

A vision and principles for health and safety governance

Health and safety governance has a critical and crucial role in improving outcomes for organisations and their kaimahi

The health, safety and wellbeing of kaimahi (workers) is both an ethical and legal responsibility for those who govern and lead businesses and organisations.

We know that health and safety are generally on the agenda for boards, officers and leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand. We also know that our performance against some measures has stalled. In some cases, our performance is getting worse. Kaimahi are still being killed and seriously harmed while whakamahi (working). The agenda is not driving the necessary change.

Health and safety as an outcome

There is an opportunity to clearly define, and for some redefine, “health and safety”. This is so Aotearoa can share a view on these things that we want officers and leaders to govern and lead for; we want business and organisations to manage and deliver; and we want our kaimahi, their family and whānau, and our communities to be.

Health and safety are positive outcomes of work going well.

Our principles for health and safety governance

Our principles for health and safety governance complement our vision and its core components. They are a place to begin in doing the necessary work to build a picture of what health and safety governance should look like, in practice, in the different governance sectors. We would like to see further work done in the next phase of the project to align them with uara and tikanga Māori (Māori values and principles).

Learn and develop

We recognise that ongoing learning and development is vital and a requirement of our role

Actively **learning** and **developing** our knowledge is important to us.

This includes knowledge about:

- leading health and safety governance practice
- effective risk management and assurance
- how people work, behave and make decisions
- the importance of local context and how systems and circumstances drive behaviour, including trade-offs and work-arounds.

We recognise that our systems, policies and procedures do not always accurately reflect the realities of normal work. People necessarily innovate at work to meet objectives, and to remain healthy and safe while under conflicting pressures.

We know that people's decisions make sense to them at the time they are made. We avoid using hindsight to judge past decisions and actions, even where they may have contributed to an actual or potential incident. Instead, we seek to **learn** more about why the incident happened, to support the continuous improvement of our systems, policies and procedures.

Anticipate and understand

We anticipate the impacts of change, and understand that a range of different scenarios may occur from it

Our operating environments are constantly changing. This includes change as a result of external factors. It also includes change as a result of the strategic decisions we make for our organisation and its people, and the decisions that influence our partners. We recognise that health and safety governance is about the here and now, but also about **anticipating** and **understanding**:

- how change will affect our future work, and our work with partners
- a range of different scenarios that may occur and need to be considered and planned for.

All change has the potential to impact health and safety, often slowly and invisibly.

Change can influence the behaviours and decisions of our people and those of our partners. It can result in trade-offs and workarounds that may increase risk. We anticipate this.

When setting and supporting the strategic direction of our organisation, we seek to identify and **understand** what delivers good work under expected and unexpected circumstances, and what has the potential to go wrong. We also seek to understand how prepared we are for a range of different scenarios, especially those with potentially significant or catastrophic consequences, even when their likelihood may be low. We use this understanding to support better work design, and better work.

Plan and resource

We plan for dynamic, messy work, and recognise that positive health and safety outcomes require people and resources to cope with that complexity

We understand that **planning**, people and the provision of effective and efficient **resources**, are crucial to designing and doing healthy and safe work.

Through direct feedback from workers and other sources, we invest in understanding what is needed to deliver good work under expected and unexpected circumstances, as well as what has the potential to go wrong.

Recognising that work is dynamic and messy, our plans acknowledge complexity in developing solutions.

We ensure that our people and our partners have the knowledge and skills, and tools and equipment to be healthy and safe at work, with feedback loops ensuring they have the **resources** they need. This enables capacity to be developed and a safety margin to be created.

Trust and verify

We trust our people and partners to give advice and implement the decisions we make; we verify that those things happen, and that our critical systems and controls work

We take, and **trust**, the advice we receive from our people, our partners and technical experts. This is because we select advisors who are demonstrably reliable and competent. We choose people and partners that will support us to enable healthy and safe work. We also **trust** them to implement the decisions we make, and our systems, policies and processes, but verify that this is the case.

Our **verification** processes are proactive and we apply a curious scepticism that responds constructively to what we learn. They give us insights into the degree to which our systems, policies and processes are known about, understood, and working effectively. Through these processes we also seek to identify that we have the people, systems, resources and other factors needed to maintain our 'safety margin'.

We use our **verification** processes to understand where normal work varies from work-as-designed. We want to know whether this variation is innovation that still achieves healthy and safe work, or drift that may be unintentionally increasing risk. Knowing this helps us harness opportunities to build organisational resilience, and healthy and safe work.

Monitor and respond

We monitor our work, seeking and welcoming genuine insights into our risks, and respond in a way that encourages honesty and transparency

We **monitor** our organisation's work, including our work done with others, and the changes we make to it. We want to understand:

- how effective our governance, and strategic direction and decisions are in keeping people healthy and safe
- where our people or resources might be, or might be becoming, compromised
- where health and safety margins may be being borrowed against for other organisational goals
- how our critical systems and controls are working to support healthy and safe work.

Recognising the dynamic and messy nature of work, we know that indicators can never provide a complete or accurate picture of risk and look for narrative as well as numbers. Recognising health and safety as an outcome of work done well under expected and unexpected circumstances, we base the selection of indicators we monitor, and the reports we receive, around the curious discussions we want to have about the delivery of work. Seeking genuine insights, we use indicators as prompts for further exploration. We look for patterns, anomalies, weak signals and gaps in our knowledge and understanding. We look for hidden issues when everything seems positive.

Honesty and transparency are vital to our culture, organisational resilience, and healthy and safe work. We **respond** to risk and harm in a way that shows we encourage reporting. We want people to be comfortable sharing information and insights early and completely.

We avoid personal bias and using hindsight to judge past decisions in our response to reporting and when an incident happens. We do not accept reports that blame 'human error', our workers, or those of our partners. We constructively challenge reports that do not help us identify weaknesses in our systems, policies and processes.

The team considers the principles necessary and useful as boards, officers and leaders can use them in their governance discussions and decisions. They can help officers and leaders govern in a way that best aligns with the vision they have articulated for their organisation and their approach to health and safety governance, helping them breaking away from personal bias and the status quo. This work can begin now, and continue into the next phase of the project.

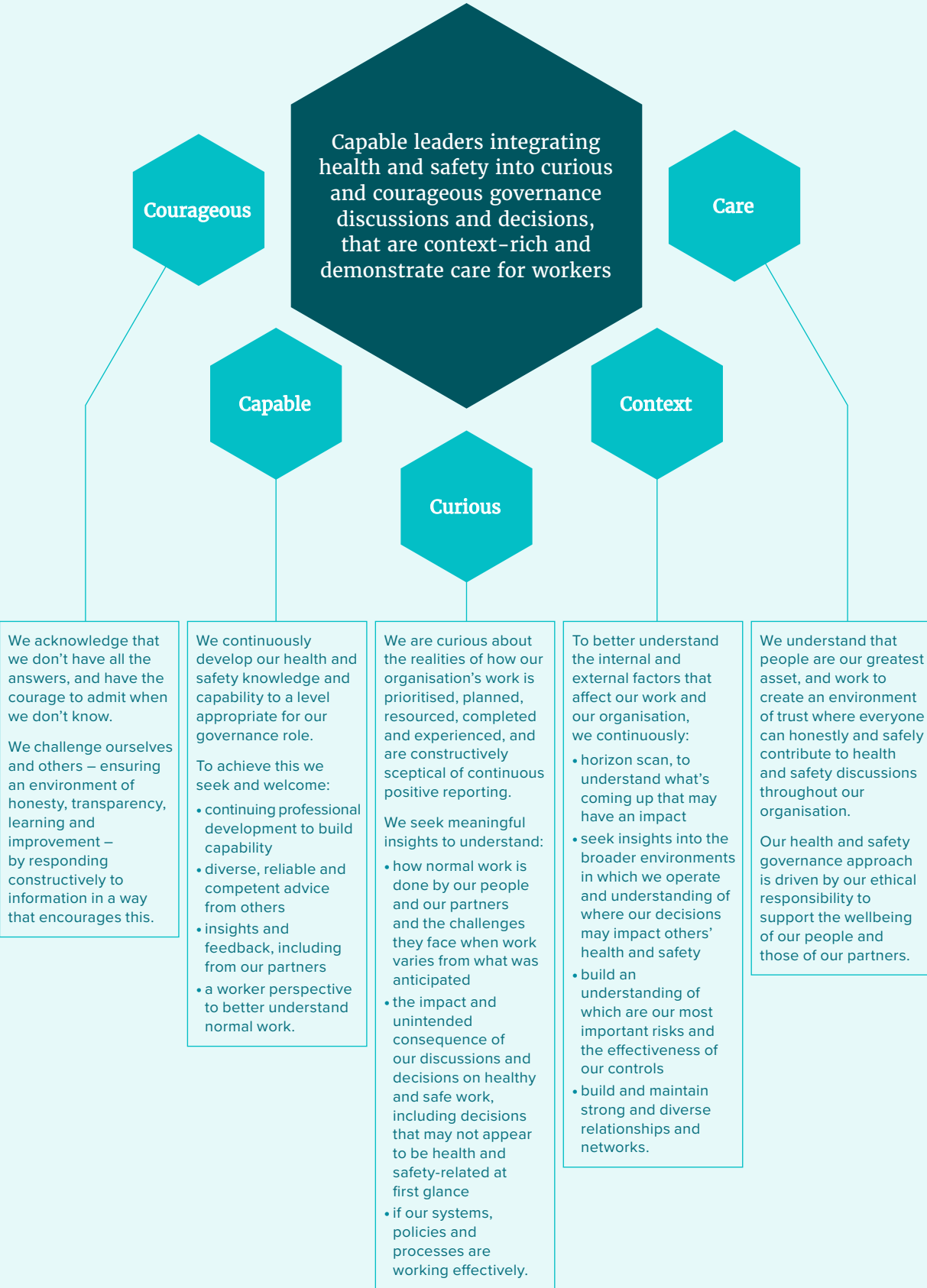
He aha te mea nui o te ao

What is the most important thing in the world?

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

It is the people, it is the people, it is the people

A vision and principles for health and safety governance



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If Aotearoa understands health and safety as positive outcomes of work going well, in both expected and unexpected situations, we can then ask how best to achieve those outcomes for our organisations and kaimahi. We can start with a vision, and a set of principles to turn it into action.

The vision sits at the centre, with its core components of capable, curious, care, context and courage defined. It is surrounded by a set of principles that can bring the vision to life. They are a place to begin in doing the necessary work to build a picture of what health and safety governance should look like.

The vision and principles were developed by the Better Governance project team. You can learn more about the project here: www.forum.org.nz/resources/better-governance

Over the past five years, an average of **77 kaimahi** have been killed each year while working

Injuries resulting in **more than a week away from work** have risen every year over the past ten years, except in 2020

There are an estimated **5,000–6,000** hospitalisations each year due to work-related ill-health

These health and safety-related statistics are from WorkSafe unless otherwise noted, and are subject to the data limitations noted at data.worksafe.govt.nz

Using the vision and principles

The vision can be shared with your Board, executive and leadership teams. It can sit on top of your health and safety governance agenda, but more importantly be on top of mind to guide your health and safety governance discussions and decisions.

You can use the principles to assess your organisation's health and safety governance practice, and to identify improvements in your approach. They can support you to make change and improve your own practice, and that of your board or leadership team.