

'Good Work offers a deeply human, evidence-based blueprint for redesigning work itself. Page combines rigour and compassion to show that wellbeing isn't a perk — it's the point.'

—Dr Kirstin Ferguson AM, author of *Head & Heart* and *Blindspotting*

GOOD WORK



**Transform Your Work
from the Inside Out**

Dr Kathryn Page

Foreword by Professor Sir Cary L. Cooper CBE

Kathryn Page's *Good Work* shifts the conversation from individual resilience to systemic design. She shows how psychological safety, meaningful contribution, and genuine connection are the foundation of both human flourishing and organizational performance. This important new book is deeply grounded in research; leaders who take it seriously will be poised to build workplaces where people and companies thrive.

— Amy Edmondson, Novartis Professor of Leadership, Harvard Business School, and author *Right Kind of Wrong: The Science of Failing Well*

Good Work is the book leaders have been waiting for. Dr Kat Page writes with a rare mix of playful energy and purposeful insight — it's compelling, relatable and scientifically grounded. She cuts through the noise to show how we can redesign work so people genuinely thrive. I'll be recommending this to every leader I work with.

— Dr Adam Fraser, author of *The Third Space* and *Strive*

Dr Kat Page brings a positive, constructive, and evidence-based perspective to mental health at work, giving business leaders the practical tools they need to not just look after their people, but to also improve their businesses.

—Tony LaMontagne, Professor of Work, Health & Wellbeing, Deakin University

In a world that glorifies exhaustion, *Good Work* is an act of rebellion — and restoration. Page gives us the science, stories and spirit to reclaim our collective sovereignty at work: to act from calm, lead with compassion, and thrive together.

— Dr Emma Seppälä, author of *Sovereign* and *The Happiness Track*

GOOD
WORK



GOOD **WORK**



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WILEY

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*For Alfie and Amelia, whose futures remind me
why good work matters.*

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About the author

Dr Kathryn Page is an organisational psychologist, adjunct professor and leadership partner who has spent her career asking one big question: *What makes work good for us?*

With over two decades of experience across psychology, public health, and organisational leadership, Kathryn works with leaders and organisations to create conditions for strong performance without burnout. Her work focuses on the systems, cultures, and everyday practices that shape how work feels — and how sustainable it is.

But this book isn't just a professional project for her — it's personal. Kathryn has lived the highs and lows of work: the thrill of meaningful projects, the grind of bureaucracy, the sting of burnout and the quiet joy of rediscovering her purpose. She writes with the conviction that work should be one of our greatest determinants of health and flourishing — not one of our biggest risks.

When she's not writing or working with leaders, you'll find her in Melbourne, Australia, with her husband, Luke, and two young children, Alfie and Amelia — drinking too much coffee and occasionally reorganising her kitchen cupboards as a highly unscientific but surprisingly effective form of stress management.

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Foreword

I first met Kat in 2008 at a conference in Rome. Even then, she wasn't content with surface-level answers. Her questions challenged the status quo, cutting straight to the heart of how work could be reimagined — not just to manage stress but to unlock both human and organisational potential. From those early conversations, it was obvious: Kat wasn't here to follow the field, she was here to shape it.

Today, Kat is one of the most compelling voices in workplace mental health and organisational wellbeing. A trained psychologist with a deep grounding in both research and practice, she has spent the last two decades not only asking the right questions but offering innovative answers. Her work challenges the outdated notion that wellbeing is the responsibility of the individual alone. Instead, she makes a powerful, evidence-based case for systemic change — where leadership, job design, culture and work structures are recognised as central to mental health and sustainable high performance.

This message could not be more timely. When I began my own career, the conversation about stress and wellbeing focused almost exclusively on personal coping strategies: meditation, exercise, resilience training. These tools remain important but, on their own, they are not enough. The global financial crisis of 2008 was a wake-up call for many organisations, exposing the cracks in how we approached workforce wellbeing. What followed was a gradual but necessary shift: from seeing wellbeing as a 'nice to have' to understanding it as a core leadership and business priority.

Today, that shift is accelerating. Forward-thinking organisations are embedding wellbeing into their leadership models, boardroom

discussions and strategic plans. Roles like chief wellbeing officer are emerging; wellbeing metrics are making their way into governance frameworks; and leaders are being called to foster psychological safety, connection and purpose. These are not fringe ideas, they are essential capabilities for leadership in the modern world.

This is precisely the territory that *Good Work* occupies. In this book, Kat moves us beyond the well-trodden ground of individual interventions and into the heart of what really matters: how work itself is designed. She equips leaders to move from symptom management to prevention, from reactive support to proactive care, from wellbeing as an add-on to wellbeing as a shared responsibility and strategic advantage.

What makes Kat's work so powerful is not just her command of the evidence but her ability to translate it into practical, actionable insights. This is a book grounded in rigour but written with humanity. It is compassionate and clear-eyed, challenging leaders to do better — not by asking people to stretch themselves thinner, but by reimagining work in ways that allow people to thrive.

As wellbeing rises to the top of leadership agendas around the world, this book is both a guide and a call to action. Kat shows us what is possible when leaders stop asking, 'How do we help people cope with unhealthy work?' and start asking, 'How do we create healthy work in the first place?'

It has been my privilege to witness Kat's journey and to support her in bringing this important work to life. I have no doubt that *Good Work* will become an essential resource for any leader ready to meet this moment and to lead in a way that truly makes work, and the world, better.

Professor Sir Cary Cooper CBE

Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health, Alliance Manchester Business School, University of Manchester; Chair of the National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at Work; Immediate Past President of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), and Past President of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Prologue

When your organisation is going through change, you know it's not a good sign when a meeting pops into your diary for 4 pm. No agenda. Just your manager's name and a random room number (eek!).

A few years back, this happened to me. I remember walking down the corridor of a floor I very rarely went to, fluorescent lights buzzing above, already rehearsing what I'd say. By the time I sat down, I didn't need the preamble. In fact, I can't remember the conversation at all, just the hollow drop in my stomach when I realised that my role was gone.

Even then, the irony wasn't lost on me. Here I was, an organisational psychologist who had spent years researching and advising on what makes work good for people. And there I was, completely blindsided, staring at the rubble of my own work life.

Looking back now, I realise it wasn't just the shock of losing my job, it was realising I'd stayed in a role that no longer fit, convincing myself it did. If I'm honest, I hadn't been happy in my work for years. The job had shifted from people to process, bureaucracy, reshuffles and endless strategy changes. Instead of helping people, I was endlessly reformatting slides and pressing the 'align text' function. Some days I wondered if my actual job title should have just been chief PowerPoint officer. But, still, I told myself it was fine. I had job security (ha!), colleagues I liked and the comfort of work I knew how to do. For a long time, that was enough. Or at least I told myself it was.

It wasn't until weeks later that the possibility dawned on me. Someone was going to pay me to redesign work on my own terms, and I

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had the perfect lab rat: me. And that's where this book began. (Actually, it started sometime in 2018 but then a bunch of other stuff happened, like marriage, kids and that global pandemic thing. Moving on.)

Somewhere along the way I found a new community and tribe — people who believe in what I do and that work is not the enemy of wellbeing. Done well, it can be part of the solution. So, this is the journey we're going on together. From the promise of work to the ways we've completely stuffed it, to the principles, practices and systems that can make it good again and, finally, to the futures we might build if we're bold enough.

I genuinely believe that Good Work is not just possible, it's imminently doable — but only if we do it together.

Kat

Introduction

What if good work was treated as a universal right not a privilege?

If my redundancy forced me to rethink my own relationship with work, it was Zoe who reminded me it's not just about me. It's about all of us.

A little while ago, I was working with a group of senior leaders who were smack in the middle of a messy cultural transformation. Things had gone wrong — and publicly. As part of their reinvention process, we had created space for junior team members to talk directly to leaders about the kind of organisation they hoped to be part of (assuming these leaders could get it right). At first no one spoke up.

Then, a young woman named Zoe (not her real name by the way) finally spoke up: 'I just want to go home at the end of the day and feel like I've had a good day.'

It was so simple I almost overlooked it. But something in her tone stuck with me. In the end, isn't that what good work really is? *Feeling like the day meant something, that we were worth something, that our effort counted.*

That shouldn't be a radical ask. And yet too often it is.

Good work as a right

Work isn't just a contract. It's one of the strongest determinants of health and dignity. And yet access to *good* work — safe, fair, purposeful

work—still feels like a privilege for the few, not a universal right. If we can accept that clean water and education are non-negotiable for a healthy society, why not work? We spend more of our waking hours at work than anywhere else. When it's designed well, work doesn't just protect us, it helps us thrive. And when it's designed badly, it doesn't just disappoint—it makes us sick.

Here's what we know about the connection between work and mental health... and take a breath because we know a lot.

Firstly, mental health problems are common amongst the working-age population. Globally, 15 per cent of working-age adults live with a mental disorder (World Health Organization 2022), and half of us will experience poor mental health at some point in our lives (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023). While there are many factors at play here, unhealthy work is one of the biggest drivers (or what we researchers would call determinants) of mental health problems globally (Rugulies 2023).

Secondly, we know that this is costing us. Globally, depression and anxiety alone are estimated to cost more than US\$1 trillion each year in lost productivity (World Health Organization 2024), and many of these costs are borne out in workplaces through lost working days.

Thirdly, we know that work-related factors such as job strain (the mismatch between job demands and the level of control you have) are significant causal factors in the onset or worsening of mental health problems. This isn't just correlation, it's causation. When demands are high and control is low, people's risk of depression and anxiety rises sharply (Stansfeld 2006; Theorell 2015).

As an example, my colleague Professor Tony LaMontagne has shown job strain is one of the single biggest drivers of mental ill-health in workplaces, costing employers billions each year (LaMontagne 2008). And it's not just white-collar professionals. Job strain is felt acutely in sectors like healthcare, education, logistics and manufacturing where workers are under pressure but often have little say in how the work gets done.

This raises a key question: *If we know poor work design actively causes harm, why are we still treating good work as optional?* If this were water or air, we wouldn't tolerate unsafe standards. Work should be no different.

Finally, we know that unhealthy working conditions are preventable. We're not talking about mysteries we can't solve. The causes of job strain, burnout and poor mental health at work are well understood — and so are the solutions.

Workload can be managed. Jobs can be designed with autonomy and voice. Leaders can be trained to create psychological safety. Systems can be built that reward recovery and fairness, not just output.

Which means harm is not inevitable. It's a design choice.

And if harm is preventable, then good work should be treated as a universal right, not a privilege.

So, if we know all of this, why aren't we doing it?

In 2013, my research team and I ran a study looking at how workplace stakeholders in Australia thought about stress at work (Page 2013). What we found helps explain why progress has been so slow and, frustratingly, why many of these issues are still with us today.

Many leaders and regulators we spoke to still saw stress as an individual weakness (a matter of personality or coping) rather than a problem of work design. Stress was even described in gendered terms: women as 'too sensitive', men as 'too tough to admit it'. When people did struggle, it was often attributed to problems at home rather than conditions at work.

Others recognised that stress came from systemic issues like workload, job insecurity or bullying, but even then, they struggled to articulate preventative solutions. As a result, most organisations defaulted to downstream fixes like resilience workshops or employee assistance programs (EAPs), rather than tackling the upstream causes: workload, lack of control, poor management, insecure contracts.

What should we take from this? We primarily treat stress as an individual failing but it's not. It's a design flaw. And unless we shift our focus to prevention — fixing the system, not just the worker — we'll keep spinning our wheels and basically end up in the same place we started.

Why this book and why now?

I think this moment is asking for something different from us.

We're living through an era of profound transition. Artificial intelligence (AI) and automation are reshaping roles and redefining what it means to work. Tasks that once belonged to us humans (writing, analysing, designing, decision-making) are now being replicated or enhanced by machines. Whole professions are being rewritten in real time.

This isn't just a technological shift, it's a psychological one. As machines get smarter, the human aspects of work (creativity, trust, empathy, judgement) become even more valuable.

And yet, while technology is connecting us more than ever before, disconnection has become the defining feature of modern life. In 2023, the US Surgeon General declared loneliness a public health epidemic, linking social disconnection to early death, chronic illness and widespread psychological distress (Office of the Surgeon General 2023). And the research supports this view.

The implications for work are huge. For many adults, workplaces are one of the last standing communities we belong to. Coworking spaces aren't booming only because of their flexibility — they're booming because people are craving connection. Professional networks are morphing into communities of belonging, not just ladders for career progression. Even remote-first organisations are being forced to rethink how you build culture without a water cooler.

Workplaces are no longer just productivity engines. They're social ecosystems. And when they're poorly designed, they don't just fall short, they leave people lonelier and less productive.