%
+1	Satisfied	30%

Level	State of Mind	% 'Difficult' or 'Very Difficult'
-3	Anxious	72%
-3	Tired	67%
-3	Stressed	70%
-2	Frustrated	66%
-2	Disappointed	58%
-2	Angry	62%
-1	Depressed	65%
-1	Hopeless	54%
-1	Desperate	58%

Table 2: Ease of Shifting

Notable findings from this data include the following:

- Not surprisingly, leaders reported having significantly more difficulty shifting out of lower vs. higher states of mind.

- The states of mind reported as most difficult to shift out of were *anxious* (72%), *stressed* (70%), *tired* (67%), *frustrated* (66%), and *depressed* (65%).

- The above-the-line state of mind reported as most difficult to shift out of was *energized* (35%).

In the interviews, leaders also discussed the impact of organizational environments where lower states of mind are prevalent. As one senior manager from a leading government contractor commented, *"It is so challenging to be upbeat when everywhere I look, the mood is so damn low."*

4. IMPACT ON LEADERSHIP

Leaders reported the impact of the 18 common states of mind in three areas: effectiveness, performance, and relationships[1]. Table 3 shows the following indicators:

State of Mind	Effectiveness	Performance	Relationships
Calm	⬆ 92%	⬆ 86%	⬆ 90%
Happy	⬆ 94%	⬆ 87%	⬆ 96%
Energized	⬆ 98%	⬆ 96%	⬆ 97%
Stressed	⬇ 55%	⬇ 53%	⬇ 54%
Tired	⬇ 66%	⬇ 68%	⬇ 65%
Anxious	⬇ 61%	⬇ 63%	⬇ 62%
Frustrated	⬇ 64%	⬇ 67%	⬇ 65%
Hopeless	⬇ 69%	⬇ 80%	⬇ 68%
Angry	⬇ 74%	⬇ 74%	⬇ 75%
Depressed	⬇ 74%	⬇ 76%	⬇ 70%

Table 3: State of Mind Impact Findings

⬆ = Majority reported a beneficial impact

⬇ = Majority reported an adverse impact; no significant benefits noted

⬇ = Majority reported an adverse impact; however, short-term positive impact on effectiveness and performance was reported as well

⬆ % = Percentage of respondents who reported the state of mind as having a beneficial effect

⬇ or ⬇ % = Percentage of respondents who reported the state of mind as having an adverse effect

[1] *Note: The survey referred to "quality of interactions," rather than "relationships." Throughout this article, we use "relationships" as a stand-in for that longer phrase.*

The following sections highlight noteworthy elements of this data.

CALM, HAPPY, & ENERGIZED (CHE)

An overwhelming majority (86–98%) of leaders identified *calm*, *happy*, and *energized* states of mind as having a beneficial impact on effectiveness, performance, and relationships. Across all three areas of functioning, energized was cited as beneficial by the largest percentage of respondents (98% for effectiveness, 96% for performance, and 97% for relationships).

The leaders we interviewed expanded on this finding. Giglio del Borgo (Country Manager, Italy, Experian) said, *"Energy is a fundamental component of everything I do at work. I also have the feeling that if you are energized, without being euphoric, without being necessarily excited about things, if you sort of show energy in what you are doing, that energy will eventually transmit into the people that are working for you."*

HOPELESS, ANGRY, & DEPRESSED (HAD)

Most leaders reported that *hopeless*, *angry*, and *depressed* states of mind have adverse effects on effectiveness, performance, and relationships.

- A *hopeless* **state of mind** was reported to negatively affect effectiveness by 69% of respondents; performance by 80% of respondents; and relationships by 68% of respondents.

- An *angry* **state of mind** was reported to negatively affect effectiveness by 74% of respondents; performance by 74% of respondents; and relationships by 75% of respondents.

- A *depressed* **state of mind** was reported to negatively affect effectiveness by 74% of respondents; performance by 76% of respondents; and relationships by 70% of respondents.

Note that for relationships, an *angry* state of mind was cited as damaging by the largest number of respondents. Our interviews supported this finding. In the words of Philippe Barrois, *"Anger is not so easy to get out of and, for me, if I get angry, it is not good. Anger definitely affects your communications with others in a negative way because anger takes over, and people tend to get distant, and then I feel like I need to get away."*

STRESSED, TIRED, ANXIOUS, & FRUSTRATED (STAF)

More than half of respondents cited four additional states of mind—*stressed*, *tired*, *anxious*, and *frustrated* (STAF)—as adversely affecting effectiveness, performance, and relationships.

- A *stressed* **state of mind** was reported to negatively affect effectiveness by 55% of respondents; performance by 53% of respondents; and relationships by 54% of respondents.

- A *tired* **state of mind** was reported to decrease effectiveness by 66% of respondents; performance by 68% of respondents; and relationships by 65% of respondents.

- An *anxious* **state of mind** was reported to decrease effectiveness by 61% of respondents; performance by 63% of respondents; and relationships by 62% of respondents.

- A *frustrated* **state of mind** was reported to decrease effectiveness by 64% of respondents; performance by 67% of respondents; and relationships by 65% of respondents.

Note that across all three areas of functioning, *frustrated* and *tired* were cited as damaging by similar percentages of respondents (within 2% difference), which exceeded the percentages for *stressed* and *anxious*.

Davida Fedeli commented, *"There were times during the change integration process when I was constantly feeling frustrated because I was second-guessing stakeholder expectations. [But] at the end of the day, I was not getting the results I wanted by continuously staying in that state of mind."*

In contrast to *hopeless*, *angry*, and *depressed*, however, a *stressed*, *anxious*, or *frustrated* state of mind may also have an upside—at least temporarily. Many leaders we interviewed said that in the short term, these states could have a positive impact on effectiveness and performance. As Davide Paganoni put it, *"I can be frustrated or I can be anxious and be effective at the same time because I like what I do."* Yet, these same leaders say that being stressed, anxious, or frustrated can damage the quality of their interactions, so these states of mind are risky when working with others.

Some leaders also shared additional risks of a *stressed*, *tired*, *anxious*, or *frustrated* state of mind, including impaired strategic thinking and personal well-being. Jim Daniell explained, *"Sometimes, negative states of mind are effective for the short-term, more tactical needs, but you may easily lose sight of the bigger picture. And over time, if you harbor these states of mind, your resilience will drop, and physical stress will take its toll on your health."*

5. IMPACT ON RESULTS

In addition to exploring how specific states of mind affect leaders' performance in general, our survey also investigated their differential effects on different types of performance goals. We asked survey participants to identify their top 3–5 performance goals for the previous year and assess the impact of the 18 states of mind on their ability to reach these goals. The goals fell into eight broad categories. Table 4 provides a high-level summary of respondent goals that fell into each category.

Category	Sample Performance Goals
Strategy	• Align people to the company vision and values • Manage a business turnaround • Merge two organizations • Transform the core business • Delocalize activities in countries • Increase brand awareness • Launch a new business enterprise
Business/ Financial	• Increase revenue by x% • Ensure profitability • Meet inventory objectives • Achieve fundraising goals • Achieve financial sustainability • Achieve the budget • Achieve cost-cutting goals • Meet capital optimization targets
Customer/ Client Orientation	• Achieve high client satisfaction scores • Achieve desired client response rates • Exceed client expectations of quality of work and outcomes • Increase consumer connection and understanding • Maximize client retention • Deliver a great customer experience • Maintain successful relations with clients on a long-term basis

Category	Sample Performance Goals
Quality/ Risk	• Resolve potential problems in loan portfolios promptly • Deliver quality materials on time • Improve the reliability of new launches • Ensure high-quality work products • Maximize forecast and demand plan accuracy • Achieve risk control targets
Innovation	• Deliver a major IT system change • Create innovative new products, processes, and services • Find innovative tools to support communication • Fund special and innovative projects • Improve product sustainability • Successfully prototype a new technology
Talent Mgmt.	• Ensure the business has the talent needed to deliver on goals • Create a talent pipeline • Develop a succession plan for leadership roles • Implement a successful annual performance review process • Ensure that regular training needs are met • Attract and retain the best talent

Table 4: Performance Goals Categories

Category	Sample Performance Goals
Operational Effective-ness	• Ensure the timely production of project team deliverables • Align accounting processes across countries • Achieve cross-functional alignment and coordination to launch new products and services on deadline • Ensure that resources are deployed to achieve business results • Contribute to departmental efficiency • Share best practices

Category	Sample Performance Goals
Culture	• Achieve the regional goal for the Best Place to Work • Develop a culture of accountability • Transform the culture to support the new direction of the business • Achieve annual diversity and inclusion goals • Ensure that people feel free to communicate openly and freely • Ensure that academic policies are enforced fairly

Table 4: Performance Goals Categories (continued)

Leaders reported the following:

● **Above-the-line states of mind have a more positive impact on performance goals than below-the-line states of mind.** On average, above-the-line states of mind were rated as having a positive or high positive impact on performance goals by more than 70% of respondents, while below-the-line states of mind were rated as having a negative or high negative impact on performance goals by more than 66% of respondents.

● **Performance goals are most positively impacted by the CHE (*calm*, *happy*, and *energized*) states of mind, with *energized* having the greatest positive effect.** A high positive impact was reported for *energized* by 74% of respondents, for *calm* by 51% of respondents, and for *happy* by 49%. A positive impact was reported for *energized* by 22% of respondents, for *calm* by 34% of respondents, and for *happy* by 38%.

● **Performance goals are most negatively affected by the *hopeless*, *depressed*, and *desperate* states of mind, with *hopeless* having the greatest negative effect.** A high negative impact was reported for *hopeless* by 53% of respondents, for *depressed* by 46% of respondents, and for *desperate* by 45%. A negative impact was reported for *hopeless* by 16% of respondents, for *depressed* by 30% of respondents, and for *desperate* by 22%.

- **Following *hopeless*, *depressed*, and *desperate*, the next most damaging states of mind are *angry*, *tired*, and *frustrated*.** A high negative impact was reported for *angry* by 38% of respondents, for *tired* by 21% of respondents, and for *frustrated* by 19%. A negative impact was reported for *angry* by 36% of respondents, for *tired* by 47% of respondents, and for *frustrated* by 48%.

Our leader interviews reinforced the conclusion that below-the-line states of mind affect some types of goals more strongly than others. They further suggested that the strongly affected goals are highly influential. Giglio del Borgo remarked, *"There are so many factors in the outside world that determine if you are successful in managing an organization. Let's say you divide success into three big categories: making your financial targets, making your people happy to come to work, and making your clients satisfied. The latter two are where you can strongly influence the outcome, and to that end, you need to make sure you are using the right state of mind. And obviously, if you are successful in these two domains, this has a positive impact also on reaching the financial targets."*

6. STATE OF MIND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

When asked what they do to shift from lower to higher states of mind, leaders provided a range of responses. These fall into four broad categories, as shown in Table 5.

Category	Practices
Health & Well-Being	• Eating a well-balanced diet • Exercising • Getting adequate sleep
Physiology	• Breathing • Centering • Stretching • Changing posture • Taking breaks
Thinking & Feelings	• Acknowledging emotions • Reframing thoughts • Thinking positively • Using visualization • Refocusing attention • Journaling • Having meaningful conversations
External Environment	• Adjusting lighting, noise levels, and air quality • Listening to music • Eliminating clutter • Spending time in nature

Table 5: State of Mind Management Approaches

DIFFERENCES ACROSS LEADERSHIP LEVELS

In analyzing the survey results, we checked for any patterns across the four leadership levels of our respondents: line management, middle management, senior management, and executive management. We found several noteworthy trends.

Frequency of Experience

Compared with senior- and executive-level managers, line managers reported experiencing certain above-the-line states of mind (*ecstatic, elated,* and *content*) less often and certain below-the-line states of mind (*disappointed, anxious,* and *frustrated*) more often. The differences were not as pronounced with middle managers.

Frequency of Experience: % Sometimes, Often, or Regularly			
State of Mind	Line Managers	Senior Managers	Executives
Ecstatic	19%	46%	52%
Elated	33%	62%	71%
Content	71%	87%	92%
Disappointed	81%	65%	65%
Anxious	81%	68%	64%
Frustrated	91%	81%	76%

Impact on Effectiveness & Relationships

Compared with other leadership levels, line managers reported that certain above-the-line states of mind (*content, calm,* and *satisfied*) had a lesser impact on their effectiveness and certain below-the-line states of mind (*tired, frustrated,* and *angry*) had a greater impact on their effectiveness.

Impact on Effectiveness				
State of Mind	Line	Middle	Senior	Executive
Content	↑ 57%	↑ 80%	↑ 79%	↑ 85%
Calm	↑ 81%	↑ 91%	↑ 93%	↑ 91%
Satisfied	↑ 71%	↑ 83%	↑ 85%	↑ 89%
Tired	↓ 76%	↓ 62%	↓ 74%	↓ 62%
Frustrated	↓ 86%	↓ 69%	↓ 69%	↓ 60%
Angry	↓ 81%	↓ 76%	↓ 78%	↓ 73%

Also in comparison with other leadership levels, line managers reported that certain below-the-line states of mind (*disappointed, stressed,* and *tired*) had a greater impact on their relationships.

Impact on Relationships Part 1: Greater Line Manager Impact				
State of Mind	Line	Middle	Senior	Executive
Disappointed	↓ 86%	↓ 59%	↓ 67%	↓ 62%
Stressed	↓ 71%	↓ 59%	↓ 57%	↓ 55%
Tired	↓ 81%	↓ 52%	↓ 61%	↓ 51%

However, for the three states of mind at the -3 level—*desperate, hopeless,* and *depressed*—the greatest relationship impact was reported by executives.

Impact on Relationships Part 2: Greater Executive Impact				
State of Mind	**Line**	**Middle**	**Senior**	**Executive**
Desperate	⬇ 43%	⬇ 62%	⬇ 66%	⬇ 71%
Hopeless	⬇ 50%	⬇ 68%	⬇ 69%	⬇ 72%
Depressed	⬇ 67%	⬇ 70%	⬇ 68%	⬇ 73%

STATE OF MIND: THE LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE

Given the impact of state of mind on leadership (survey section 4) and results (survey section 5), it's no surprise that the leaders we interviewed considered state of mind management a high priority. Three key insights emerged from these conversations:

1. **Leaders' states of mind have far-reaching consequences.** Leadership is a public act. Leaders' states of mind are highly contagious to the individuals and groups they lead, and therefore have a powerful influence on their organizations' culture and ability to succeed. In leaders' own words: *"[T]he tone the leadership sets at the top soaks into the organization and becomes part of the culture."* (Jim Daniell) *"A company's culture is its DNA. When people collaborate and create together in a positive environment, this has a positive effect on the company's flexibility in the marketplace, capacity to accommodate changes, and ability to find competitive solutions."* (Giglio del Borgo)

2. Managing state of mind is a core leadership responsibility. Leaders are accountable for managing their states of mind at work. Their leadership effectiveness depends on it. In the words of a Senior VP of Human Resources at a leading beauty and cosmetics consumer products company, *"In the world that we live in with things coming at us constantly from all different directions… we need to recalibrate and center and achieve higher states of mind. This is the key to being effective and productive, and we have the power to do it."* Jim Daniell takes a firm stance on this point: *"A CEO who runs around and yells at people is not a CEO in my mind and therefore loses some of the moral right to lead."*

3. Leaders need strategies to notice and shift state of mind in the moment. As indicated in the survey responses, low states of mind can be challenging to shift, or even to be consciously aware of. The leaders we interviewed highlighted the need to have strategies in place for that purpose. *"Unless you have clear strategies to be aware of [your state of mind] when you are in it and then shift it, you more than likely will cause serious harm to yourself and your organization."* (Jim Daniell)

This third point led us to look more closely at the effectiveness of specific approaches for shifting from a lower to a higher state of mind.

SHIFTING STATE OF MIND IN THE MOMENT: AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

Among the leaders who responded to our global survey, more than 60% reported using at least one type of practice to manage their state of mind. As mentioned earlier, these practices fall into four main categories: health and well-being, physiology, thinking and feelings, and external environment.

The health and well-being practices are foundational, as it's difficult to sustain higher states of mind without adequate sleep, nutrition, and exercise. However, these are primarily long-term rather than in-the-moment strategies. (A leader experiencing a low state of mind in a meeting cannot simply take a nap or go for a run.) Similarly, external environmental factors are often challenging to manipulate on demand.

The other two categories of practices—physiology and thinking and feelings—can each help facilitate in-the-moment state of mind shifts. In our interviews, the leaders who reported the greatest success with such shifts were those who used an integrative approach. In addition to maintaining regular health and well-being

practices, they addressed low states of mind when they occurred through physiology, thinking, and feeling. Through our exploration of various methodologies for managing stress and building resilience, we encountered several practices and techniques that integrate those elements, including the Freeze Frame® Technique (HeartMath® Institute), cognitive reframing (cognitive behavioral therapy), and visualization. Inspired by the effectiveness of these practices and techniques and based closely on the HeartMath® Freeze Frame® Technique, we developed an adapted, integrated approach we call the 4-Step Reset. (See Figure 4.) This method proved to be so effective that it quickly became our go-to approach for supporting leaders to shift their state of mind. The remainder of this section outlines each of the four steps, together with reflections from leaders who've used this method.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| RESONANT BREATHING | POSITIVE FEELING | REFRAME THINKING | ENGAGE ACTION |

Figure 4: The 4-Step Reset Method

Step 1 is to engage in *resonant breathing*.

Slow, deep breathing at a constant rate can help to achieve a physiological condition called coherence, which is associated with improved mental clarity, focus, emotional stability, and decision making. Studies suggest that *resonant breathing*—maintaining a breath cycle (inhalation + exhalation) of 10 seconds, for a total of 6 breathing cycles per minute—is optimal for engaging coherence.

Lisa Kelly Croswell, Vice President of Human Resources at Boston Medical Center, described the impact of resonant breathing on her cognitive capabilities: *"I have always known intellectually that breathing matters. I learned this from many sources. And so I practiced it to some extent. But what resonant breathing has done for me as a leader is to free up my brain capacity to think clearly and make different types of decisions faster. I had not realized this. Breathing makes me more facile. It takes out all the noise and crunching of my manual gears, and it transforms them into smooth automatic."*

HeartMath is a registered trademark of Quantum Intech, Inc.

Step 2 builds on resonant breathing by activating a *positive feeling*.

This is typically done by bringing to mind a person, place, or thing that elicits a positive feeling (such as gratitude, appreciation, or love) while actively attempting to re-experience that feeling. Many leaders find that summoning up a genuine emotion is challenging at first, but with practice becomes automatic. Megan Griffault told us, *"Many times, I can move from step one to two without thinking about it… After I take two or three deep breaths to slow my racing heart, I take a moment to tap into a happy feeling to clear my mind so that situations and issues can be approached from a more subjective and calm state of mind. It almost always produces better results, and it can become a subconscious exercise."*

Positive feelings stimulate the release of neurochemicals including serotonin, nor-epinephrine, and dopamine and hormones including ANF, DHEA, and progesterone. These substances help to anchor the physiological states required for Step 3.

With breathing engaged and a positive feeling activated, Step 3 is to *reframe thinking*.

We coach leaders to do this through reflective inquiry, asking themselves one or more powerful "what" questions. (See the sidebar for a partial list of reframing questions we share with our clients.)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO REFRAME THINKING

- What else is possible here?

- What is the opportunity in this situation?

- What really matters right now? What is important right now?

- What could I learn from this situation?

- What does my heart say? What does my gut say?

- What is a more productive/constructive/positive approach to the situation?

- What is the ultimate outcome I need to keep in mind?

- What thought would serve me and this situation better?

- What else do I know about myself?

While Step 3 may require more conscious effort than Steps 1 and 2, leaders report that this effort pays off. Jim O'Connor, Vice President of Timberland PRO, commented: *"I am mostly an optimistic and upbeat leader. But like most, I can get triggered and slip into negative thinking. When I do, the first two steps are automatic, and then I take a look at my thinking so that I can reframe my thoughts to more positive ones. This keeps my mind clear, and I am able to operate at a higher level. Keeping my mind in a positive state of mind takes the stress out of the system and keeps my team in a positive place."*

Together, Steps 2 and 3 can create a virtuous cycle: positive feelings enable more constructive thinking, which, in turn, leads to more positive feelings.

Finally, Step 4 is to *re-engage action*.

The physiological and psychological shifts triggered by the first three steps leave an individual much better equipped to take thoughtful, effective action. With increased cognitive flexibility, they're better able to think creatively about possible actions and select one that's beneficial. And from a more grounded, resilient physiological state, they're more capable of following through with that action. Three of the most common shifts that we see resulting from the 4-Step Reset are as follows:

Persisting in pushing one's own argument	⟶	Inquiring and listening to others' concerns
Trying to do it all	⟶	Focusing on what's most important
Getting stuck in overwhelm	⟶	Moving forward one step at a time

Like any self-management technique, the 4-Step Reset takes time and practice to master. However, in our experience, this particular technique yields exceptional results. Hilary Ware, Senior Vice President of Bristow Group, Inc., spoke highly of its impact on her: "*The key to strong leadership is understanding that performance is linked to state of mind, which is part of a holistic system that has to be balanced. Leaders need to combine physiological well-being with positive mindfulness to intentionally focus their thoughts and feelings, clear their minds and eliminate the 'clutter.' The 4-Step Reset is a powerful way to achieve this. Personally, it allows me to improve my focus, clarity, and creativity and engage in productive actions and decision making. It also helps me clear my thinking, shift my perspective, maintain my energy and balance, and become more present with my team, colleagues, friends, and family.*"

CONCLUSION

Organizations today face a global environment of continuous and accelerating change and complexity, placing increasing demands on leaders at all levels. While there are a wide variety of self-care practices, development programs, professional services, and other resources designed to support leaders in meeting these demands, selecting among these resources can be challenging. With limited time and energy to expend on their own development, on top of their existing work obligations, where should leaders focus first to have the greatest positive impact on their effectiveness, relationships, and performance? Our experience and global study suggest that state of mind is one of the most powerful areas of focus for any leader. By increasing their awareness of and ability to shift their own state of mind, leaders can achieve transformative positive change for themselves, their teams, and their organizations.

THANKS TO OUR CONTRIBUTING LEADERS

We're deeply grateful to all the leaders who shared their experiences and insights for this article beginning in 2012. As of 2022, the individuals we quoted directly have since moved on to new leadership and consulting roles.

Philippe Barrois, formerly CEO of Novartis, now works independently as a consultant.

Giglio del Borgo, formerly Country Manager, Italy, for Experian, is now Amministratore delegato (CEO) of Diners Club Italia.

Lisa Kelly Croswell, formerly Vice President of HR at Boston Medical Center (BMC), remains at BMC in the role of Senior Vice President and CHRO.

Jim Daniell, formerly COO for Oxfam America, is the Founder and CEO of Revol, LLC.

Davida Fedeli, formerly regional Vice President of HR for Western Union, is now an executive coach and HR consultant.

Megan Griffault, formerly Global HR Director for FMC Corporation, is now Vice President of HR for The Honickman Companies.

Karen Nelson, formerly CEO and President of Planned Parenthood of Western New York, is now CEO and President of Planned Parenthood of Maryland.

Jim O'Conner, formerly Vice President of Timberland PRO, is now Senior Vice President for North America at Shoes for Crews.

Davide Paganoni, formerly Director of Worldwide Learning & Development at Gucci, is now Group Director L&D at Groupe Edmond de Rothschild.

Hilary Ware, formerly Senior Vice President of Bristow Group, Inc., is now Senior Vice President and CHRO at Cheniere Energy.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alexander Caillet, co-founder and CEO of Corentus, Inc., is an organizational psychologist, consultant, and coach internationally known for his pioneering approach to team coaching and his state of mind research with organizational leaders. Alexander's work has spanned more than 30 countries across five continents. In addition to his coaching work with individuals and teams, he has an extensive background in management consulting. Alexander is an Adjunct Professor on the faculty of Georgetown University's Leadership Coaching Certificate program and a frequent speaker on the subjects of change, teams, coaching, and leadership.

Jeremy Hirshberg is a coach and consultant with advising specialties concentrated in organizational development. From Founder to Chief Executive roles, he guides a portfolio of consulting companies each focused on animating a distinct mission to build impactful teams. Bringing an interdisciplinary background developing leaders, Jeremy has worked across diverse sectors including energy, defense, finance, marketing, and manufacturing. His approach is informed by a combination of formal training, including a doctorate in Industrial and Organizational Psychology, and a focus on pragmatic and genuine partnership.

Stefano Petti is Partner at Asterys, a global organizational development firm, and works primarily as thinking partner with leaders who are engaged in transformational and change initiatives. In 2018 he co-founded AEquacy, the revolutionary, hierarchy-free organizational design and operating system that accelerates innovation, collaboration, and performance. Stefano is also a passionate international speaker and lecturer, an International Mentor in the Startupbootcamp acceleration global program, and a member of the Harvard Business Review Advisory Council. In 2018 he co-authored the book *AEquacy* with Giovanna D'Alessio.

Alexander, Jeremy, and Stefano co-authored a series of articles related to stress and state of mind for *Harvard Business Review* in 2014–2016.

This article was edited by **Amy Yeager**, Chief Knowledge Officer at Corentus, Inc. Amy is a consultant, coach, instructor, and author with a focus on communication and team development. In addition to her direct client work, she leads the research and development of Corentus instructional materials for both clients and practitioner trainees, as well as serving as senior faculty on Corentus training programs. She is a certified Senior Trainer in SAVI® (the System for Analyzing Verbal Interaction) and co-author of the first book to be published on the system, *Conversation Transformation*.