Keynote & Workshop 2026

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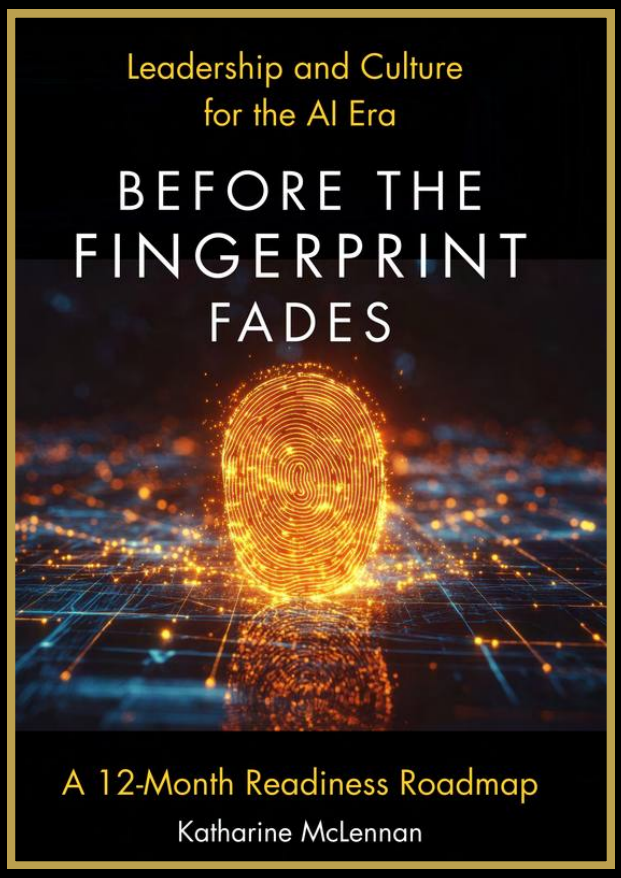




amazon Amazon Kindle/Paperback

(Colour Hardcover contact me)

AI did not simply disrupt industries. It ended the Information Age.
Most organizations are responding with speed, tools, and pilots. Few are confronting the deeper question: Is your leadership ready for what this era demands?

In this keynote and accompanying workshop, Katharine McLennan challenges executive teams to examine the hidden cultural assumptions they are still carrying from the Industrial and Information Ages. She introduces two practical frameworks, VISTA and ORG6, to help leaders diagnose whether their culture is drifting toward irrelevance or deliberately building ingenuity.

This is not a talk or workshop about technology. It is a talk about judgment, courage, culture, and the choices that determine whether organizations amplify human wisdom or quietly lose it.

Audiences leave with a clear lens for assessing readiness and a disciplined roadmap for leading in the AI Era.

Videos of Other Keynote Speeches

My Channel YouTube

LINK



THREE MINUTE SPEAKING DEMO SHOW REEL

LINK



2024 TEDX TALK: CREATING BRAIN-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES FOR THE AI AGE

LINK



Keynote at 2025 Skills Conference Where Human Wisdom Meets Artificial Intelligence

LINK



Top 100 Global Leaders Cochlear "Neuroscience and Leadership"

Testimonials

CEO-TESTED. PODIUM-PROVEN.



John Quayle, CEO National Rugby League and NRL Hall of Fame

"Katharine was a driving force in the operational planning for the Sydney Olympics—and just as powerful behind a microphone. Over the last 25 years, she has continued to bring the same focus, humour, and clarity to her speaking that she brought to every challenge we faced together. She's one of the best communicators I've ever worked with—and she always had a sense of what was coming before the rest of us saw it."



Jon Sutton, CEO Bankwest, CEO Bank of Queensland, CEO ScotPAC

"Katharine has advised me and my executive teams on leadership and culture for over 15 years. I continue to rehire her for her exceptional coaching, facilitation, and speaking impact. She doesn't just talk about leadership when she's on stage—she makes you feel it. Whether addressing 10 or 300 people, she brings clarity, energy, and insight that sticks—especially about where leadership is headed next."



Chris Smith, Global CEO Cochlear; CEO NeoGenomics,

"Katharine helped shape our global people and culture strategy during my tenure as CEO of Cochlear. She made an everlasting impact on the global business and our multicultural organization. Her style is sharp, heartfelt, and deeply relevant to today's business leaders. She brings vision and humanity to every conversation—and a rare ability to connect today's choices to tomorrow's realities."



John O'Sullivan, CEO Tourism Australia

"For four years at the Sydney Olympics, Katharine's role was to meld 80 functions into one cohesive operation. It was a masterclass in leadership under pressure. She brought clarity, empathy, and calm to complexity—and now, 25 years on, I still draw value from her leadership and culture wisdom. As a speaker, she combines strategic depth with human insight and a sharp, future-focused lens."



Betina Szkudlarek, Prof of Intl Management, University Technology Sydney

"Katharine is one of the most knowledgeable, inspiring and engaging speakers I have ever met. I have been inviting Katharine to guest lecture at the University of Sydney Business School for over seven years. Her insights on neuroscience and leadership are among the most powerful learning experiences. Her classes are a truly transformative experience for everyone, and her passion, connection with the audience and wealth of knowledge are truly unique!"



Geoff Parmenter, CEO Events NSW, CEO New Sydney Waterfront

"I worked with Katharine for four years during the lead-up to the Sydney Olympics—some of the most complex, high-stakes planning any team could face. Over the last 25 years, I have seen her continuing to stand out for her strategic clarity, communication skill, and ability to keep people focused. She continues to coach my own insight—especially around the future of leadership and culture. As a speaker, she brings both sharp intelligence and grounded humanity."



Ian Bottrell, Division President, USA for Jones Lang Lasalle (JLL)

"I've worked with Katharine on some of the most complex leadership challenges over the last 29 years. She is perhaps the cleverest and most capable person I have ever worked with. She brings insight, structure, and emotional intelligence to everything she does. When she speaks, she delivers ideas that are clear, grounded, and just far enough ahead to change your thinking."



Katharine McLennan

Katharine McLennan is a rare blend of C-suite executive, strategist, psychotherapist, and keynote speaker. With over 35 years' experience across 50+ organisations, she brings deep business acumen and psychological insight to today's most complex leadership challenges.

She has led global People & Culture for the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and Cochlear, and advised executive teams on strategy, transformation, and succession through Booz & Co, Heidrick & Struggles, and PwC.

Katharine operates at the intersection of strategy, culture, execution, and inner leadership development. As Head of Operational Planning for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, she demonstrated her ability to lead at scale and under pressure.

Since then, she has coached and assessed hundreds of senior leaders on integrating purpose, performance, and people in a rapidly changing world.

She holds a BA in Neuroscience and History from Duke University (summa cum laude), an MA in Political Science from UNSW, and an MBA (top 5%) from Stanford. She is also a qualified clinical psychotherapist.

She is renowned for her Oprah-style interaction; she engages audiences to think beyond the moment and apply insights to real-world leadership challenges.

A natural storyteller, she draws on deep experience with executives to spark practical change.

YouTube

OTHER KEYNOTE TOPICS



Creating Brain Friendly Workplaces for the Imagination Age

Imagine a future where our workplaces are more human-centred and we can tap into our full cognitive potential - optimising our brain, our creativity and our potential. Why do our Industrial Age organisations threaten our serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin, centred brain waves, and the clarity of our prefrontal cortex? What about our gut, our sleep, and our breath? It is time for a new workplace -- but how?



AI meets Human Wisdom: Navigating Leadership in the Integration Age

The Information Age has passed. Knowledge and, therefore, strategy quickly become commodities that can easily be discovered and passed between competitors across the world. The precious combination of AI, human creativity, customer enthralment, employee activism, and laser-like continuous improvement is an outcome of getting the right talent to love what they do, whom they work with, and where they work.



The Second Most Powerful and Paid Person is not the CFO, COO, CIO . . .

The Chief People Officer needs to be the right hand of the CEO and the second most paid and powerful person in the organisation. This position will also be the final stepping stone to the CEO position. The AI Age will force us to recognise that talent and culture are the two "assets" that cannot be copied. They have the potential to grow in value exponentially—if we know how to do it and focus on it.

OTHER KEYNOTE TOPICS (continued)



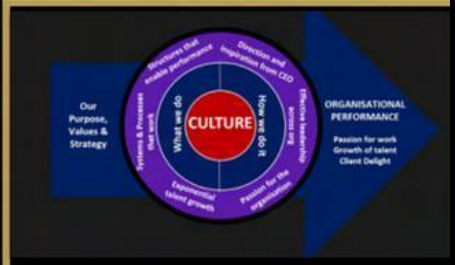
The Neuroscience of Fearless Leadership - overcoming anxiety at work

Fearless Leadership: How do we develop our brains to deal with the stress of the 2020s: A Neuroscientific Perspective to dealing with everyday workplace situations that can derail us. We reflect on a four-part model of how the brain gets so easily fooled that we're facing a death threat at work -- and what we can do to retrain the mind. This includes an explanation of how the brain works in stress



Planning the Sydney Olympics: What it Taught me About Leadership & Culture

From 1996 to 2000, I was head of Operational Integration Planning for the Sydney Olympics 2000. Over four years, I led in translating vision to strategy to implementation and operations. My consulting and executive experience in strategy, talent, organisation, and leadership were built on these foundations. These insights are pragmatic and applicable today to any organisation.



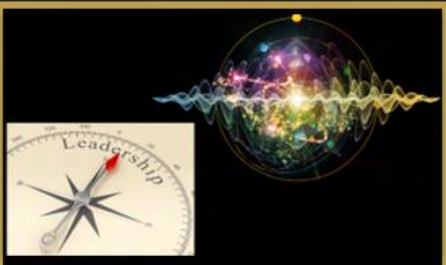
Culture: Not a buzzword but the reason you can't wait to come to work

What exactly is "Culture" – a frequently used term that remains vague and unactionable for most executives – so how do we define it, measure it, and improve it in the most down-to-earth way so that we love coming to work? We can't wait to contribute our potential. An engagement score from a survey taken online won't cut it.



The Intuitive Edge: how executives can relearn what we've lost long ago

How to develop intuition—we are not born with it —we can develop it. We need it more than ever in a world that no longer makes sense. Our ancient peoples had it, and we lost it in the hours we worked and the technology that has fascinated us. We can relearn it if we partner well with artificial intelligence.



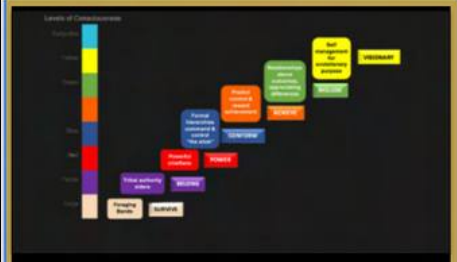
Quantum Physics Applied to Leadership - Harnessing the Possibility

Applying Quantum Physics to Leadership and Culture—Quantum physics offers extraordinary and understandable insights into how to think about today's workplaces. We reflect on abstract theories like the uncertainty theory, the observer effect, potential and possibility, and more. We turn them into everyday English and then apply them to the workplace.



Reclaiming Connection: The Lost Arts of Dialogue and Storytelling

Discovering two long-lost arts in our society and our organisation: dialogue and storytelling. Going past the "crucial conversation" mechanics and into the heart-heart meets mind-to-mind. It is high time we let AI do its thing and let us reclaim our ancient wisdom through the power of our word- and allow connection of our people



Vertical Leadership: Evolving from Intelligence to Wisdom in the age of AI

Vertical Leadership: Growing into IQ and then Emotional Intelligence, then Systemic Intelligence and then Wisdom. Why our Leadership Development programs are failing us and how we transform how we develop leaders in this AI Age. We see this in our leaders, and we now have a way to describe the strength of their leadership. Hint: it is not IQ.



Spiral Dynamics: Navigating the Shift from Chaos to Clarity

What worked for the Information Age will not work in the emerging AI Age. How does the philosophy of spiral dynamics help us see the next stage in societal and organizational evolution? What will be our role in this change? What will be our responsibility?



From Thought to Action: The Unseen Power of Mindset and Intention

We underestimate the impact on others and the results of the way we use our minds, the way we talk to ourselves, and the way we focus the "washing machine" of our thoughts. How can we quiet the mind, choose the thoughts we want to listen to and stay clear on the intention we want to have?

MY PODCAST LINK



Podcast: From Baby Boomer to Gen Z

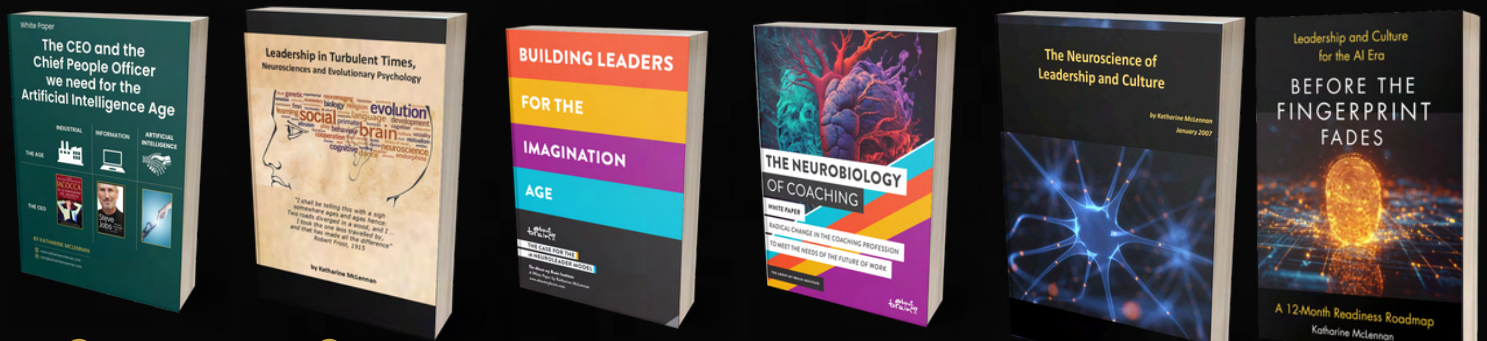
Katharine McLennan hosts bold, intergenerational conversations between Stanford MBAs from the Class of '95 and '25 — exploring how leadership, work, and purpose have evolved across generations.



1. CEO Succession Programs
2. Culture Transformation Programs
3. Executive Team Performance
4. Coaching a CEO (CEO / Coach)
5. CPO — Coaching a Chief People Officer (Chief People Officer)

BOOKS & WHITE PAPERS

Link to the Collection



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POSITIONS HELD AS CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER OR SENIOR EXEC AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL

Booz Allen · Sydney 2000 · YWCA NSW · pwc · Chandler Macleod · Heidrick & Struggles · CommonwealthBank · QBE · about my brain · Cochlear · UTS: Business School · export finance australia

SAMPLE OF CLIENTS OVER 35 YEARS AS AN EXTERNAL LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE ADVISOR

ScotPac Business Finance · Ergon Energy · Telstra · Qantas · Woolworths · Macquarie · Westpac · EY · Leighton · NRL · nbn · MinterEllison · Centrelink · Quest for Life · UBS · Bank of Queensland bank different · bankwest · Gilbert + Tobin · AGL · illion · International Olympic Committee · greencollar



Katharine McLennan

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With 35 years as a catalyst for leadership and cultural change, Katharine brings a rare depth and breadth of experience to the leadership, talent, and transformation field. She is known for her futuristic visioning, inspiring teaching, clinically informed psychology, and in-demand keynote speaking. Her work is also marked by thought-provoking workshops, innovative program design, and a relentless curiosity that keeps her at the leading edge of her leadership advisory practice.

EXPERIENCE INSIDE ON THE CEO'S TEAM

Head of Operational Planning

Directed the operational planning for 40+ venues of Sydney Olympic Games , creating the operating model still in use today

Executive General Manager, HR

In charge of all 9 Business Units HR across CBA and Talent Learning, Acquisition and CEO Succession -- 90% of all HR

Global Senior Vice President, People & Culture

In charge of all HR and Talent across 30 countries, Katharine led a cultural transformation that shifted country-led silos into a cohesive, globally aligned organisation

Head of Global Leadership Academy

Designed and delivered an academy for five levels of leadership across 27 countries -- covering 2-5 day programs for 800+ people/year

Head of Strategy & HR

Australia's Federal Government export credit agency -- where I directed both HR and Strategy

Board Director

Five years on Board for working with people across Australia facing depression, anxiety, trauma and chronic illness

Advisory Board Member

Five years advising the Dean and his team on strategy and curriculum content for Business School

Head of Strategy and Deputy Chairman of Board

Responsible for developing and delivering the 10-year strategy for "Y It Takes a Village" with our clients being youth at risk, homeless, domestic violence, and employment and training services

EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE AS A TALENT AND STRATEGY

Associate, Strategy Consulting

Consulting in strategy across telecommunications, financial services, logistics and healthcare

Director, Leadership Advisory

Established the Leadership Development practice of PwC Australia, externally facing - designing and developing large-organiation programs

Director, Mettle Leadership

Led the Mettle Leadership Practice, designing and delivering leadership, talent, culture, and coaching initiatives

Principal, CEO Succession

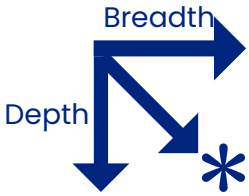
Designed and delivered CEO succession projects at CBA, GPT, CSR, GIlbert and Tobin, Leighton Group (Leighton COntractors, John Holland and Leighton Aisa)

My clients over the years have included: CBA, GPT, Ergon Energy, PwC, AGL, Ernst & Young, Qantas, Macquarie Bank, Telstra, NBN, CSR, Leighton Group, Gilbert & Tobin, Minter Ellison, Bankwest, Bank of Queenlsand, ScotPac, illion, AMP, UBS, Westpac, Sydney Uni, UTS, Medicare/Centrelink and many others

A SET OF CREDENTIALS UNIQUE IN THE MARKET

- Undergraduate degree with highest honours in Neuroscience and History (Duke University)
- Masters in Australian-US Political Science (UNSW)
- MBA with highest honours (Stanford University), focusing on Strategy and Corporate Finance
- An accredited psychotherapist through PACFA: Psychotherapists and Counsellors Federation of Australia, trained by Jansen Newman Institute

BREADTH AND DEPTH OF EXPERIENCE



- 35 years of delivering a wide array of talent services:
  - Culture Diagnoses and Interventions
  - CEO Succession: assessment, transition, and onboarding
  - C-Suite Team Effectiveness Diagnosis and Intervention
  - Workshops across multiple days, audience size and levels of seniority - covering strategy, innovation, culture, vision, values
  - Executive Coaching: sparring on strategy, operations, leadership and Self
  - Executive and Private Psychotherapy: addressing depression, anxiety, trauma, substance abuse, relationship breakdown
  - Global Leadership Academies
  - Vertical development
  - The Neurobiology of Leadership and Coaching
  - Talent Management Strategy
  - The Future of HR
  - Career Progression
  - The application of Ancient Philosophies on Human Potential



Katharine lived in the occupied West Berlin between 1978 and 1980 and West Germany until 1982. She considers the fall of the Wall on 9 November 1989 a pivotal historical event that continues to inform her leadership lens

"Strategy without execution is a daydream.

Execution without strategy is a nightmare.

But without a vibrant culture and leaders of integrity, neither can survive."

— Katharine McLennan