




performancefrontiers®

**Immunity**

**to Change**



*If we don't engage with our inner landscape to make changes, we won't be able to prolong them.*

COVID-19 has thrown the world into change. Technologically, in terms of our ways of working and communicating in business, we've advanced in leaps and bounds. And it begs an obvious question. If we can make so much progress, so quickly, during a crisis, what's holding us back the rest of the time? It seems that when the stakes aren't high, we can get lost in the space between intentions and actions.

According to behavioural psychologists, Lisa Lahey and Robert Kegan, it's not fear of change that gets in the way, but more often, hidden mindsets. These mindsets create what they call an *immunity to change*.<sup>1</sup> However, by identifying what those hidden mindsets are, we can increase our capacity to see beyond our current belief systems and into new possibilities.

In order to do this though, it's useful to be able to identify if the challenges we are facing are either *technical* or *adaptive changes*. Lahey and Kegan use the example of heart patients who have been given very clear directives to change their diet and exercise habits or risk a fatal heart attack. Though the need for change is life or death, only 1 out of 7 patients will successfully sustain a change. And that, they say, is because this is an adaptive challenge that requires a mindset shift <sup>1</sup>.

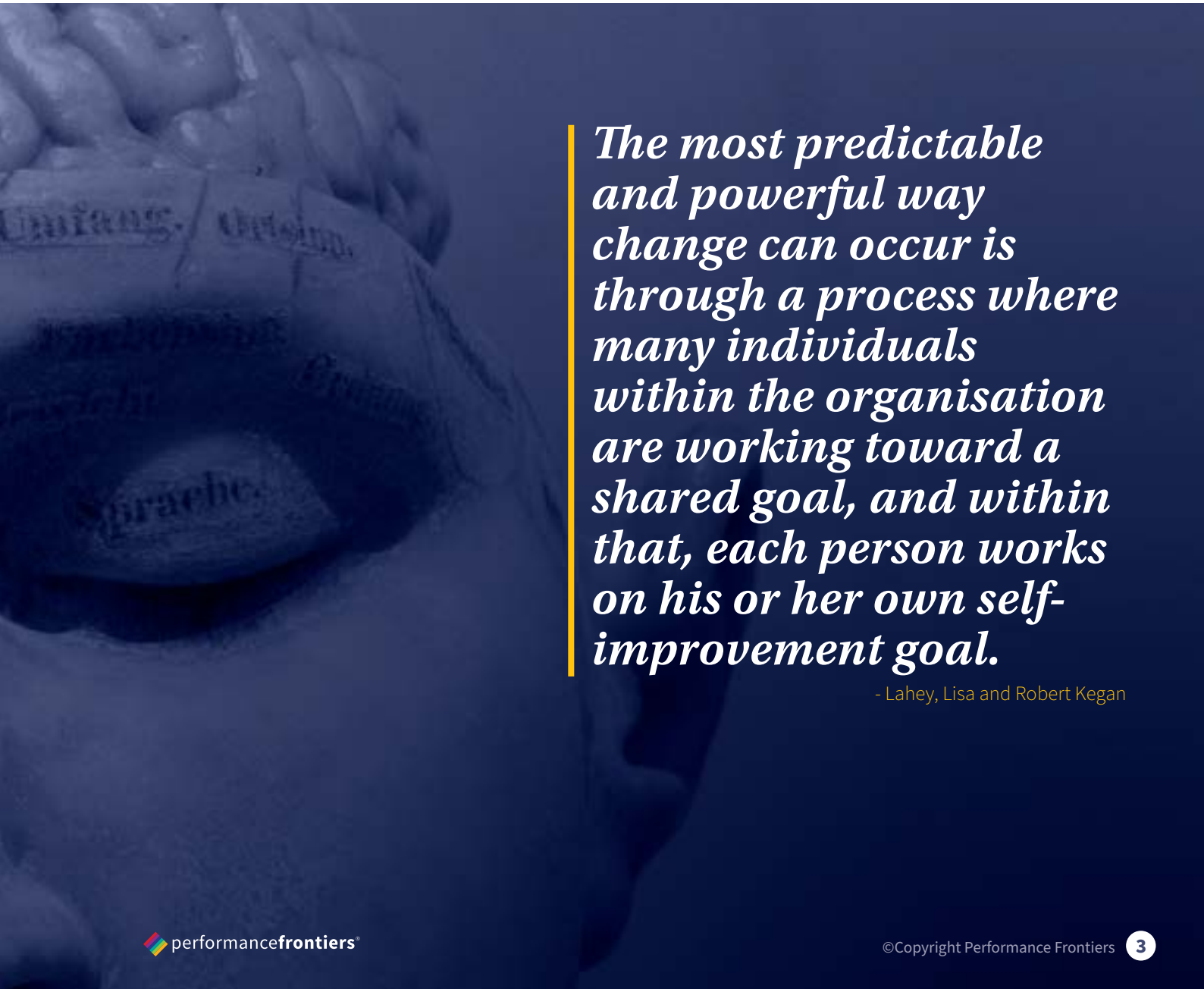
It seems that if we don't engage our inner landscape, we are unlikely to be able to sustain change. Our inner landscape is comprised of the beliefs, heart, feelings, assumptions we have - in other words, our invisible operating system.

## Changing Organisational and Team Mindsets

While our personal mindsets can be a stumbling block to individual change, teams and organisations may experience the same problem. One of the biggest factors contributing to low achieving work cultures is the disconnection between what people say and what they do - especially leaders. This sits squarely in the intention-action gap and paints a picture of the state of our company's immune system.<sup>2</sup>

“The most predictable and powerful way change can occur is through a process where many individuals within the organisation are working toward a shared goal, and within that, each person works on his or her own self-improvement goal.”<sup>1</sup>

However, Lahey and Kegan have learned that desire and motivation on their own are not enough to affect change. They believe we have to identify our blind spots, and hidden beliefs, and do the work to rewire them.



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- Lahey, Lisa and Robert Kegan

## Mapping Our Immunity to Change

As a way of acquainting ourselves with our own operating system, we can create an Immunity to Change map. This will help us identify what our self-protective mechanisms are, and what underpins our personal, team, or organisational immune system. It provides a window into the hidden commitments that hold us captive.<sup>3</sup>

The Immunity to Change map follows five crucial steps.



### Collective Improvement Goal

What areas of your life could benefit from a positive change? An improvement goal should be articulated as an action, rather an outcome, and stated in the affirmative, rather than "stop..." or "not do...". What do you want to *do*? i.e. I want to delegate more to empower our team.



### Obstructive Behaviours

What are you currently doing (not doing) that works against you? Think of behaviours or actions getting in the way of this goal. i.e. I am micromanaging.



### Confront Competing Commitments

What are you committing to that is opposed to your goal? i.e. I am committing to my own ideas of perfection at the expense of my team members' valuable contribution. If you imagine doing the opposite of this behaviour, what discomfort, worry, or fear do you feel? i.e. I fear losing control.



### Collective Big Assumptions

What assumptions are driving your fears and undermining behaviours? These are foundational cultural beliefs, often invisible forces holding the whole ship together. i.e. If they can work without scrutiny, then maybe I'm not important in my job, and if that's so, then I'm not worth anything as a human being.



### Questioning the Big Assumptions

Now, let's test your assumptions. What possibilities open up if they aren't true? To do so, it's time to gather data in a SMART<sup>5</sup> way...



### Safe

The risk is small and acceptable



### Modest

You intend to learn a bit at a time



### Actionable

It will be easy to find a chance to do it soon (next week or so)



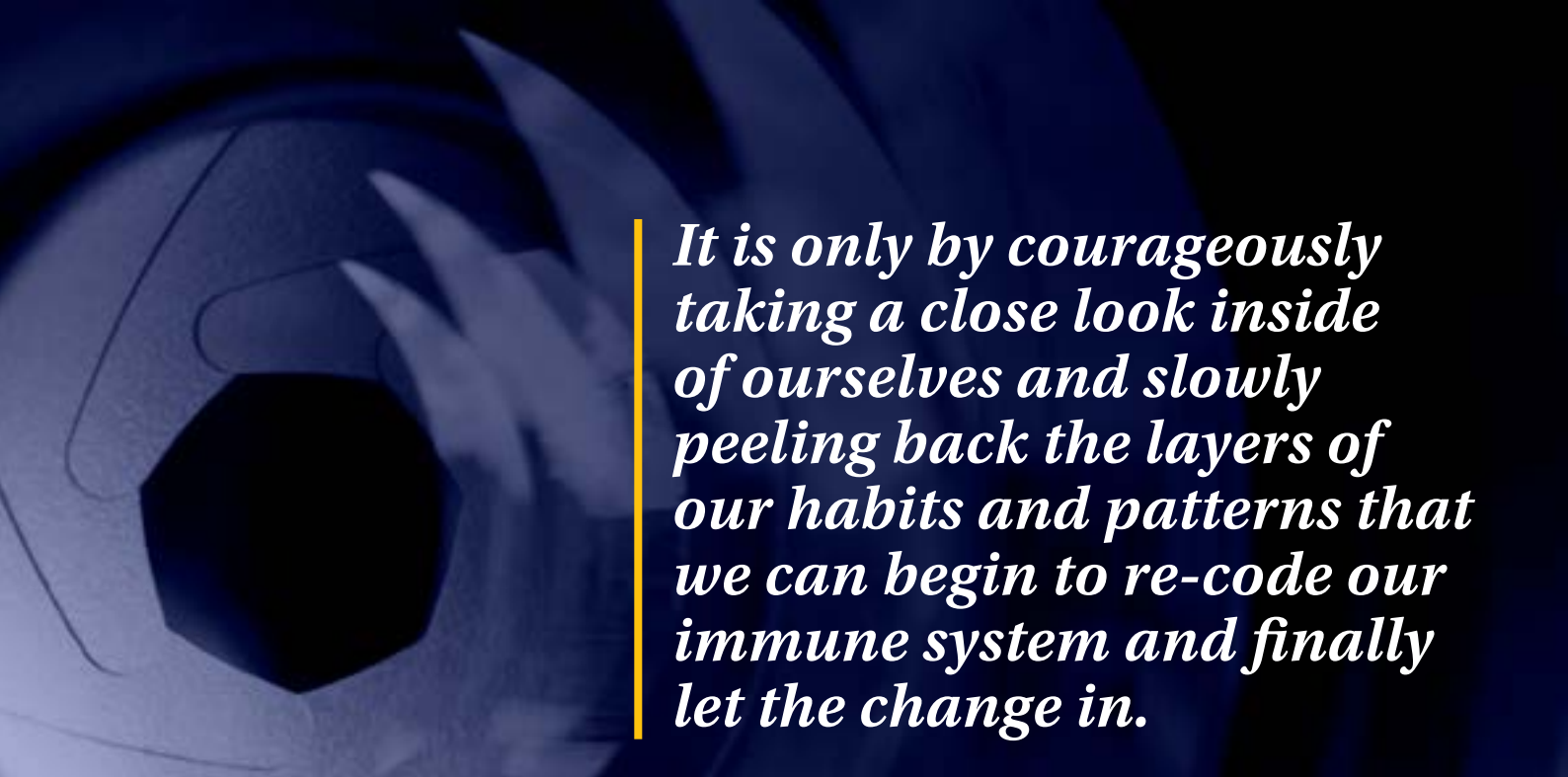
### Research focused

Its purpose is to learn vs. improve



### Tests your big assumptions

It will generate helpful data about the (in) accuracy of your Big Assumptions



*It is only by courageously taking a close look inside of ourselves and slowly peeling back the layers of our habits and patterns that we can begin to re-code our immune system and finally let the change in.*

We often find that we hold a lot of assumptions - beliefs at our very core - that do not serve us and keep us in a stagnated state. Without going through an Immunity to Change process, we may not be aware of these core drivers, or the hold they can have on us. And without testing, we may not uncover the assumptions that are not true at all.

It is only by courageously taking a close look inside of ourselves and slowly peeling back the layers of our habits and patterns that we can begin to re-code our immune system and finally let the change in.

This takes courage, and requires us to lean into some discomfort. So on Lahey and Kegan's recommendation, go lightly.<sup>6</sup>

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## References

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