A comprehensive approach to Workplace Health and Safety leadership in New Zealand

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Abstract

This article explores a comprehensive approach to Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) leadership in New Zealand. It delves into the integration of inclusivity, vulnerability, Safety II principles, and Te Ao Māori values into WHS practices. The holistic vision presented emphasises proactive leadership, education, and cultural responsiveness to create a paradigm shift in WHS. By prioritising well-being and inclusivity, this approach aims to transcend compliance-driven WHS models, fostering a culture where safety is everyone's responsibility. The article calls for action, inviting organisations to embrace this transformative leadership model for a safer, more empathetic future in New Zealand workplaces.

Keywords

Workplace Health and Safety, Safety Leadership, Holistic Approach, New Zealand, Te Ao Māori, Women in Safety

1.0 Introduction

In this review, we explore a multidisciplinary approach to health and safety in New Zealand, focusing on the integration of inclusive and vulnerable leadership styles, the Safety II model, and Te Ao Māori principles.

This report examines a leadership approach anchored in inclusivity, vulnerability, and a 'Whole of Person' focus, aligning with the Safety II model. It incorporates elements of Te Ao Māori, particularly 'whanaungatanga' (relationships) and 'manaakitanga' (care for others), offering a holistic framework that complements modern WHS practices. Moreover, the article delves into how Te Ao Māori perspectives can significantly contribute to health and safety strategies, especially in light of the disproportionately high rates of workplace injuries and fatalities among Māori workers.

The review also addresses the challenges and opportunities of implementing these approaches, particularly emphasising the need for education and the potential benefits they offer. The discussion then focuses on the importance of uplifting women in safety roles, considering the current underrepresentation and lack of tailored programs for female leadership development in health and safety. This blend of contemporary safety practices and indigenous wisdom aims to cultivate a WHS environment that is not only compliant but also supportive, respectful, and empowering. This comprehensive approach aims not only to enhance workplace safety but also to ensure a holistic consideration of the 'Whole of Person', including physical, emotional, psychological, and cultural well-being. The integration of these diverse elements aspires to shape effective and culturally attuned WHS practices for the future, prioritising safety and well-being for all.

2.0 Background

The historical evolution and current landscape of health and safety practices in New Zealand reflect a significant journey from basic worker protection to a comprehensive, risk-based framework aimed at proactively safeguarding workers' health and safety.

Historically, the concept of workplace health and safety emerged during the Industrial Revolution, which was characterised by hazardous working conditions, child labour, and minimal regulation. The appalling state of worker welfare led to the introduction of the Factory Act in 1802 in Britain, setting basic standards for the health and morals of apprentices. This act was the precursor to more comprehensive legislation, reflecting a growing public interest in worker welfare. Over time, this led to the establishment of the 'duty of care' principle, legally affirming the employer's responsibility for employee safety. Key legislation like the Employer's Liability Act 1880 further developed these principles by enabling workers to seek compensation for injuries due to employer negligence (Armstrong, 2010).

In New Zealand, the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA) is a cornerstone of the current regulatory framework. The HSWA came into effect on 4 April 2016, following a report by the Independent Taskforce on

Workplace Health and Safety in 2013 that found New Zealand's work health and safety system to be failing. This resulted in the most significant reforms in over 20 years, establishing WorkSafe New Zealand and introducing the HSWA. The Act's guiding principle is that workers and others should be given the highest level of protection against health, safety, and welfare risks from work as is reasonably practicable (Peace et al, 2019).

Furthermore, the HSWA sets out principles, duties, and rights related to workplace health and safety, shifting the focus from simply monitoring and recording health and safety incidents to proactively identifying and managing risks. It ensures clear responsibilities for everyone, from businesses to workers, in maintaining a safe work environment. The Act covers all types of modern working arrangements, all work-related risks, and nearly all work in New Zealand (Health and Safety at work Act, 2015).

New trends in health and safety legislation in New Zealand, as seen in the Health and Safety Work Act of 2015, have brought about new codes, regulations, and standards across multiple industries. This Act emphasises constant monitoring, collaboration between employees and leadership, and active involvement in creating health and safety plans. It targets any person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), making them responsible for providing a safe work environment without risk to health, mental health, and safety, and ensuring that employee views on health and safety are heard (Peace et al, 2019).

The evolution of health and safety practices, culminating in New Zealand's Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA), intertwines closely with the 'Whole of Person' approach, reflecting a shift from traditional, reactive safety measures to a more holistic, proactive framework (Hollnagel, 2014). Historically, health and safety legislation emerged in response to the dire conditions of the Industrial Revolution, focusing initially on physical hazards and basic worker protections. Over time, this evolved into more comprehensive legislation, considering a broader range of workplace risks and the responsibility of employers towards their employees' safety (Health and Safety at work Act, 2015).

With the introduction of the HSWA in 2015, a significant reform occurred, influenced by the realisation that effective health and safety management requires a more inclusive and proactive approach. This shift aligns with the 'Whole of Person' approach, emphasising not just physical safety, but also the psychological, emotional, and social wellbeing of workers. The HSWA's principles of engagement, participation, and shared responsibility between employers and employees reflect this holistic view, recognizing that a diverse workforce has varied health and safety needs. This approach is not just a legal compliance issue but also an ethical imperative for modern workplaces, aiming to ensure the overall wellbeing of every individual in the work environment (Peace et al, 2019).

In essence, the HSWA and the 'Whole of Person' approach together mark a progressive step in health and safety management, acknowledging the complex and interconnected nature of workers' wellbeing in today's diverse and dynamic work settings.

3.0 Proactive safety leadership

Traditional workplace health and safety (WHS) models, often labelled as Safety I, have historically been reactive, focusing primarily on analysing incidents post-occurrence to prevent future mishaps. This approach, while having its merits, operates under the assumption that most work environments are inherently unsafe and the best strategy is to control or mitigate hazards (de Koster et al, 2011). It often perceives people as problems needing correction, which can inadvertently foster a blame culture and hinder open communication, limiting a comprehensive understanding of workplace safety.

In contrast, the Safety II model advocates for a proactive, systems-thinking approach. It emphasises understanding why operations frequently go right, which helps in building a more resilient and adaptable work system (Hollnagel et al, 2010). This perspective aligns with leadership styles that emphasise inclusivity, vulnerability, and a holistic 'Whole of Person' approach (Clarke, 2013). Safety II views workers not as problems but as integral contributors to safety, shifting the narrative from blame to learning and providing a more all-encompassing approach to safety (Hollnagel, 2014, MacKinnon et al, 2021).

Safety II is chosen as the preferred model for this analysis because it aligns with contemporary research challenges and complements personal leadership styles focused on inclusivity and adaptability (Ball et al, 2015, Hollnagel, 2014). Studies like those by Kim, Lee, & Connerton (2020) highlight the importance of psychological safety in team efficacy, which Safety II inherently supports through its emphasis on open communication and adaptability. This is further supported by Harvey et al (2019) discussing the relationship between team learning

orientation, team psychological safety, and team open-mindedness.. Furthermore, the model's focus on system adaptability resonates with ongoing educational pursuits and involvement in Te Ao Māori projects, echoing the need for adaptability in leadership, as discussed by Ortega et al. (2014).

A multi-disciplinary approach in implementing Safety II principles is vital. It brings together diverse viewpoints and methodologies, enhancing the organisation's adaptability to changing conditions and fostering a culture of continuous learning (Hollnagel et al, 2010). This approach aligns with Safety II's emphasis on learning from both successes and failures(Hollnagel, 2014). It also promotes psychological safety, a critical component of effective leadership. Incorporating diverse perspectives, such as Te Ao Māori, adds further inclusivity and effectiveness to safety leadership. This diversity fosters innovation, moving the focus from mere compliance to comprehensive care for employee well-being.

Inclusive leadership, integral to Safety II, involves everyone in the safety conversation, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for safety among employees (Carrillo, 2019). Vulnerable leadership, which encourages openness about weaknesses and challenges, aligns with Safety II by treating errors as collective learning opportunities rather than individual faults (Carrillo, 2023). This approach de-stigmatizes mistakes, viewing them as integral to organisational growth and improvement, resonating with Safety II's focus on learning from all events, not just adverse ones (Hanold, 2017)(MacKinnon et al, 2021).

4.0 A multidisciplinary approach to health and safety

In health and safety management, a multidisciplinary approach is integrally linked to the 'Whole of Person' concept, addressing the comprehensive wellbeing of individuals in the workplace. This approach, encompassing disciplines like customer service, change management, and innovation, is essential for holistic employee wellbeing. It extends beyond physical safety to include psychological, emotional, and social aspects, ensuring that the unique needs of each employee are met. For example, customer service principles prioritise understanding and responding to individual needs, aligning perfectly with the 'Whole of Person' ethos that seeks to cater to the unique wellbeing aspects of employees (Quinlan et al, 2010).

4.1 Integration of Customer Service Principles:

Applying customer service principles to health and safety can significantly enhance the way safety protocols are communicated and implemented. By treating employees as 'internal customers,' organisations can ensure that safety measures are not only well-understood but also well-received. This involves actively listening to employees' feedback, concerns, and suggestions regarding safety measures, similar to how customer feedback is valued in service industries. A customer-centric approach in safety management ensures that safety procedures are more tailored, user-friendly, and consequently, more likely to be followed (Hyun-Joon Cho, 2023, Weinstein, 2022).

4.2 Change Management for Safety Implementation:

Effective change management is essential for the successful implementation of new safety protocols and systems. Resistance to change is a common challenge in any organisation. By utilising change management strategies, companies can better facilitate the transition to new safety practices. This includes clear communication about the changes, the reasons behind them, and the expected benefits. Involving employees in the process and providing them with adequate training and support ensures smoother adoption of new safety measures. Change management techniques also help in addressing any apprehensions or misconceptions that might hinder the acceptance of new safety protocols (Parker et al, 2006, O'Driscoll et al, 2003).

4.3 Leveraging Innovation for Safety Solutions:

Incorporating innovation into health and safety management leads to the development of more effective and efficient safety solutions. This can include the use of new technologies, such as wearable safety devices or advanced data analytics, to monitor and enhance workplace safety. Innovative approaches can also mean finding creative solutions to longstanding safety challenges, improving safety training through interactive and engaging methods, or utilizing new communication tools to spread safety awareness. Innovation in safety management not only improves safety outcomes but also keeps the safety practices up-to-date with the latest technological advancements and industry standards (Mamula et al, 2019, Hogard et al, 2007).

4.4 Positive deviance, a different view of safety:

Positive deviance in health and safety refers to the practice of learning from individuals or groups within an organisation who, using the same resources as others, find unique ways to achieve better safety outcomes. These unconventional methods, though atypical, are effective and can be replicated across the organisation to improve overall health and safety standards. By identifying and understanding these positive outliers, organisations can discover innovative and effective strategies that may not be evident through traditional analyses. This approach fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement, encouraging employees to think creatively and proactively about safety (Baxter et al, 2022, Pascale et al, 2010).

4.5 Tapping into traditional storytelling techniques to support safety outcomes:

Storytelling plays a crucial role in the multidisciplinary approach to health and safety, serving as a powerful tool for communication and learning. In a diverse setting, where various disciplines intersect, storytelling can unify complex ideas and make them accessible and relatable to everyone (Ploeckelman et al, 2020, Komene et al, 2023).

Storytelling helps in bridging the gap between different disciplines, such as psychology, ergonomics, and management. By narrating real-life scenarios or hypothetical situations, it allows for a more profound understanding of how different safety principles apply in practical settings. It's not just about conveying facts; storytelling imbues them with context and emotion, making them more memorable and impactful (Bliss et al 2018).

Furthermore, storytelling can be instrumental in fostering a culture of safety. When stories highlight the positive outcomes of safety practices or analyse the lessons learned from past incidents, they become tools for cultural change. They can illustrate the consequences of negligence or the benefits of diligence in a way that statistics or directives alone might not.

Additionally, storytelling aids in promoting engagement and participation. When employees hear stories about safety successes or failures, it often sparks discussions and reflections, leading to a deeper engagement with safety practices. This method is especially effective in training sessions, where storytelling can turn abstract concepts into concrete and understandable narratives.

Incorporating storytelling into health and safety also aligns with inclusive leadership and Te Ao Māori perspectives. It respects and utilises the power of oral traditions and narratives, which are integral to many cultures, including Māori. By valuing and incorporating these narrative traditions, organisations can create more inclusive and culturally sensitive safety practices (Ruru et al. 2017).

Additionally, a multidisciplinary approach, especially when it involves empathetic leadership and effective communication, plays a crucial role in ensuring psychological safety (Carrillo, 2023). This aspect is fundamental in the 'Whole of Person' concept, recognizing that an employee's overall wellbeing is significantly influenced by their mental and emotional health. By addressing these elements, organisations not only enhance the physical safety of their employees but also foster a supportive and understanding work environment where every aspect of an employee's health is valued and protected.

5.0 The importance of Te Ao Māori perspectives in safety leadership

Incorporating Te Ao Māori perspectives into health and safety practices, particularly under the Safety II model, enhances the approach to workplace wellbeing and safety. Te Ao Māori, the Māori worldview, offers valuable insights and principles that align well with modern safety practices, emphasising collective well-being, relationships, and a holistic understanding of health and safety.

Addressing the disproportionately high rates of workplace injury and mortality among Māori in New Zealand is crucial. The adoption of a Te Ao Māori approach in health and safety strategies can be significantly beneficial. This approach, by integrating Māori worldviews and principles, could help in designing more culturally responsive and effective safety frameworks. Such an approach would be especially pertinent in sectors where Māori workers are overrepresented and face higher risks. Acknowledging and addressing these disparities is vital for ensuring equitable health and safety conditions for all workers (Ruru et al. 2017).

5.1 Whanaungatanga and Manaakitanga in Safety Practices:

The principles of 'whanaungatanga' (relationships, a sense of belonging) and 'manaakitanga' (hospitality, uplifting people) are central to Te Ao Māori and have a direct impact on health and safety practices. Whanaungatanga fosters good relationships between workers and management and among all parties in the contracting chain. It emphasises the importance of a sense of belonging and getting to know one another, which can be crucial in building a safety culture where everyone feels responsible and valued (Komene et al, 2023).

Manaakitanga involves showing care for workers and their well-being, and respect for all involved in the work process. This principle aligns with the concept of psychological safety and underscores the importance of recognizing the dignity and worth of every worker (Harvey et al, 2019). When consulting with workers on health and safety matters, acknowledging and valuing their skills, knowledge, and experience is crucial.

5.2 Storytelling in Te Ao Māori and Safety Practices:

Storytelling is a significant aspect of Te Ao Māori and can be effectively used in health and safety practices. Through storytelling, important safety messages can be conveyed in an engaging, memorable, and culturally relevant manner. Storytelling can bring to life the principles of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga, making them more relatable and impactful (Ruru et al. 2017, Komene et al, 2023).

5.3 Māori Leadership Practices in Safety:

Māori leadership practices, characterised by inclusivity, respect, and community care, can be integrated into modern safety leadership. These practices align with the values of Safety II, focusing on the collective well-being and seeing workers as part of a larger community. Māori leadership in safety emphasises collaboration (kotahitanga), guardianship (kaitiakitanga), and a holistic view of well-being (hauora), reinforcing the idea that safety is a shared responsibility (Holmes, 2007).

The Haumaru Tāngata framework, a Māori-centred approach to health and safety, is an example of how Te Ao Māori perspectives are being integrated into safety practices. It focuses on high-risk sectors and provides a space for Māori workers, businesses, and representatives to design a bespoke framework for reducing workplace injuries and fatalities. This framework is a testament to the effectiveness of incorporating Te Ao Māori principles in creating safety models that are culturally responsive and effective (Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, 2023).

6.0 What does effective leadership look like in New Zealand?

Effective leadership in New Zealand is characterised by a blend of diverse leadership styles and cultural considerations. Based on a three-year study by behavioural scientist Daniel Goleman, six main leadership styles are identified, including authoritative, pace-setting, affiliative, democratic, coaching, and coercive. Each of these styles has unique behaviours and is effective in different situations (Wylie et al, 2021).

Vulnerable and inclusive leadership styles are pivotal for fostering a healthy and productive work environment. Vulnerable leadership involves leaders being open about their weaknesses and uncertainties, encouraging a culture where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities rather than failures. This approach helps in building trust and promotes open communication, crucial for effective teamwork and problem-solving (Ruwhiu et al 2016).

Inclusive leadership, on the other hand, focuses on ensuring that all team members feel valued and heard. This style involves actively seeking and respecting diverse perspectives, fostering an environment where everyone can contribute their best. Inclusive leaders recognize the importance of diversity in driving innovation and problem-solving (Haar et al 2019).

Both styles are essential in creating a supportive and dynamic workplace, where employees feel secure to share ideas, take risks, and contribute to their full potential (Holmes et al 2011). For instance, an affiliative leader's focus on emotional relationships aligns with the principles of vulnerable leadership, which emphasises openness and emotional honesty. Similarly, inclusive leadership complements democratic and coaching styles, as it involves actively listening to diverse perspectives and supporting the growth and development of all team members (Carrillo, 2019). This integration enriches the leadership landscape in New Zealand, offering a more holistic approach to managing teams effectively.

A leadership style that takes into consideration Te Ao Māori would be one that aligns with the principles of whanaungatanga (relationships and belonging), manaakitanga (care and hospitality), and kotahitanga (unity and collaboration). This style emphasises collective well-being, shared decision-making, and respect for cultural values and traditions. Such a leader would focus on building strong community relationships, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment, and valuing the contributions and perspectives of all team members, in line with Māori values and worldviews (Ruwhiu et al 2016).

7.0 The importance of uplifting women in safety leadership

Studies of male-dominated industries, where women constitute 25 percent or less of the workforce, reveal higher pay scales compared to female-dominated fields (Liversedge, 2023). However, women in such industries encounter increased stress levels, gender-based stereotypes, and societal pressures. They often lack access to mentorship and career growth opportunities and may be subjected to elevated instances of sexual harassment (Ferri, 2019).

The research on professional development opportunities for women in health and safety leadership and governance in New Zealand reveals a scarcity of tailored programs. Only six out of 162 programs were specifically designed for women in these roles (Hare, 2021). The study, conducted in July 2021, involved an extensive internet search for courses at universities, polytechnics, colleges, and private providers, focusing on women's advancement in leadership and governance within health and safety. The results indicate a need for more targeted development opportunities to support female practitioners' progression into senior roles where they can influence health and safety leadership and governance (Clarke, 2013). The lack of tailored programs for women in health and safety leadership indicates a gap in professional development opportunities. Increasing the representation of women in these roles is not just about gender balance; it's about enriching the field with diverse perspectives and approaches (Ferri, 2019).

Uplifting women in health and safety roles in New Zealand is critical for several reasons. Firstly, it brings diverse perspectives to the field. Women can offer unique insights and experiences, which are invaluable in creating comprehensive safety strategies that cater to a diverse workforce (Safety Excellence Common Interest Group, 2022). Secondly, gender diversity in leadership leads to more innovative problem-solving. Diverse teams are shown to be more creative and effective, which is essential in the dynamic field of health and safety.

Thirdly, having more women in safety leadership roles can inspire and encourage other women to pursue careers in this field, helping to break down gender stereotypes and barriers. It creates role models and mentors for future female professionals, fostering a more inclusive professional environment. Additionally, women leaders in safety can address gender-specific safety concerns more effectively, ensuring that safety measures are equitable and cater to the needs of all employees (Safety Excellence Common Interest Group, 2022).

Moreover, empowering women in these roles aligns with broader societal goals of gender equality and inclusivity. It sends a strong message about the value of diversity in leadership and decision-making. This can lead to more equitable and just workplace practices and policies.

Finally, women's leadership in health and safety can contribute to overall business success. Studies have shown that companies with diverse leadership teams perform better financially and have higher employee satisfaction rates. This indicates that gender diversity is not only a matter of fairness but also a strategic business advantage.

8.0 Benefits and challenges of multidisciplinary leadership in health and safety

In discussing the challenges and opportunities of implementing inclusive and vulnerable leadership, the Safety II model, and Te Ao Māori in health and safety, the focus should be on practical application and integration into existing systems.

8.1 Challenges

- Resistance to Change: Implementing new leadership styles and safety models often faces resistance from those accustomed to traditional methods. Overcoming this requires effective communication and demonstration of the benefits of these new approaches.

- Educational Gaps: There is a need for education at all levels to ensure understanding and effective implementation of these concepts. This includes training in inclusive leadership, understanding Te Ao Māori principles, and grasping the nuances of the Safety II approach (Smith et al, 2018).
- Cultural Integration: Integrating Te Ao Māori into predominantly Western business models poses its own set of challenges, particularly in terms of acceptance and understanding across diverse employee groups (Ruwhiu et al 2016).
- Resource Allocation: Adequate resources, both in terms of time and finances, need to be allocated for training, development, and implementation of these approaches.

8.2 Opportunities:

- Enhanced Safety Outcomes: These approaches offer more comprehensive safety solutions, considering not just physical but also mental and emotional health.
- Improved Employee Well-being and Engagement: Inclusive and vulnerable leadership can lead to a more engaged workforce, with employees feeling valued and heard.
- Cultural Sensitivity and Diversity: Embracing Te Ao Māori principles and inclusive leadership fosters a more culturally sensitive and diverse workplace, which can lead to innovative solutions and a broader understanding of safety issues (Spiller, et al 2020).
- Long-Term Organisational Benefits: Although initially challenging, the long-term benefits of these approaches include reduced workplace accidents, higher employee retention, and potentially better financial performance due to a more committed and satisfied workforce (Weinstein, 2022).

8.3 Role of Education:

Education is key in overcoming the challenges and seizing the opportunities presented by these approaches. Training programs need to be developed to educate leaders and employees on the importance of inclusive and vulnerable leadership, the principles of Te Ao Māori (Ruwhiu et al 2016), and the Safety II model (Hollnagel, 2014). These programs should be designed to be engaging and accessible, ensuring broad participation and understanding (Clarke, S, 2013).

The ultimate goal is a holistic, inclusive, and culturally aware health and safety environment that benefits from diverse leadership styles and approaches (Smith et al, 2018).

9.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the multifaceted approach to Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) leadership presented in this report reflects a holistic vision for a safer and more inclusive future in New Zealand workplaces. By weaving together elements of inclusivity, vulnerability, Safety II principles, and Te Ao Māori values, we aspire to create a paradigm shift in WHS practices.

Challenges such as resistance to change and the necessity for extensive education can be seen as opportunities for growth. Embracing a proactive and inclusive leadership style that values open communication and collective learning can help overcome these hurdles. Furthermore, recognizing the importance of uplifting women in safety leadership and addressing health and safety disparities for Māori workers underscores our commitment to equity and inclusivity.

This comprehensive approach seeks to transcend traditional WHS paradigms that often focus solely on compliance. Instead, it champions a cultural shift where safety becomes a shared responsibility deeply embedded in the organisation's DNA. It's not just about meeting regulatory requirements; it's about creating a workplace where every individual's well-being matters.

The goal is to foster a work environment where the safety and well-being of employees are prioritised, irrespective of their gender, cultural background, or role within the organisation. Through education, collaboration, and a commitment to cultural responsiveness, we can transform WHS into a force that not only prevents accidents but also enhances the overall quality of work life.

As New Zealand continues to evolve, so too must its approach to WHS. By embracing this forward-thinking leadership model, organisations can navigate the complexities of modern workplaces more effectively. Safety

will no longer be viewed as an isolated function but as an integrated part of organisational culture, contributing to enhanced employee well-being and productivity.

In essence, the WHS leadership approach presented here is not just a theoretical framework; it's a call to action. It's an invitation for organisations, leaders, and practitioners to embark on a journey towards a safer, more inclusive, and empathetic future. It's a commitment to ensuring that health and safety are not mere compliance checkboxes but fundamental values that underpin the success and sustainability of New Zealand workplaces.

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