

Make progress visible

Of everything that lifts the inner experience of work, the single biggest lever is making progress in meaningful work. AI can accelerate that progress — or quietly hide it.

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In a multi-year study of daily diaries from knowledge workers, Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer found that of all the events that brighten a person's inner work life, the most powerful is the simplest: making progress in work that matters. They called it the progress principle. Small wins, noticed, compound into motivation; setbacks, especially unacknowledged ones, corrode it.

“Of all the things that can boost inner work life, the most important is making progress in meaningful work.”

Amabile & Kramer, *The Progress Principle* (2011)

AI-era work complicates this. A capable agent can collapse a week of effort into an afternoon — real progress, faster than ever. But it can also make the work harder to **see**: when the output appears in one step, the struggle and the wins behind it leave no trace anyone celebrates, and the felt sense of momentum thins even as the output rises.

What to do on purpose

- Anchor progress to shipped outcomes, not activity — a finished thing, a decision, a learning.
- Make small wins legible to the team, so momentum is shared rather than private.

- Name setbacks early; an unacknowledged stall does more damage than the stall itself.
- Watch for progress theatre — motion that photographs well but ships nothing.

In CARE this is the work of **Clarity**: a mirror the team holds up to see how work actually moves, anchored to outcomes, never to a leaderboard of effort.

Sources

1. Teresa Amabile & Steven Kramer, *The Progress Principle* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2011).

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