



Closing the gap between work as imagined and work as done

Lisa Hansen, DCE People & Culture ACC



He Kaupare. He Manaaki. He Whakaora.
Prevention. Care. Recovery.

Purpose for Today



Why the gap matters

Why the gap between work as imagined and work as done matters for safety, learning, and decision-making



Share what we're learning

Share what we're learning at ACC about understanding real work, including what's improving and where we still have gaps



How to close the gap

Leave you with practical questions and approaches you can use in your own workplaces to close the gap

Work as imagined

What leaders see from a distance



**Policies &
procedures**



Risk registers



**Training
completion**



**Incident
dashboards**



**Assurance,
audits, reviews**

Spot the hidden assumptions

Table Activity

At your table:



1

Choose a routine task from your workplace (something that happens every day)

2

Write down three assumptions that leaders might make about how that task is done

3

Circle the assumption that worries you most, the one that, if it's wrong on a bad day, could create harm

Work as done

The frontline reality



**Busy daily
reality**



**Competing
priorities**



**Imperfect
systems**



**Real-time
trade-offs**



**Real people, real
conditions**

Unless we see and understand adaptations, we can't decide whether to support them, redesign around them, or remove the constraints that are forcing them.

Why the gap matters

Hidden risks and missed opportunities



Real risks stay hidden



Incidents can lead to blame instead of learning



Improvement efforts miss the mark



Early warning signs are missed

Closing this gap isn't about catching people out. It's about learning how the system really operates, so we can design for reality.

Two-way accountability

How leaders should show up

- Spend time where work happens to understand constraints, not to check compliance
- Ask better questions than “Are we covered?”
e.g. “What makes this hard on a bad day?”
- Act on what we hear, listening without follow-through teaches people it’s not safe to speak up.

What helps HSRs & committees influence

- Describe how a busy day can impact on procedures
- Look out for system assumptions and share about the reality
- Use real-work questions with leaders to help them understand your day to day work and challenges

Build a bridge

Table Activity



At your table:

1

Pick the assumption from Activity 1 that you circled

2

Design one 'bridge' action in each of these categories:

Worker/HSR action: What can people doing the work change or test?

Committee/system action: What can the HSW committee change in process, information flow, or escalation?

Leader/executive action: What decision, resource, or priority shift is needed?

3

Decide the first small step you could take in the next 30 days — and what evidence would tell you it's working

What we're doing at ACC

Understanding work as done takes both structure and curiosity

Planned frontline engagement that focuses on “how work works” (not just compliance checks)

More meaningful worker, HSR and committee involvement in identifying risk and shaping controls

Governance forums that ask better questions about conditions, not just incidents

Leaders doing walkthroughs of real scenarios “show me what happens when it’s busy” and listening for what makes success possible

Using learning teams more consistently to understand conditions and redesign controls, rather than defaulting to reminders and retraining



Closing

You don't need authority or all the answers to make a difference

Your influence comes from:

Staying close to the work

Noticing how it really happens

And being willing to explain that reality clearly

When leaders understand work as it truly is, not just how it's imagined, everyone benefits