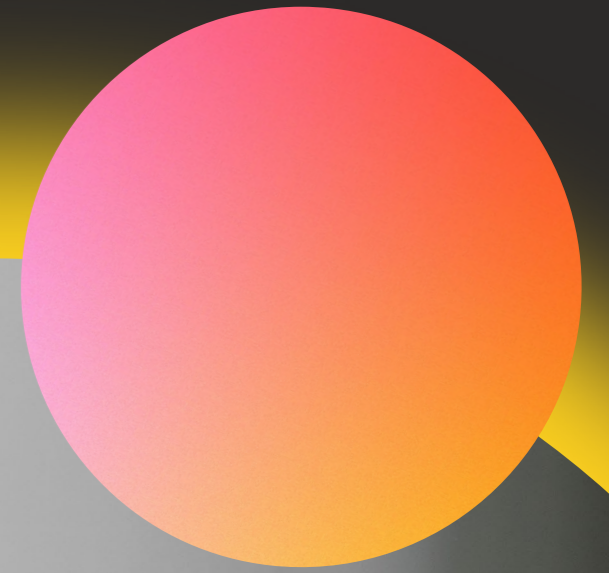
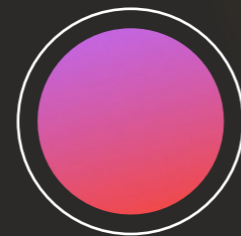


# Energized by Design

How connection will power  
the next era of work

November 2025 Edition



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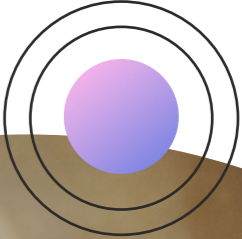
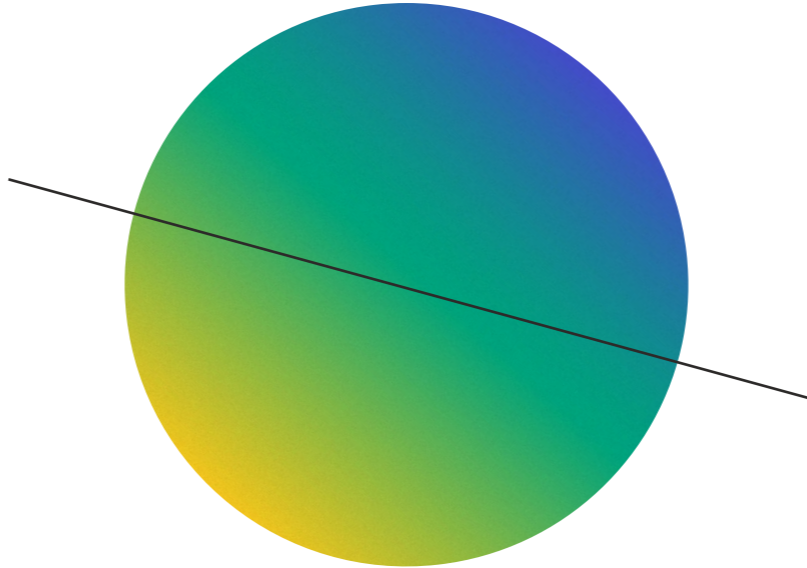
A snapshot of the disconnection problem and Sunny's scalable solution.

How well-meaning systems have left teams disengaged, detached, and running on empty.

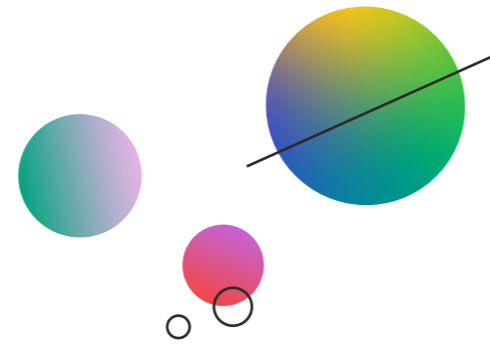
How connection fuels resilience, clarity, and performance at every level.

The invisible fuel that makes connection effective (and how to keep it flowing).

A science-backed framework for embedding connection into how work gets done.



# Executive Summary



Despite more tools, messages, and touchpoints than ever before, today's workplaces are running on empty.

Employees feel disconnected. Culture falls flat. And even high-performing teams often feel more drained than energized.

On the surface, it looks like burnout, turnover, or disengagement. But these are just symptoms of a deeper issue: the quiet erosion of relational energy, the motivational spark people draw from meaningful connection.

Relational energy is the invisible current that powers how individuals contribute, teams collaborate, and organizations adapt. And its importance couldn't be more timely. As organizations race to adopt AI, automate workflows, and manage constant digital input, human connection is becoming the most endangered (and most essential) resource in the modern workplace.

Strong connection fuels the energy that restores morale, strengthens commitment,

and drives better performance. But when connection is fragmented or forced, energy leaks from the system. The result is *static buzz*: constant communication with diminishing clarity, cohesion, and impact.

Over time, that buzz doesn't just create fatigue. It erodes performance. Without relational energy, even the most talented teams fall short of their potential because the human spark that drives collective progress is missing.

The modern workplace has prioritized execution, but neglected the fuel that powers it: human energy shared through connection.

This white paper introduces Social Architecture<sup>SM</sup>, a practical framework for restoring connection as a core operating system. Built around three core design pillars (employee enablement, team habits, and workplace alignment), this approach embeds connection into the infrastructure of everyday work. It does not rely on perks, one-off initiatives, or costly, time-intensive interventions. Instead, it's grounded in thoughtful, scalable design that allows social energy to circulate throughout the organization.

We explore how social energy functions as a workplace resource that can be measured, managed, and renewed. Understanding how this energy flows between people (and where it gets depleted) is key to building cultures that sustain performance and momentum. This perspective forms the foundation of Sunny's Social Battery<sup>TM</sup>, a model that makes energy tangible and actionable across the rhythm of work.

Together, these frameworks help automate connection and fuel the energy that scales individual effort into collective impact.

The future of work will belong to organizations that treat connection as critical infrastructure. This is your blueprint for building it.

This isn't about teaching people how to be human. It's about creating the conditions where our humanity can thrive.

## HERE'S WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE:

- The science-backed impact of meaningful connection on performance, resilience, and culture.
- A clear diagnosis of why so many modern workplaces feel disconnected, even when collaboration appears constant.
- A glimpse into how connection becomes your strategic edge in an AI-powered future.
- The concept of social energy as a renewable, measurable resource, and the hidden cost of letting it drain.
- A new design model: Social Architecture<sup>SM</sup>, built around three core pillars and four foundational spaces.
- Practical ideas for re-energizing your teams, from rituals to policies to technology choices.



# The Modern Workplace Disconnect

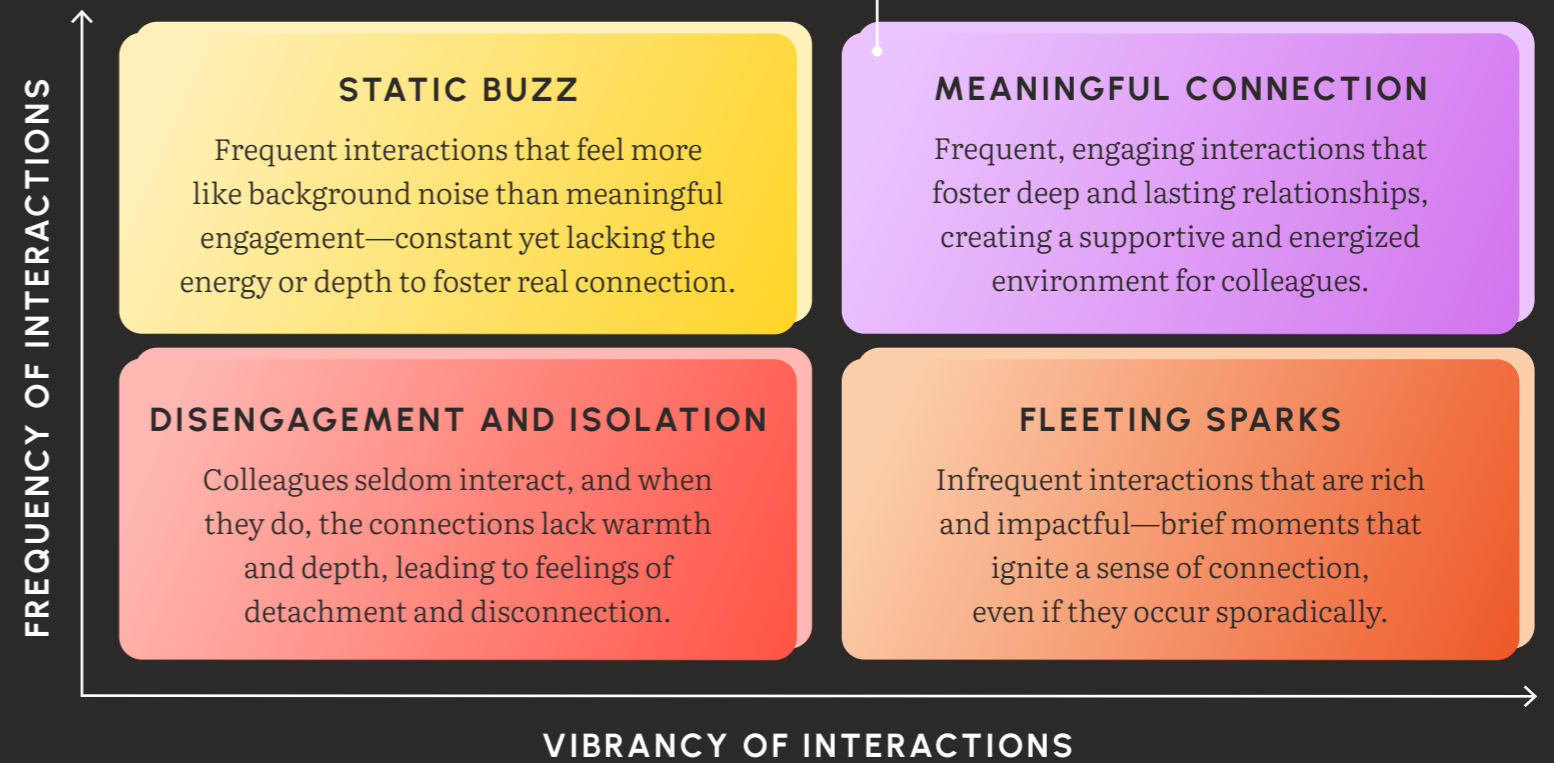
**Picture a typical Tuesday:** your inbox is overflowing, your calendar's double-booked, and Slack is relentlessly buzzing. Somewhere between a quick email reply and a project ping, you're already behind.



By the end of the day, you've answered dozens of messages, sat through back-to-back meetings, and dropped some emoji reactions in the team chat. You've been "in communication" all day long, but still feel strangely detached.

This paradox has become the new normal. And we gave it a name: *static buzz*.

Figure 1



**VARIETY** Meaningful connection comes from a mix—close ties, casual bonds, and everything in between.

## The rise of static buzz

Despite a proliferation of collaboration tools, the modern workplace is suffering systemic disconnection, a structural drift away from the social energy that makes work feel human (Figure 1).

And people can feel it:

**1 in 5**

employees reported feeling significant loneliness just the day before they were surveyed<sup>1</sup>.

**80%**

of the global workforce say they lack the time or energy to do their work<sup>2</sup>.

**76%**

of executives say they struggle to connect with colleagues, and nearly

**60%**

describe workplace relationships as superficial<sup>3</sup>.

**Static buzz** (the overstimulating hum of messages, meetings, and notifications) masquerades as productivity without delivering the depth or vibrancy of meaningful connection. Instead of collaborating, employees are fielding rapid-fire requests. Instead of exchanging ideas, they're clearing inboxes. Work becomes a series of interruptions rather than a shared, purposeful effort.

Digital tools have kept us operational, but they've also kept us overloaded. During the 9-5, employees are interrupted every 2 minutes by meetings, emails, or pings<sup>2</sup>. Nearly 80% of employees say they feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of communication app alerts<sup>4</sup>. Interruptions can double error rates and increase task time by 3% to 27% compared to uninterrupted work<sup>5</sup>. Even video calls, which offer more nuance than text, come with their own challenges. "Zoom fatigue" is now a recognized form of cognitive overload, caused by prolonged screen time, constant self-monitoring, and limited movement<sup>6</sup>.

### STATIC BUZZ DRAINS:

- **Time** because employees are reacting instead of thinking.
- **Energy** because every notification chips away at focus.
- **Innovation** because creative ideas need space to emerge.



- **Culture** because when communication becomes constant but shallow, human connection quietly erodes.



By the day's end, employees feel tired, depleted, and strangely isolated despite being in constant communication.

Yes, tasks are getting done. But without meaningful connection, transactional workplace efficiency comes at the cost of intrinsic motivation, sustained engagement, and a sense of fulfillment.

### Humans are wired for connection. Work isn't.

When companies clear the static, they make space for employees to feel seen, heard, and part of something bigger. That's when connection begins to feel human again.

But static buzz is only a symptom. To understand what's really happening, we have to look at how modern workplaces are designed.

The human brain has evolved to prioritize social connection. Communication, empathy, and collaboration are hardwired into our biology. Our species' success is

built on our ability to work together in units and solve problems as a community<sup>7</sup>.

Yet, modern workplaces (with the best intentions) optimize for efficiency at the expense of human connection. To maximize output, organizations have structured work around:

- **Task-oriented communication:** brief, transactional exchanges.
- **Individualized performance metrics:** prioritizing personal achievement over collective success.
- **Digital efficiency tools:** streamlining work but reducing human interaction.
- **Resource optimization:** maximizing time for output, while minimizing space for connection.
- **Culture focused on "what" over "how":** valuing deliverables more than the dynamics of collaboration.

These systems are optimized for output, but they create unintended consequences: reactive workflows, divided attention, burnout, and disconnection. Employees face information overload, uncertainty about where to focus their energy, and a lack of informal conversations that bring trust, transmit knowledge, and create belonging.

The result is a fractured organizational culture, fueling a new market dedicated to employee experience as companies attempt to course-correct an environment that feels increasingly isolating. What looks like progress on paper often masks energetic decline in practice.



Outside of work, the trend is no different. 41% of Americans report feeling lonely<sup>8</sup>.

The youngest generations are feeling that decline most acutely. Nearly half of workers aged 18-25 say they feel lonely on a regular basis<sup>9</sup>. While this may reflect a growing openness around mental health, it also points to something more profound: a fundamental craving for deeper relationships.

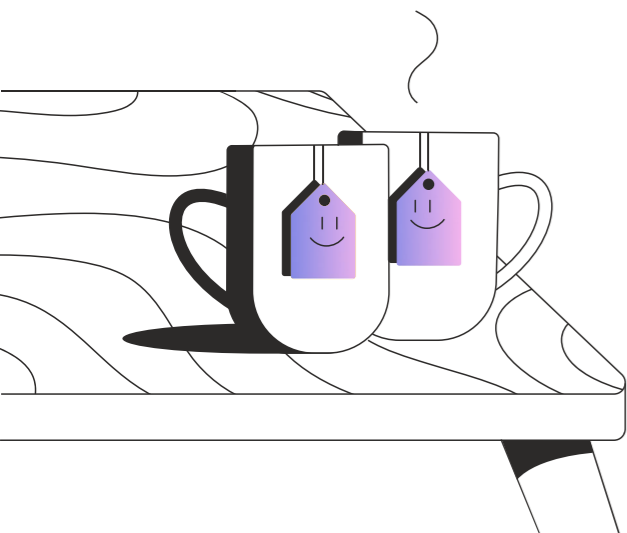
Loneliness is more than a feeling. It's like hunger or thirst: a motivated state for change<sup>10</sup>. And younger generations, in particular, are bringing that desire into the workplace. They're not just looking for a paycheck; they're seeking shared purpose, meaningful interactions, and a way of working that feels human<sup>11</sup>. This shift isn't generational fragility; it's cultural foresight.

## It's not a skills problem. It's a systems problem.

There's a persistent myth that younger generations "just don't know how to connect." That they're too soft, too digital, or too awkward to collaborate.

But this narrative is flawed. What's really missing isn't communication skills, it's social infrastructure.

For decades, connection at work was learned through immersion. New employees absorbed relational dynamics by being around others: watching how teammates asked for help, gave feedback, and built trust. These real-time feedback loops shaped how people grew into contributors and colleagues.



Now, these loops are fraying. In today's hybrid, distributed, and hyper-scheduled environments, people work behind screens and rarely get the informal reinforcement that shapes connection over time.

Even with in-office teams, proximity doesn't guarantee psychological closeness. People work with headphones in, calendars stacked, and attention split across tools and tasks. The exposure that once helped people learn how to connect has quietly disappeared.

The real cost of disconnection isn't just lower engagement. It's a stalled energy system that can't sustain the future of work.

### The attention bottleneck

Connection doesn't just require intention; it requires capacity. And in the noise of static buzz, attention is one of the scarcest resources we have.

The average employee toggles between 11+ applications per day<sup>12</sup>. Calendars are sliced into 30-minute blocks. Communication sprawls across Slack, Zoom, Teams, email, text, and more.

**People give more attention to their screens than to each other, not out of disinterest, but because everything feels more urgent.**

The systems around connection make it difficult to be present, spontaneous, or fully available to one another. Over time, people stop reaching out simply because they're overwhelmed.

### The role of connection in an AI-driven future

As AI automates more of what humans once did, the value of meaningful connection will only rise.

Repetitive, technical, and rules-based tasks are being absorbed by machines. What's left (and what matters most) are the uniquely human capabilities that AI cannot replicate<sup>13</sup>:

- Creativity and problem-solving
- Empathy and ethical decision-making
- Trust-building, collaboration, and sense-making

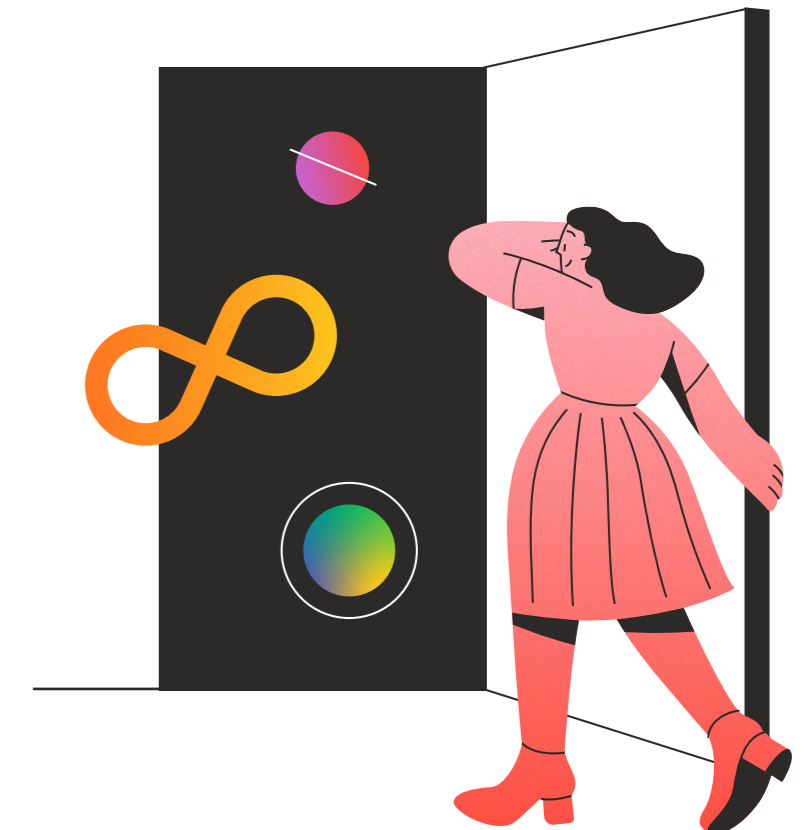
To meet this new reality, organizations must rethink *how* work gets done (not just *what* work gets done). Rather than relying on rigid, hierarchical structures, future-ready teams will function as a fluid network that can assemble quickly, collaborate effectively, resolve conflict, and adapt in real-time. Such teams rely on trust, shared context, and the ability to learn and problem-solve together. And those qualities are powered by connection.

Employees recognize this. Eighty-two percent of individual contributors believe that as AI use grows, employees will crave more human connection. Yet only 65% of managers agree<sup>14</sup>, highlighting a growing disconnect in how leadership views the human side of work. This gap is critical as the manager's role shifts from task overseer to energy shaper and connector.

As Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella put it:

“ I think the world needs today, more than anything else from leaders, are optimism and energy...People come for people, not policy. And I'd like to say that all of us now are event managers; if I say I have a meeting, nobody is going to show up, but if I say I have an event, people are going to come. ”

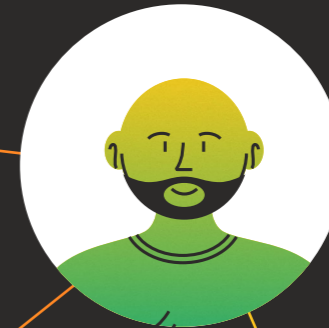
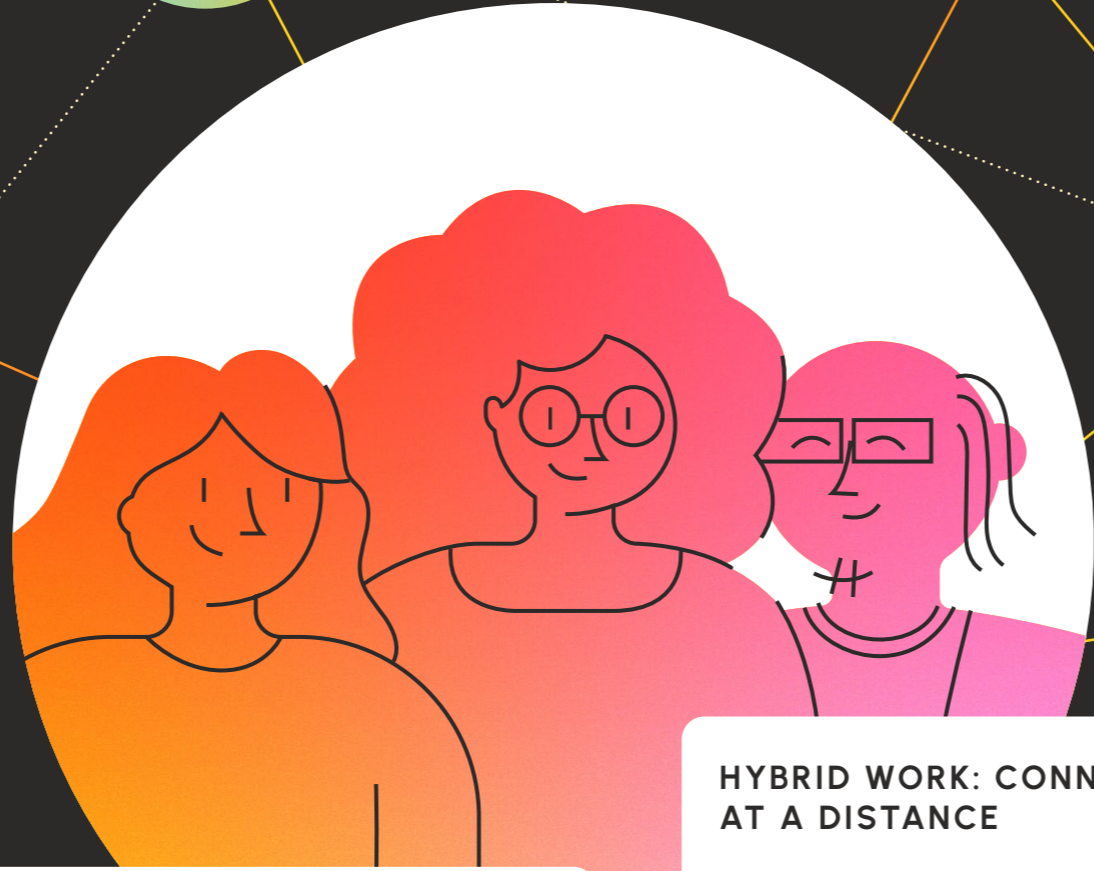
If connection remains shallow or neglected, companies risk building workforces that are individually productive but collectively stagnant. AI may execute flawlessly, but the social system that fuels creativity, learning, and innovation will stall.





### Sunny helps you solve for the three major shifts reshaping work

To move forward, organizations must go beyond reactivity and begin designing for the kind of energy that connects people, powers performance, and sustains culture.



### MULTIGENERATIONAL TEAMS: BRIDGE THE GAP

With five generations in today's workplace, friction is inevitable. Sunny creates shared language and trust so teams can connect and collaborate across age, experience, and expectation.

### HYBRID WORK: CONNECTION AT A DISTANCE

When spontaneous hallway moments disappear, connection can't be left to chance. Sunny helps teams build consistent rhythms that keep them aligned, energized, and cohesive across time zones, tools, and transitions.

### AI TRANSFORMATION: MORE HUMAN THAN EVER

As AI reshapes roles and workflows, the people who remain aren't just operators. They're integrators, trust builders, and energy shapers. Sunny equips your workforce to lead with creativity, resilience, and emotional intelligence. The more digital we become, the more human we must be.



# The Power of Meaningful Connection

Why do some workplaces thrive while others stagnate? The answer may not be strategy, leadership, or even talent, but the presence of meaningful connection.

Meaningful connection is more than getting along or staying in touch. It's the quality of interaction and support that generates energy, deepens trust, and anchors shared purpose<sup>15</sup>.



When connection is strong, energy flows<sup>16</sup>. As that energy scales, it fuels individual motivation, accelerates team momentum, and sustains cultural resilience. It turns a group of capable people into a unified, high-performing force.

At every level of the organization, meaningful connection isn't just a communication channel; it's an energy transfer system. And it powers everything.

## Individual

### AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL, CONNECTION FUELS PERFORMANCE.

When employees feel connected to their colleagues, work gains clarity and meaning<sup>17</sup>. Connection brings context. Exposing employees to their peers' perspectives, priorities, and goals helps them understand how their contributions fit into the bigger picture. This deepens their emotional investment in the organization's objectives and increases optimism about its direction. As a result, work becomes less *passive* and more *purposeful*.

Connection also acts as a buffer against stress, burnout, and disengagement<sup>18</sup>. When employees feel connected, they're more likely to ask for help, share the load, and combine their strengths to meet challenges together<sup>19</sup>. Everyday interactions (e.g., troubleshooting with a teammate, venting over a tough day, or sharing a laugh) reduce emotional exhaustion and replenish the social energy people need to stay motivated. In a 2024 survey, 81% of US professionals said work friendships are "highly important," and 78% said having friends at work improves their mental health<sup>20</sup>.

The impact of connection goes beyond just well-being. Eighty percent of employees report that a sense of community improves their performance<sup>21</sup>. This is because connection expands what people feel capable of handling. Every role comes with formal expectations (like hitting deadlines, managing projects, or

achieving targets) and informal demands (like supporting teammates, contributing to culture, or staying aligned with a manager's expectations). To meet them, we rely on job resources: the tools and capacities we draw from to stay effective.

Often, we think of these resources as internal qualities, such as intelligence, skill, experience, or problem-solving ability. However, external resources are just as important, and can include supportive colleagues, helpful managers, access to information, and a culture that enables collaboration.

Under pressure, we don't always access all the resources available to us. Stress can trigger a threat response in the brain, commonly known as fight-or-flight, narrowing our focus to immediate tasks and individual action<sup>22</sup>. In the process, we lose sight of the most powerful resource we have: the people around us.

Connection acts as a resource multiplier.

It expands what people feel capable of handling because they're not handling it alone. And with it, their energy doesn't just recover; it grows.

In periods of uncertainty, connection keeps employees grounded. When organizations undergo changes, such as restructuring teams or adopting new tools, employees with strong social ties tend to be more agile and adaptive<sup>23</sup>. During the pandemic, for instance, quick chats and virtual check-ins were shown to be effective ways to maintain morale and ease team adjustment to remote work<sup>24</sup>.

More than anything, colleague support drives resilience. We often imagine resilience as an individual trait: grit, determination, the lone high-performer pushing through. But in reality, resilience is rarely solitary. It's built through strong relationships.

Teammate support is what separates employees who hesitate in the face of obstacles from those who meet them with confidence and energy.

**42% of employees say work friendships directly contribute to their resilience in tough times<sup>20</sup>.**

When people know they're in it together, obstacles become opportunities for shared victory rather than solitary burdens.

## Team

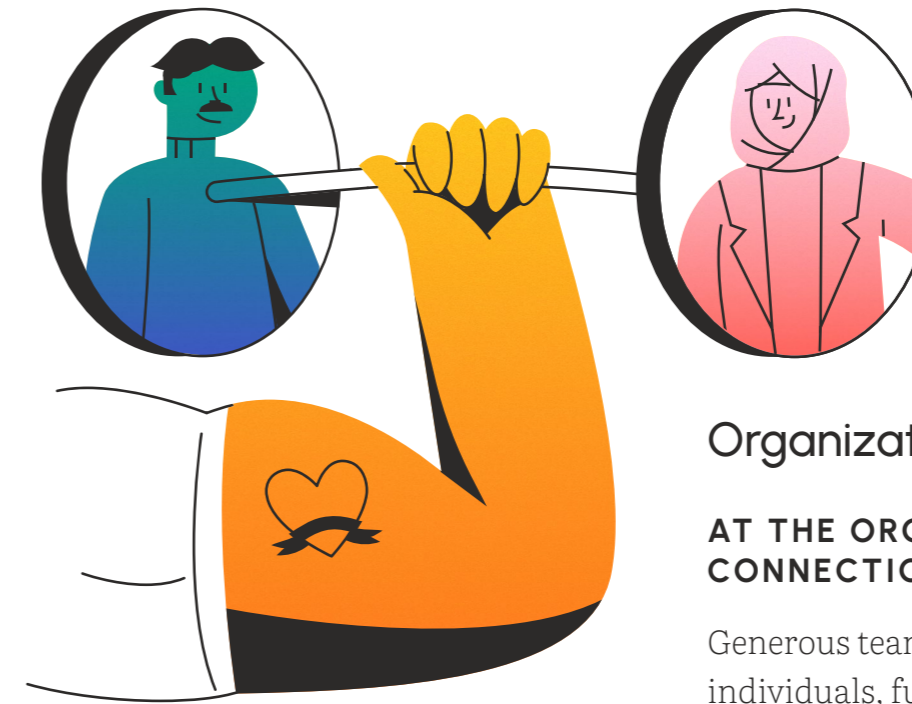
### **AT THE TEAM LEVEL, CONNECTION CREATES MOMENTUM.**

When resilient employees knit together, connection scales into collective strength. Teams rooted in trust and mutual support communicate openly, collaborate effectively, and commit deeply.

In a cohesive unit, knowledge isn't guarded. It's shared freely, fueling a cycle of learning, commitment, and growth<sup>25</sup>. The more teams exchange information, the better they solve problems and reinforce their collective resilience. Work shifts from a series of individual efforts to a shared current, driving stronger performance and greater productivity.

When employees are connected, they are more likely to feel safe to speak up, take risks, and learn from mistakes. Google's "Project Aristotle" study found that psychological safety was the number one predictor of high-performing teams<sup>26</sup>. When teammates feel safe being vulnerable, they're more likely to ask for help, pitch bold ideas, and approach problems with a collaborative, creative mindset<sup>27</sup>.

Friendship and familiarity amplify these effects. Studies show that teams built on genuine connection perform significantly better than teams of strangers<sup>28</sup>. That's because familiarity lowers the barriers to honest conversation, and honest conversation results in better decisions. These teams feel comfortable brainstorming openly, challenging ideas



## Organizational

### **AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL, CONNECTION IS CULTURE.**

Generous teams, made up of connected individuals, fuel an energized, committed culture. This culture is built, reinforced, and renewed through everyday interactions, including how people relate, support each other, share ideas, and navigate challenges together.

Despite years of investment in engagement programs, many organizations still struggle to create environments where employees feel energized and invested. In fact, only 31% of HR leaders believe their company's culture is strong enough to drive their business forward in the coming years. Fifty-seven percent of HR leaders agree that managers fail to drive the culture their organization wants<sup>31</sup>.

This reflects a broader understanding: while culture is necessary for organizational success, it's losing its momentum in modern workplaces. Not because it's less relevant, but because the meaningful connection that once powered it has eroded.

constructively, and leaning on each other's strengths without ego getting in the way.

The energy that flows between teammates becomes a flywheel. It generates trust and provides an emotional lift in moments of pressure or uncertainty<sup>16</sup>.

The effects extend far beyond morale. Gallup found that employees who have a close friend at work are seven times more likely to be engaged, which is linked to improved work quality, stronger retention, and even better workplace safety<sup>29</sup>. Companies with highly engaged employees perform measurably better, with outcomes like 23% higher profitability and 18% greater sales<sup>30</sup>. Connected teams don't just get along. They get results.

## Connection drives culture

Culture isn't what's written on the wall. It's what happens in the room.

It's the shared behaviors, norms, and signals that tell people: *This is how we work. This is how we treat each other. This is what matters here.* Surveyed executives described culture as “a belief system,” “a coordination mechanism,” “an invisible hand,” and “how employees interact with one another.” Yet 93% of those executives described their culture as values-driven from the top, rather than built through bottom-up connection<sup>32</sup>. This discrepancy is consequential.

The connection that once powered vibrant, collaborative workplaces has weakened due to factors like pandemic fatigue, political polarization, and ongoing shifts in work arrangements. Many organizations operate in silos, resulting in interactions that have become transactional. As a result, many workplaces feel fragmented. The top-down, values-based approach has not been enough, on its own, to sustain the energy and culture organizations need to perform.

From the outside, culture may look intact, but on the inside, it feels stagnant, disconnected,

and uninspired. People (and business outcomes) experience the difference as engagement feels performative. Collaboration becomes compliance. A shared sense of purpose dissolves.

Without intentional effort to prioritize connection, culture becomes an idea rather than a lived experience. This is why managerial ownership at the team level is more positively related to strong culture than top executive ownership<sup>32</sup>.

That's why connection must be treated as infrastructure, something to design, sustain, and measure with the same discipline as any other strategic asset. Driving team connection has been shown to build cultures as varied as:

- **Helping cultures:** where generosity is the norm, not the exception<sup>33</sup>.
- **Safety cultures:** where people feel secure (both physically and psychologically) and supported when they take risks, ask for help, or admit mistakes<sup>34</sup>.
- **Speak-up cultures:** where contributions are celebrated, ideas are tested, and people share a sense of ownership over the health of the workplace<sup>35</sup>.

## FOCUS FEATURE: SAFETY/HELPING CULTURES

Research shows that strong peer relationships are a key driver of team identification and a predictor of “above and beyond” helping behaviors<sup>33</sup>. In environments where colleague connection is strong, individuals don't just feel psychologically safe; they contribute to that safety by looking out for one another<sup>36</sup>.

In industries like maritime transport (where safety is paramount), strong peer relationships have been shown to directly strengthen a culture of safety and increase proactive safety behaviors<sup>34</sup>. In other words, when people feel connected, they don't just protect themselves. They protect each other.

Meaningful connection isn't a byproduct of culture; it's the starting point. And at a time when workplace energy feels depleted, it's also the force that can rebuild it, one relationship at a time.

Connection is the spark. Energy is the current that carries it. To scale it sustainably, we need to understand what fuels it (and how to keep that fuel flowing).



# The Energy-Connection Loop

Connection at work isn't just about feeling good. *It's about having the energy to do good work.*



Social energy is the motivational spark that drives us toward others. It underpins key behaviors that keep organizations running, such as helping, following through, solving problems together, and learning in real time. It's not a mood or a mindset.

One fuels the other, as energized environments create more connection, which in turn generates more relational energy. This sets off a self-reinforcing cycle of engagement and shared momentum. Research shows that employees

We define social energy as a *dynamic psychological state* that reflects a person's immediate capacity and readiness to engage in social interactions such as collaborating, networking, and negotiating.



who interact with energizing colleagues are more engaged, more resilient, and higher-performing<sup>16</sup>.

The opposite is also true<sup>38</sup>. When social energy is blocked, people withdraw. They stop reaching out, avoid spontaneous interaction, and quietly burn out. Culture stalls because the energy that animates it has gone missing. This may happen due to negative behaviors, such as bullying and incivility, but it may also happen because of apathetic or transactional work environments. The static buzz we've described earlier is a major blocker of relational energy.

Employee social energy is the fuel of connection. When it flows between people in real time, it gives rise to *relational energy*, the motivational spark we draw from meaningful connection<sup>37</sup>.

When workplaces treat connection as a source of energy (rather than an emotional experience), they unlock a powerful upstream driver of performance. Connection becomes a cultural force multiplier:

the current that carries trust, momentum, and commitment across the organization.

## Vibrancy is the differentiator

Energy fuels connection, but not all connection is created equal. Some interactions drain us. Others uplift, ground, and re-energize us.

That's why it's not just the presence of connection that matters, but the *quality* of it.



### VIBRANCY IS SHAPED BY:

#### Energy:

The emotional lift we get from others that leaves us feeling more capable, motivated, or grounded, especially in moments of stress or uncertainty.

#### Depth:

The willingness to go beyond transactional talk through honesty, vulnerability, or insight that deepens understanding.

#### Positive intention:

A sense of trust, care, and goodwill in how people relate, signaling support rather than competition.

### At Sunny, we define meaningful connection through three core features:

- **Frequency:** How often colleagues interact, including the regularity and predictability of those interactions.
- **Variety:** The breadth of connection across different teams, departments, and organizational levels.
- **Vibrancy:** The energy and positive intention behind interactions that make connection feel rich, uplifting, and human.

All three matter, but vibrancy is what makes connection stick. It's the difference between going through the motions and truly moving people.

#### Presence:

The quality of attention we bring to an interaction. It's the difference between a distracted nod and a real pause to check in with presence and respect.

#### Spontaneity:

Unplanned, human moments that break routine through humor, encouragement, or levity—building connection and reminding people they're not just cogs in a machine.



Vibrant workplaces are full of emotionally rich micro-moments. A colleague who says, "I've got your back" (and follows through). A check-in that turns into an encouraging moment. A leader who makes space for questions without judgment.

These moments of energy exchange create a culture where people feel grounded, motivated, and ready to move forward together.

Vibrancy isn't about being "on" all the time, faking positivity, or making grand gestures. It lives in the small moments of humanity through interactions that disrupt autopilot, signal care, and leave you feeling a little more energized than before. Over time, these moments create a culture that feels emotionally rich, not just operationally efficient.

Vibrancy also isn't a fixed trait; it's something we create. It starts with presence, empathy, and an intention to lift others. Leaders play a key role by modeling trust and offering emotional support. But everyone contributes to team vibrancy through everyday actions like showing appreciation, giving credit, or simply asking, "How are you really doing?"

When vibrancy is missing, frequent interaction alone feels empty. But when it's present, even short exchanges can energize and sustain.

## Fueling connection

Social energy is a real, renewable workplace resource. It fuels connection, which drives productivity, buffers stress, improves retention, and boosts employees' well-being beyond just work. Unlike many corporate resources, it doesn't require sweeping tech overhauls or complex rollout plans. Instead, it requires attention, intention, and systems that enable people to uplift each other.

Even small rituals can reignite social energy:

- A 15-minute weekly "progress pairing" to share wins and stuck points.
- A shared "start well" or "close strong" routine to frame the week.
- Casual time buffers between meetings for decompression or check-ins.



The goal isn't to add more to people's plates. It's to rewire how they engage with what's already there, transforming routine interactions into opportunities for meaning, momentum, and shared performance. That's why the real breakthrough comes from designing workplaces where this energy flows automatically, every day.



# Designing for Connection

Designing for connection isn't about teaching people how to be human. It's about creating the conditions where humanity can *thrive*.

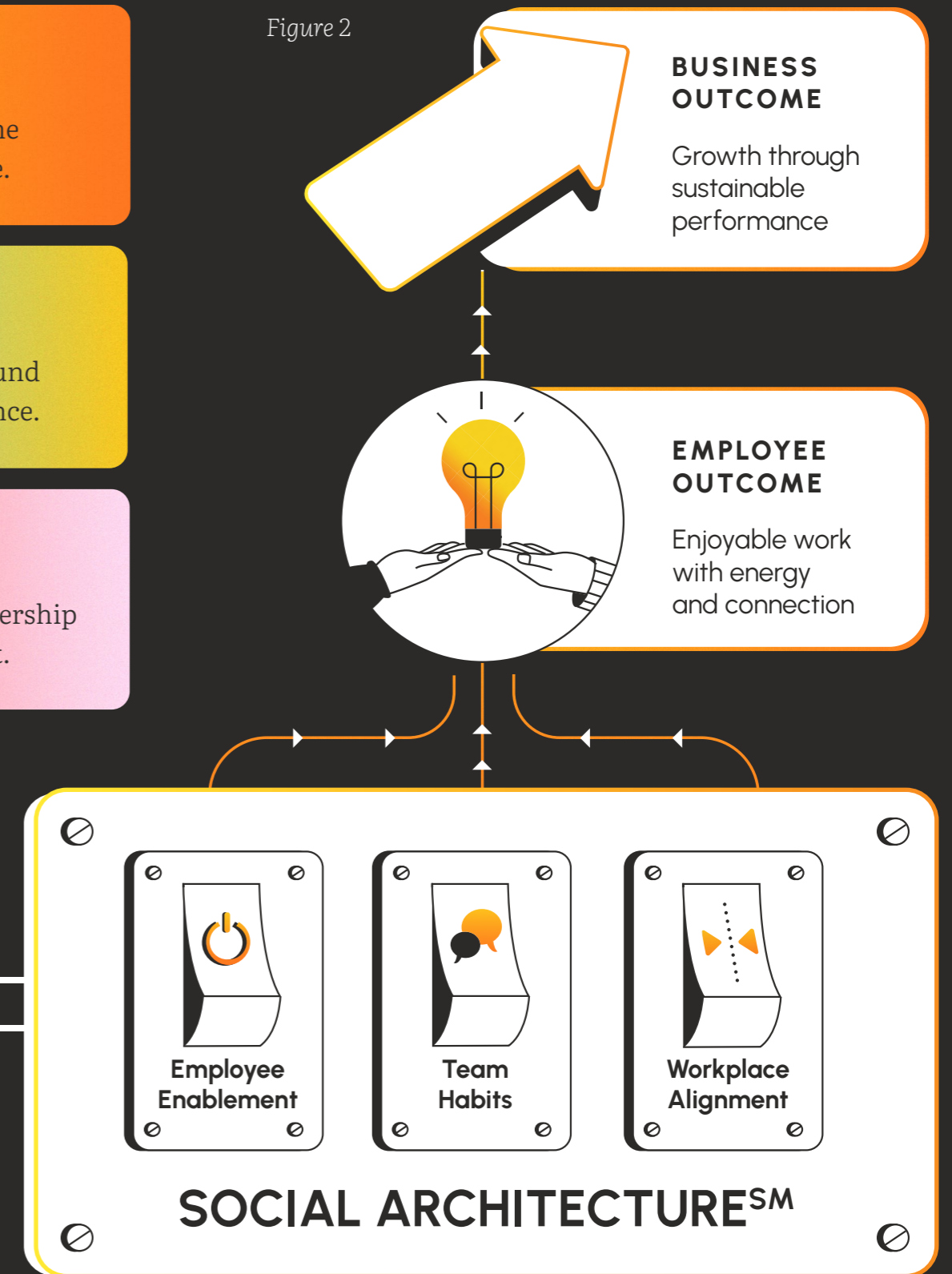
That's why we created Social Architecture<sup>SM</sup>, our practical framework for embedding connection into the infrastructure of work. Social Architecture<sup>SM</sup> is the design of an environment (including physical, social, and digital elements) in ways that embed effortless connection.



WE BUILD SOCIAL ARCHITECTURE<sup>SM</sup>  
BY MAKING CONNECTION:

- AUTOMATIC:**  
Connection becomes the path of least resistance.
- ANCHORED:**  
Rhythms and rituals ground people in shared experience.
- AUTONOMOUS:**  
People have choice and ownership over how they connect.

Figure 2



**When connection is built into the flow of work**, it becomes self-reinforcing, fueling energizing collaboration, strengthening culture, and equipping teams with greater trust, alignment, and resilience.

This approach builds connection effectively into the foundations of an organization's culture and operating system.



## Automatic

**EMPLOYEES CONNECT MORE WHEN IT'S THE DEFAULT WAY OF WORKING AND THE EFFORT BARRIER IS REMOVED.**

Automatic connection is enabled through defaults, signals, prompts, and nudges that make engagement effortless. These structural cues reduce the friction of initiating interaction, moving connection from intention to instinct.

Examples:

- Normalizing camera-on as the default for virtual meetings, nudging more visual connection.
- Downsizing or redesigning office space to naturally bring people into shared areas.
- Cueing Slack messages with social lead-ins (“👋 Morning crew – how’s everyone feeling today?”).
- Embedding icebreakers or gratitude prompts into the start of meetings.
- Refining tech workflows to steer people toward shared digital spaces rather than isolated silos.

## Anchored

**HABITS AND RITUALS ENSURE CONNECTION IS CONSISTENT AND MEANINGFUL, NOT SPORADIC.**

Anchored connection is created through repeatable team practices that generate predictability and consistency. These rituals help increase adoption and establish team rhythm.

Examples:

- Embedding weekly check-in rituals to surface wins, blockers, and personal updates in under 15 minutes.
- Establishing milestone-closeout habits like “what worked, what we’d do differently” to normalize learning and closure.
- Integrating connection moments into project kickoffs, aligning on working styles, preferences, and team norms.
- Standardizing brief “pulse checks” during heavy sprints to assess energy alongside progress (no extra meetings required).
- Refreshing team agreements quarterly to keep connection norms current, relevant, and team-owned.

## Autonomous

**CONNECTION OCCURS IN WAYS THAT ARE AUTHENTIC FOR EMPLOYEES, NOT FIXED OR FORCED.**

Autonomous connection empowers people to engage on their own terms (with choice, voice, and control), rather than through a mandated approach.

Examples:

- Offering flexible connection pathways, such as async prompts, opt-in circles, and 1:1 walking meetings.
- Equipping Culture Champions to customize social rituals based on local energy rhythms.
- Enabling employees to track and shape their Social Battery™ via proactive planning tools.
- Creating connection libraries and templates that teams can pull from, without mandates or micromanagement.
- Building psychological safety to say “no” to connection when capacity is low, without guilt.

When connection is Automatic, Anchored, and Autonomous, it's no longer left to charisma or chance; it's built into the environment itself. Just like good user experience, great Social Architecture™ makes meaningful connection feel intuitive and energizing.

## A future with Sunny

Complex change like this requires the careful implementation of a strategic ecosystem. That's where Sunny comes in. We handle the hard part, making connection plug-and-play through practical design, scalable tools, and real-time support.

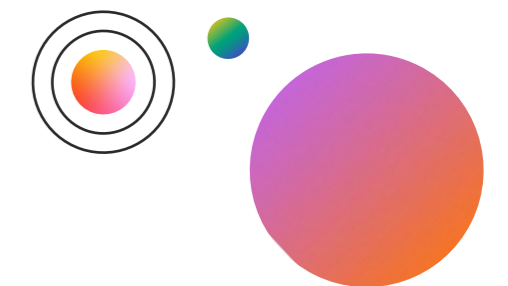
Our approach is unique because we focus on the psychology that drives the energy and action behind meaningful connection, not just surface behaviors.

### ENERGY

- Optimize your Social Battery™ for connection.
- Aim for frequent, vibrant interactions.
- Avoid demotivating social predictions.

### ACTION

- Make tiny connections, often.
- Enable ‘connectors’ who bring people together.
- Embed connection into everyday life.
- Package what works so it's simple for others to replicate.



## Implementing Social Architecture<sup>SM</sup>

Social Architecture<sup>SM</sup> (figure 2) reframes the question from “How do we get people to connect?” to “How do we build connection into the way we work?”

We use the Social Architecture<sup>SM</sup> design principles to foster connection through three key opportunities:



### 1. EMPLOYEE ENABLEMENT

**Equipping individuals with the energy, mindset, and support to connect.**

Connection happens when people feel charged, capable, and supported. That’s why Sunny doesn’t view connection as a personality trait. Rather, it’s shaped by the right resources, behaviors, and beliefs.

Employee enablement is about unlocking the internal and external conditions that make connection natural and energizing.

We partner with organizations to activate those conditions by focusing on three foundational levers:

- **Energy:** Helping employees preserve and replenish the social energy needed to show up for others.
- **Skill:** Where needed, building the confidence and tools for key interpersonal behaviors (especially at moments of tension, transition, or leadership).
- **Mindset:** Reframing connection as a core ingredient of effective teamwork, not just a “nice-to-have.”

When those conditions are in place, employees show up with clarity, collaborate with confidence, and contribute in ways that strengthen alignment, accelerate progress, and deepen accountability. This is the power of enablement, not as training, but as a system that activates human energy at work.

Sunny also helps shift limiting beliefs around workplace relationships. Many employees assume that connection is either instant or out of reach: “If I’m not already close with this person, it won’t happen.” We reframe connection as a learnable, repeatable behavior that grows through feedback, practice, and intention.

These shifts aren’t theoretical. We help embed them into the *actual flow of work*, from how meetings begin and how feedback is shared to the way people respond to conflict. No heavy lifts. No cultural overhauls. Just practical tools that meet teams where they are.

When people are enabled (at the level of energy, mindset, and skill), they don’t have to force connection. They generate it every day, across the system.



### 2. TEAM HABITS

**Embedding connection into how teams work automatically and intentionally.**

At Sunny, we don’t believe in adding more to already-packed calendars. We focus on making what’s already happening more energizing and effective.

Social Architecture<sup>SM</sup> helps teams hardwire connection into daily operations, converting routine interactions into rituals that restore energy, build trust, and act as circuit breakers in the static buzz of modern work.

Some of the science-backed social protocols Sunny equips teams with include:

- Energizing meeting frameworks to increase clarity, reduce friction, and elevate team output.
- Decision-making practices that drive action while reinforcing shared ownership.
- Micro-feedback loops shown to improve alignment and strengthen cohesion.
- Structured reflection practices that sharpen foresight, resilience, and focus.
- Peer pairing cadences that unlock real-time learning, accountability, and creative problem-solving.

Importantly, we build in flexibility from the start. What works for a creative team on-site may not suit a global ops team spread across time zones. That’s why Sunny encourages principles, not prescriptions, inviting teams to adopt the rituals that serve their unique flow, goals, and dynamics.

When connection becomes a habit, performance becomes a shared rhythm. Teams move faster, solve smarter, and navigate change with greater unity because the foundation is already in place.

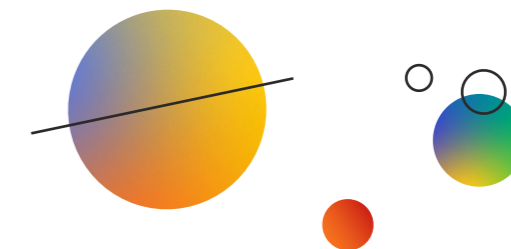


### 3. WORKPLACE ALIGNMENT

**Creating organizational norms, policies, and systems that support connection at scale.**

Connection can’t rely on individual effort alone. It requires infrastructure (policies, tools, workflows, and norms) that reinforce connection at scale.

Workplace alignment ensures that the systems built to drive performance also support the human energy that powers them. Sunny works with organizations to audit and realign both their hard scaffolding (technology, scheduling, performance structures) and soft scaffolding (values, leadership behavior, cultural signals). We help translate good intentions into systems that deliver on them.



Key questions we help organizations address include:

- Are there protocols that protect time for deep work and team reflection?
- Do recognition systems reward individual performance or collaborative contribution?
- Are communication tools optimized for coordination or adding to the noise?

Even the best policies can be misinterpreted. And misalignment (between intent and experience) is a silent drain on energy and trust. That's why we emphasize strategic consistency over uniformity, helping companies set clear guardrails while giving teams the flexibility to adapt to them meaningfully.

Technology plays a role here as well. In a sea of tools, messages, and platforms, organizations must ask: are we using tech to connect, or just to transact?

We support teams in streamlining and humanizing their digital environments so that tools serve people, not the other way around. When the systems that enable performance also support connection, work doesn't just move forward; it brings people with it.

The future of work belongs to organizations that power human connection. Not as a value, but as infrastructure. Not occasionally, but by design. **That's where Sunny comes in.**

## Making connection your competitive edge

The three ways of implementing Social Architecture<sup>SM</sup> form a blueprint for making connection a renewable force inside your organization, built into how people show up, collaborate, and succeed.

Today's work environment demands more than just productivity. It demands presence, trust, and creativity. And yet, most workplaces default to a narrow slice of experience, with reactive communication, relentless collaboration, and little space for reflection or renewal. People are always "on," always reacting, but feel disconnected nevertheless.

Social Architecture<sup>SM</sup> changes that. It creates the conditions where connection becomes a steady, energizing presence. Not something to push, but something that flows.

When teams use Sunny's tools to fuel connection, the energy of work shifts. People feel more grounded, more focused, and more capable of moving together with purpose.

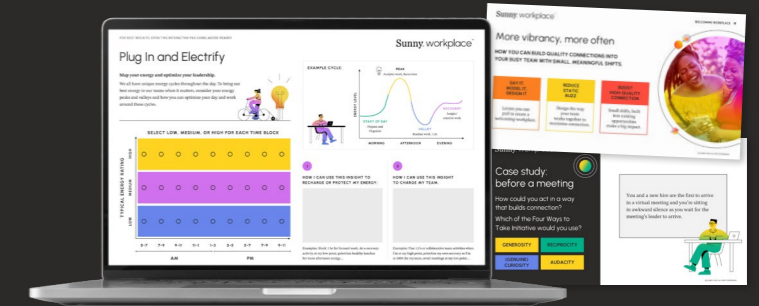
## With Sunny, organizations don't need to reinvent the wheel.

We've distilled years of research and practice into products that are ready to use, easy to scale, and designed for real workplaces. This makes connection not another demand on people's attention, but an energy source that powers performance.



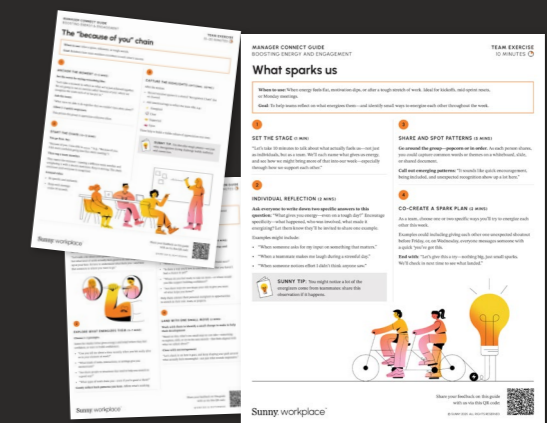
### SUNNY SESSIONS

Deliver three 60-minute, ready-to-run sessions tailored for individual contributors, managers, and leaders—so everyone can engage in ways that feel approachable and relevant.



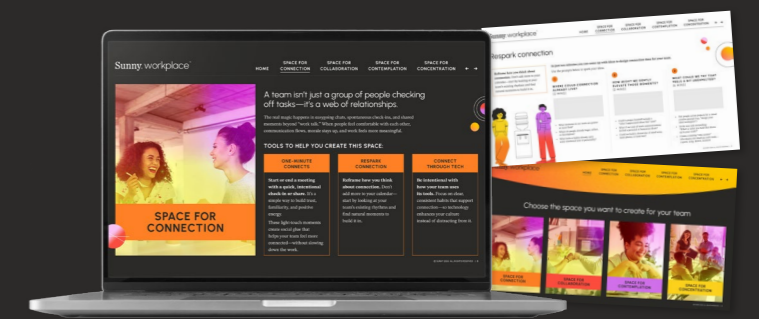
### MANAGER CONNECT GUIDES

Lead meaningful conversations in team meetings and 1:1s with short, structured guides designed to build trust, fuel relational energy, and fit seamlessly into existing routines.



### MANAGER TOOLKITS

Equip managers with self-serve tools that fuel energy across four core areas—connection, collaboration, contemplation, and concentration—and take actionable steps to create the conditions for teams to thrive.

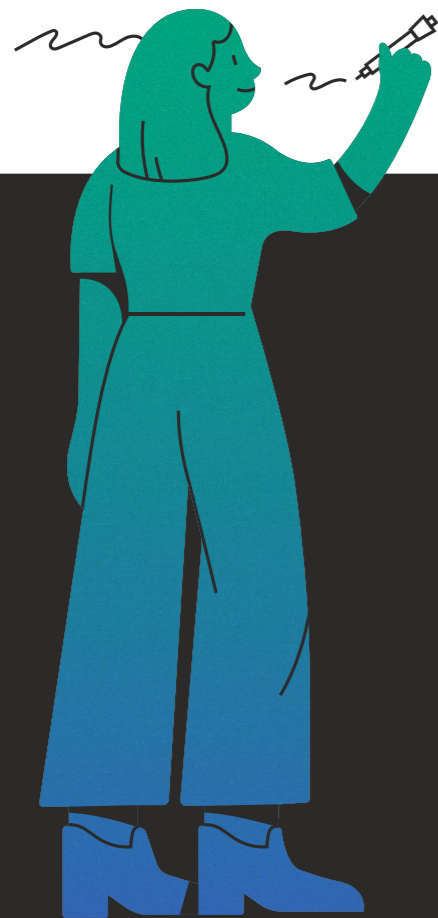


# We deliver science-backed systems that embed connection into the DNA of how your organization works.

## About Sunny Workplace™

Sunny Workplace™ helps organizations turn connection into a renewable advantage that powers performance, strengthens trust, and sustains culture from the inside out.

We equip leaders with science-backed, plug-and-play tools that embed connection into the flow of work. With frameworks like the Social Battery™ and Social ArchitectureSM, teams can amplify the energy that drives engagement and builds culture, not through another initiative but through everyday shifts that fuel connection and scale impact.



Whether you're an HR leader designing culture, a team lead navigating burnout, or an executive exploring performance drivers, we give you the tools to act with confidence and clarity.

Our belief is simple: connection shouldn't be another demand. It should be your most renewable advantage.

If you're ready to unlock the conditions where people thrive and performance scales, Sunny is here to help.

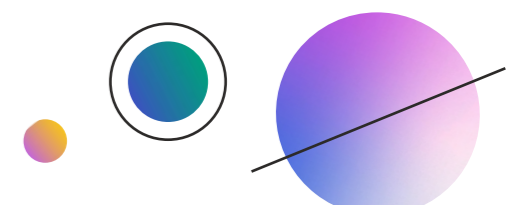
## Ready to get started?

### HERE'S HOW WE HELP:

- Scalable toolkits, sessions, and team rituals ready to plug into your existing workflows.
- Strategic partnership and tailored support to embed lasting connection across onboarding, leadership, hybrid collaboration, and more.
- Research-backed frameworks that make connection visible, measurable, and repeatable.
- Seamless integrations with Slack and Microsoft Teams, so nudges, prompts, and check-ins meet employees right where work happens.

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# Meet Sunny

## MEANINGFUL CONNECTION IN A MODERN WORLD.

Sunny helps people and organizations rediscover the energy and action needed to fuel meaningful connection. Funded by the **Barnes Family Foundation**, Sunny's unique purpose-over-profit model means we reinvest every dollar into expanding our reach and impact.

Our free mobile app tracks and boosts your Social Battery™ while offering simple steps to connect. Our Sunny Workplace™ platform helps organizations embed connection into the flow of work, turning social energy into a renewable resource that powers performance, strengthens trust, and sustains culture from the inside out.

Ready to bring Sunny Workplace™ to your organization?

