



Business Leaders'
Health & Safety Forum

Creating thriving workplaces:

How Forum organisations are
preparing for the future of work




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



*“The construct of the
8am-5pm working day
is now 100 years old.”*

ACC



*“There’s been such a shift in
expectations of leaders in the
past three years, very few
leaders are ready and have
the skills to lead in a remote
working world.”*

AURORA ENERGY

Contents

Foreword	2
Changing mindsets	3
Executive summary – key workplace flexibility principles	4
The future of work – opportunities and challenges	8
The home vs the office – or flexibility of ‘place’	10
Flexibility beyond ‘place’ of work	13

Foreword

Work flexibility is not a new concept – in fact legislation supporting flexible working was introduced in the Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007.

However, since March 2020 and the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, a vast majority of workplaces have been forced into thinking differently about how the work in their organisation gets done – paving the way for a much broader and prevalent conversation about flexibility and the future of work.

We know from discussions with Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), General Managers (GMs), and Human Resources and Health and Safety Managers that no one necessarily has all the answers to how to manage work in this new, changing world. What we do know however is that a number of organisations are starting to trial new ideas, adapt to new expectations and learn from what's going well, and what remains challenging.

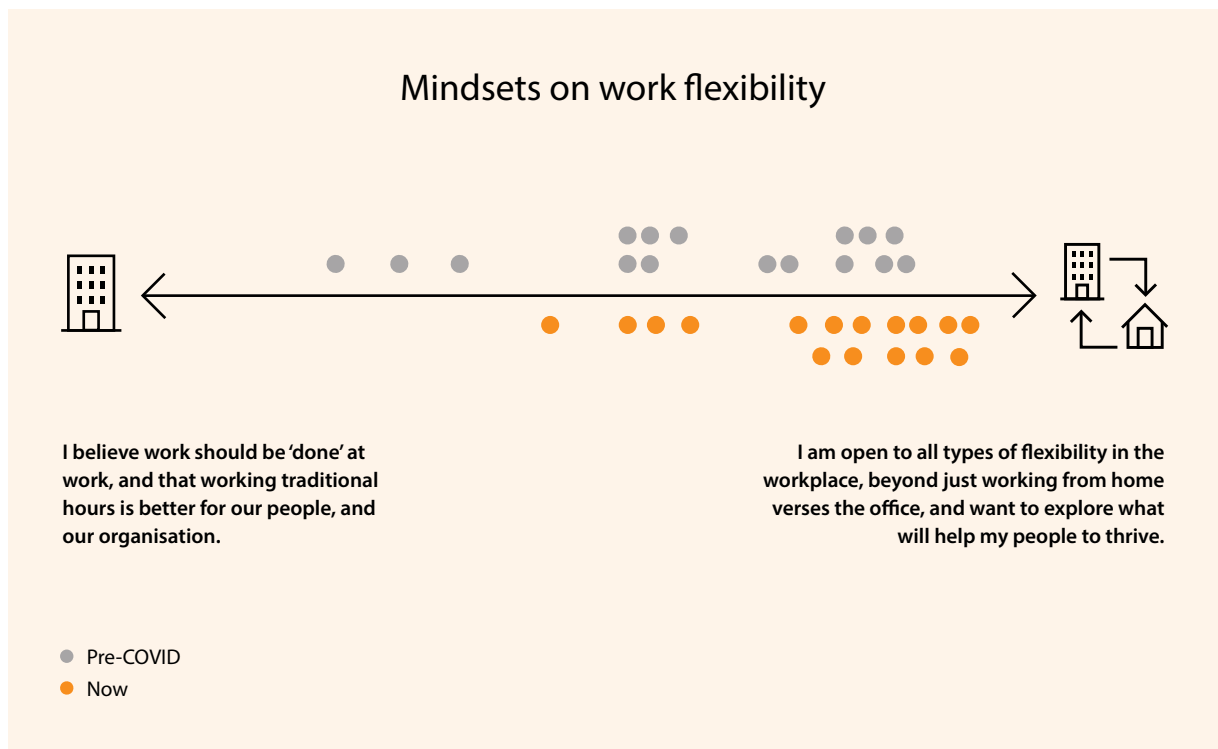
At the same time, we're seeing [growing evidence](#), internationally and in Aotearoa New Zealand, that one intervention that's proving to have an impact on positive mental wellbeing at work is 'flexibility'.

The Forum has spoken to more than 30 senior leaders to understand how they're thinking about the future of work and flexibility, what opportunities that's presenting and the challenges they're facing. It's clear that for the majority of organisations this is still emerging work.

This report is a summary of those discussions, pulling out some key themes, case studies and principles that organisations could consider as they continue their own journeys to understand how the future of work will impact on the work they do.

Changing mindsets

When we spoke to Forum leaders across Aotearoa, we first asked them about the mindset when it came to flexibility at work. Below you can see where their mindsets were prior to March 2020, and where they say they are now.



Executive summary

– key workplace flexibility principles

Discussions with senior leaders from a range of Forum organisations have highlighted five key principles to consider when thinking about all types of flexibility at work. These are:

1. Ensure any approach is ‘team-centric’

A number of organisations talked about how a flexible approach had to work not just for the organisation and the individuals involved, but also the team. In fact, during our discussions with leaders it quickly became apparent that those organisations who had not centered flexible work approaches or guidelines with the ‘teams’ at the centre were having difficulty in implementing any sustained success. Whereas those who supported their people or team leaders to structure their own flexible arrangements with their teams’ support had more success.

2. Support your people leaders to lead well in a hybrid world

It has become clear that this is a crucial element of a successful rollout of any flexible working practice or policy in organisations. One, however, that very few organisations have thought deliberately about, or taken time to rollout dedicated support to their people leaders. Only one organisation we spoke to had taken time to upskill their people leaders and to ensure they’re supported to lead their teams in this new world of work. We heard from organisations that there was often ‘varying success’ in their flexible working policies – often due to an inconsistent approach led by people leaders who either didn’t understand how to lead in a hybrid world, or who fundamentally disagreed with the organisation’s approach.

3. Ensure you have guardrails, or parameters in place

The Forum and its members were first introduced to the concept of ‘guardrails’ in a flexible working context during an event with [Yarra Valley Water in June 2022](#). There, the organisation’s Managing Director and GM of People described why it was important to have some boundaries in place in any flexible working approach, and introduced their concept of ‘Moments that Matter’. Moments that Matter are those times or days where it’s important people are in the office, and are often followed up with a social connection moment. For example, a monthly board meeting, followed by a team lunch. This idea of having some parameters or guardrails to support people with flexible working has been reinforced in our conversations with Forum CEOs.

“People want clarity about what they can do.”

LANDPOWER

Alongside this however is the belief from a number of senior leaders that while guardrails are important, it’s also important not to over-specify what people can or can’t do. For example, working at home on a Monday and Wednesday isn’t flexibility, it’s just a different working arrangement.

4. Move to outcome-focused performance or KPIs

A small number of senior leaders very honestly talked about the difficulty they have in measuring performance or productivity when they can't physically 'see' people in the office. However, it's widely acknowledged, even by those who mentioned it, that this is an out of date, and ineffective method of measuring productivity. We also know from hearing anecdotally from organisations that for the vast majority of their workforce, the productivity continues, or is even improved, when flexibility is provided.

Some organisations have put in place changes to their performance agreements, and/or KPIs, to be outcome and deadline focused. This then assures the leaders in the organisation that the work will be completed in the right timeframes and to the right standards and trusts the employee to get the work done.

5. Remain curious and ask your people what they need

Ultimately, like all good work, one of the keys to success is being curious about what could work. This is particularly so if your organisation has parts of its workforce where 'place' of work cannot change. Have you considered other flexibility options; employee-led rostering, different Full Time Equivalent (FTE) options, school-hour shifts or secondment options?

“In the current labour market with so many skill shortages, organisations can't afford to take the same old approaches to finding talent. Offering flexibility is one way around this.”

PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION

Engaging your workers, and supporting team leaders to understand their employees is one way to understand what flexibility you could offer – even if it looks different to a traditional flexible working approach.

Case study: Supporting 600 people leaders to move to hybrid

“We’ll keep listening and adapting our approach to how we work.”

MEGAN MAIN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ACC

As the country emerged from the series of national lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic, ACC started a Hybrid Working Group to gather feedback from across the organisation about how it would work in the future. Out of this, a suite of resources was developed to support the organisation to bring their first phase of hybrid working to life.

This first phase included dedicated time developing resources and support for its 600 people leaders across the organisation.

“We wanted to support our people leaders to navigate the conversations they would be having with their teams about hybrid working and to help them work with their teams to define their ‘moments that matter’.”

MICHAEL FRAMPTON, DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE PEOPLE AND CULTURE, ACC

Part of this has involved building dedicated resources and training for people leaders to help them understand how to lead their teams in a hybrid model; covering topics from employee engagement, wellbeing and inclusion, when leading a team who aren’t always together in ‘the office’, as well as supporting leaders to navigate difficult conversations such as those where team members may want more flexibility than is available. Teams are also encouraged to sign a team commitment to lock in their team’s approach.

Supporting Our Performance

We've refreshed and developed a range of resources and workshops to support our people, teams, and leaders.

Use these resources to set yourself and your teams up for success!

Individuals and teams

On the Te Pātaka "Hybrid Working" site you will find:

- The [Principles](#) for how we apply hybrid working at ACC
- [Employee & Leader Guides](#) for completing remote working declarations and working arrangement change requests in Te Kahu
- [All Employee FAQs](#) for hybrid working
- The ACC [Team Commitment Template](#)
- Tools and tips for [building connection](#) in hybrid teams
- Tools and tips for maintaining privacy, and security
- Ideas for maintaining your wellbeing in a hybrid environment

Leaders

There are several webinars and workshops including:

- Hybrid working – [leading in a hybrid world series](#) (run by The Training Practice)
- Leadership wellbeing series – recordings of [workplace mental wellbeing](#) and recent [leading through uncertainty](#) series.

On Te Pātaka there is leader specific information including:

- Tips, tools, and techniques for leading hybrid teams
- Ideas for running effective hybrid meetings
- Tools and tips for [creating connection](#) in hybrid teams (including recommended operating rhythms)
- Guidance on [supporting performance](#) in hybrid environments
- [Decision-making guides](#) for remote working declarations and working arrangement change requests
- [FAQs for leaders](#)

Support for People Leaders – from ACC's 'Hybrid People Pack'.

“Hybrid working is about more than ‘where’ work happens. Into the future it’s an approach that offers real promise for enabling us to deliver even better services for our customers and even better work for our people.”

MICHAEL FRAMPTON

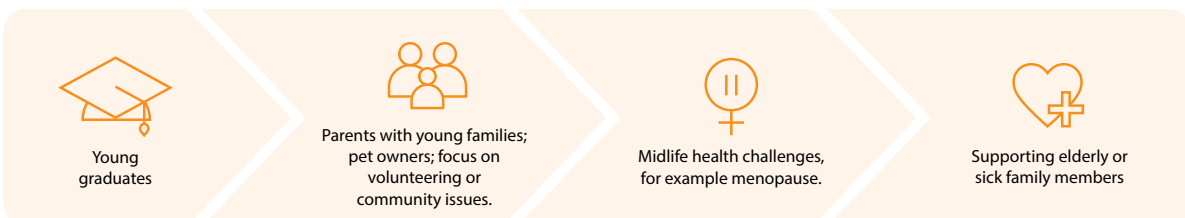
The future of work – opportunities and challenges

Opportunities

The majority of the senior leaders the Forum spoke to, talked of a wide-ranging number of benefits from employing a flexible work approach in their organisation. These opportunities and benefits included:

- Improved mental wellbeing at work** – and in turn people’s physical health and safety. A number of organisations reported seeing improvements in mental wellbeing or engagement following flexible working approaches. The Forum’s [Effectiveness of wellbeing interventions](#) also lists flexibility as one of the proven interventions organisations can make to improve wellbeing.
- Recruitment and retention is easier.** *“Flexibility is one of the top questions candidates are now asking at interviews in the fight for talent,”* – says Jason Cherrington, CEO of Accordant. Other organisations are also reporting being able to attract a wider pool of candidates if they’re flexible with not just hours and days worked, but also location. Animates reports that it’s been challenging itself to ask, *“does this role really have to be in Auckland?”* and often finding the answer is no – thus enabling the organisation to attract a wider range of people to the roles being advertised.
- Our people are part of our communities.** Seeing your people, not just as a whole person but part of a wider whānau and community. The Public Service Association (PSA) reports that its Health and Safety Representatives in government organisations report this as a benefit when flexibility is offered in organisations. The PSA also points out that flexibility is another way of supporting employees through the employment life cycle while also gaining the best from them; see the employment life cycle diagram below. Another Forum member talked about the cost savings to employees by offering flexibility; whether that’s enabling school-hours so reducing the cost of childcare; or working at home several days a week to save money on commuting.
- It’s better for business overall.** With new ways of working being trialed or underway, a number of organisations we spoke to described how the flexibility not only benefits the teams doing the work, but the business as a whole. AsureQuality reports how their trial with flexibility in the Auckland laboratory (see page 13) has enabled it to better support clients as their lab can be open for longer hours each day.

Employment Life Cycle



Challenges

While most of the benefits above were universally acknowledged, so to were the common challenges outlined here:

- **Maintaining culture and connection.** Even those organisations who were leading new and innovative ways of working, mentioned this was a common challenge. How to keep that sense of ‘we’re in it together’ if everyone is working different days and doesn’t see each other in person very often? Some organisations talked about creating ‘connect’ or ‘gathering’ days which brought teams together for celebrations or regular morning teas – often on days that coincided with an important team meeting or planning session.
 - **Equity.** This is a common challenge noted by a number of senior leaders – particularly those with a percentage of workers where ‘place’ of work cannot change, with many saying there were issues of fairness or equity raised by those who saw office workers able to work from home regularly, where they were unable to. A number of organisations are thinking differently and trying new ideas to get around this challenge, as well as directly engaging with these teams and workers to understand how and if they could offer different types of flexibility – can read more on pages 13-15 of this report.
 - **Supporting new graduates, young, and new workers who learn best in an office or on-site environment.** This was mentioned by several organisations, particularly those who bring new graduates into office-based environments.
- One senior leader questioned, “*Will there be a future effect on this generation of graduates and young workers who really need to be learning from their colleagues at work?*”. ACC is managing this challenge by requesting that all young graduates or those coming into new roles who have less experience, work in the office for the first six months until they have established networks and a support system within the organisation.
- **Needing to see people in the office.** While only a few senior leaders mentioned the need to see people in the office to feel they were being productive, others honestly spoke of their difficulty in measuring productivity if they couldn’t ‘see’ people. Most leaders understood that work happened regardless of ‘where’ people were, and the majority spoke of the need to ensure an outcome-based performance monitoring framework, and ultimately to trust their people to get the work done.
 - On the following pages, we’ve outlined some examples and case studies from Forum organisations and others who are deliberating thinking about the future of work and what that means for their people and their organisation.
 - This is in two parts; the way organisations are thinking about flexibility of ‘place’ of work; and examples of how organisations are thinking about flexibility more broadly.

The home vs the office – or flexibility of ‘place’

Conversations around flexibility at work, or the future of work often go straight to ‘working at home’ or ‘working in the office’. However, we know that a significant part of the workforce in Aotearoa cannot work from home. The next section of this report will look at what Forum organisations are doing to enable flexibility for those who cannot change their place of work. This section however focuses on what Forum organisations are doing to support their workers who can do their work in other locations, and how they’re going about it

Across our conversations, more than 80% of organisations had some form of guidance or policy in place to cover working at home. The **majority were focused on a maximum of two days a week at home**, with a few going further, enabling people to work three days at home. No organisation had a fully remote policy in place, with the exception of some individual employees who had particular working arrangements. One organisation is gearing up to trial a fully remote working environment in the months ahead.

During our discussions with senior leaders, we were struck with three key themes to our conversations about working at home, or away from the office.

1. Getting clear on when and why being in the office is important

As referenced earlier, in June 2022 Forum members heard from Yarra Valley Water in Australia about their ‘Moments that Matter’ as part of the new hybrid model. This focused on enabling teams to determine what moments they should come into the office for, and when remote working might be more suitable. Several Forum organisations had similar arrangements already in place, and some others adopted some of the ideas covered by Yarra Valley Water.

A common theme during our discussions with leaders was the need for, or lack of, clarity on when and why people should be encouraged to come into the office to work. Those organisations who had been clear, or had set parameters in either a policy or guidance to their workforce were more likely to report success in their hybrid approaches to work.

“It’s fundamentally important to have parameters in place, about how we see hybrid working. Without an agreed framework to set the rules around hybrid working it’s unlikely to work.”

AURORA ENERGY

At Mitre 10’s national Support Centre – they’ve got clear on their ‘why’ with an outline of what type of work is best for at home, or in the office.

In office work: To connect, collaborate and celebrate

Remote work: Task time, focus time, balcony time (i.e., time to reflect)

Working remotely isn’t always at home – it could be from one of the retail stores.

Several organisations mentioned that for them, working away from the office didn't necessarily have to be 'at home'. Tonkin + Taylor, for example, has spent some time understanding the different tax rules for its employees who may wish to work, for a short period, overseas. This has supported several employees to 'work from overseas' for up to a month at a time, visiting family and friends.

2. Making it team-led

As outlined in the key principles, making any policy, guideline or expectation team-centric will be more beneficial, than just a company-wide flexibility policy. We heard from a number of organisations who had 'the team' at the centre of their flexible work plans.

“We have a range of flexible options, but they all centre on three key themes: What does my organisation need? What does my team need? What do I need?”

ANIMATES

We heard from senior leaders, and also workers and unions that while some team managers may implement a flexible approach that's led from the CEO or Executive Team, other people leaders were less likely to, or didn't have the right mindset to adopt new ways of working.

This is where many organisations admitted common challenges of ensuring a consistent approach, despite a policy or guidelines in place.

Many talked about how some of their people leaders were unsure about how to lead a team where they all weren't in one place together, and others had different mindsets about flexible work. Take a look at page 6 where ACC outlines their work in this area to support their people leaders, and lead to a greater buy-in to the organisation's hybrid approach.

3. Maintaining your culture when fewer people are in the office at one time

“We've struggled to get people back to the office” was a comment mentioned by some leaders in our discussions. While this was a common challenge, everyone mentioned 'culture' when discussing ways of resolving it. Some methods included:

A. Trust

“Treat everyone like the adults they are.”

MAXTEL SOFTWARE

Even those organisations who admitted some people were reluctant to come into the office at all, acknowledged the bigger issue at play was that of workplace culture and trust. A number of organisations told us that the culture of the organisation had to be right before any flexible working approach could be successful. One told us that if there was no psychological safety in the organisation then any approach would be unlikely to succeed, due to equity and trust issues.

“We are proud to have a culture where our people feel able to discuss flexibility openly. We have policies in place that enable and encourage our people, at all levels and across all roles, to have a conversation with their supervisor about their preferences regarding flexibility. There is always consideration given to balancing individual preferences, business requirements, and what works best for individuals and their team, as well as client needs. But based on feedback received, we appear to be getting the balance right.”

DLA PIPER

B. Patience

Two organisations talked to the Forum about how giving their people time, and clear parameters on when and why they would be needed to work in the office, i.e., on days where they were presenting to the Board etc. saw people come back into the office, and more frequently over time.

“We don’t have all the answers, but we have an open mind, and have been patient. Over time we’ve seen more and more people come into the office regularly and people have found their own ‘happy place’.”

HUMAN RESOURCES INSTITUTE OF NEW ZEALAND (HRNZ)

C. Creating ‘connection’ moments

A number of organisations talked about creating ‘connection’ moments where they encourage everyone to come to the office. These could be a morning tea shout, Friday get together or a group activity, often linked to a key meeting or deliverable. There were mixed reports on the success of these, with some claiming they worked well and brought people together; others felt they were token if not done right and weren’t successful in bringing everyone into the office.

“People eventually work out what’s best for them, and that takes time. It’s not always about food and shared lunches, they have to WANT to come in. If they’re living 90-minutes away from work, in traffic, they have to want to come in for themselves for it to work.”

ANIMATES

Other organisations actively promote coming back into the office.

“It’s simpler to make people work in the physical environment together, it makes it a fun place to be and creates consistency with those people in our teams who cannot work from home or in a different location.”

CODA GROUP

Flexibility beyond 'place' of work

We know that a significant proportion of Aotearoa's workforce cannot work from home or another location. For some organisations this creates an equity issue, between those workers who have flexibility and those who don't.

As part of our discussions with senior leaders from across the Forum membership, we wanted to learn more about how organisations were managing this challenge.

It was fantastic to see organisations thinking curiously in this area, trialing new ideas and, most importantly, engaging with their workforce to understand what flexibility looks like beyond just changing the 'place' where people work. The case studies below illustrate some of the leading work from Forum organisations in this space.

A trial of school-hour days

AsureQuality provides food assurance to many Aotearoa organisations – employing around 1700 people. Many of these people cannot work from home, due to the nature of the work i.e., laboratory testing or training. The organisation wanted to ensure its 'Flex for All' policy meant exactly that – and didn't just provide flexibility for its office-based staff.

This year it started a trial to provide flexibility for its Auckland Laboratory staff. Nothing was off limits – teams were asked what type of flexibility they would like, and then they worked out with their managers what could work. One option that became popular was working a school-hour day shift (9am-3pm). While these workers need to be onsite in the lab to do their job, they still have a proportion of paperwork to complete every day. So, as an option, people had an opportunity to work school hours – or six hours in the lab – and finish their two hours of paperwork from home another time in the day.

Other Flex for All options being trialed in the Auckland lab include four, ten-hour days – providing three-day weekends; or moving from a 1.0 FTE role to a .8 or similar. Another key aspect here was the organisation **actively promoted** these flexibility options, rather than waiting for employees to 'ask' for them.

Another organisation, **Freightways**, has adjusted its part-time shift pattern so it is now 9.30am-2pm. This has enabled the organisation to recruit different people, who previously couldn't accommodate an early start, or late start because they had school-aged children.

Trialing different ways of rostering

At **Mitre 10**, a number of their stores are trialing new and different ways to offer flexibility to their retail teams. One store has been testing a 'blank roster' for the Sunday shift. This means team members chose whether they want to work the Sunday shift, and fill the roster in between themselves – rather than being told what shift pattern they should be on. This has so far been trialled for just one day of the working week, but the results to date show there is always the right number of people self-rostered to work Sundays.

In Aotearoa, McDonald's has brought on software technology company, **Maxtel**, to expand the functionality of its roster-based support and app, 'Work Buddy'. Every employee has this app on their smartphone (or for those without internet or a smart phone, there's access on work computers). Not only does this allow employees to access pay slips and request leave, employees can swap shifts with each other virtually, and a manager can advertise shifts they need to fill and an alert goes direct to employees to see if they're interested in an extra shift.

Future technology, and some apps used internationally enable employees to choose their own shifts and swap shifts.

Changing hours and secondments

In a healthcare environment, **Mercy Hospital** in Dunedin has found it challenging to accommodate flexibility given the nature of the work. However, they have worked with their employees to find solutions where they can. Options they've used include allowing some people to move from a 1.0 FTE role to 0.8; and enabling partners to work different shifts to support childcare or other responsibilities at home.

Another option they consider is short secondments, or time off work. A number of employees have taken 3-6 months off, to work in the outback in Australia – enabling them to save enough money for a deposit on a house in Aotearoa.

Discover what people want and need

One organisation we heard about had a successful way of managing flexibility with a group of their workforce who couldn't work at home. They brought those workers together to ask them what they wanted and needed. The conversation revealed those workers didn't have enough professional development. The outcome? Those workers are now able to work one day a fortnight from home where they engage in professional development – enabling them to have some small amount of flexibility, as well as upskilling.

Being honest about what can't work

There will always be a proportion of a workforce where flexibility will be difficult. The first step many organisations have taken is to **ask those teams what they need**. If a solution can't be found, ACC's Michael Frampton has some advice:

“support those leaders whose teams cannot have flexibility, to have ‘honest conversations’ about the work they’re doing and why flexibility may not work in those roles. Face into it and realise while an approach may work for as many people as possible, it won’t work for everyone.”

Thank you to those organisations who contributed to this report

- AsureQuality
- Electrical Training Company (ETCO)
- Landpower
- ACC
- Aurora Energy
- TDX Ltd
- Mercy Hospital
- Animates
- Mitre 10 New Zealand Ltd
- Freightways
- Tonkin + Taylor
- Maxtel Software
- Public Service Association
- Unite Union
- Accordant Group
- Coda Group
- HRNZ
- DLA Piper
- Pipeline and Civil



About the Forum

The Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum inspires and supports its members to become more effective leaders on health and safety. The Forum has more than 390 members, who are Chief Executives or Managing Directors of significant New Zealand companies.

Contact us info@forum.org.nz or find out more at:
www.forum.org.nz



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