From Psychosocial Risk Compliance to an ESG Strategy

Global recommendation from the 23rd World Congress on Health and Safety at Work delegates

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Co-authoring an approach to defining social governance

Global Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) experts descended on Australia for the 23rd World Congress on Safety and Health at Work in November 2023. Hosted in Sydney, this was one of the largest global conferences in work health and safety with over 3,000 delegates representing 119 countries involved in this marquee event.

Howden Insurance Brokers Australia (Howden) facilitated a dynamic workshop that harnessed the collective expertise of the delegates and highlighted the depth of the global occupational safety and health experience that was represented at an event that was first held in 1955.

This was truly a global event with representation from every continent showing that safety and health in the workplace is very much front of mind no matter where you live.

The Howden workshop sought to define the current global and local position of social governance within the construct of Environmental Social Governance (ESG).

With the increased global focus on ESG green washing - a company making broad sustainability claims without evidence - governments around the world are proposing new reporting standards that hold companies to account. In Australia, the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) is on the case, with its first green washing court case against a superannuation funds manager who claimed the Fund excludes companies that were involved in carbon-intensive fossil fuels.

After ASIC identified its investment in these companies, the Funds Manager agreed to pay $11.3m in penalties which is still to be approved by the Federal Court. The current discussion in the media communicates that just as divesting fossil fuel assets does not reduce carbon emissions, establishing a bullying and harassment policy does not in itself create a safer workplace.

S in ESG is set to play a critical role

As we continue to improve our approaches to the construct of environment, it is the "S" - the social issues in ESG - which are often overlooked. The "S" is set to play a critical role in how governments and organisations define how we not only protect our environment, but also our people. In Australia, we are now at a turning point where we can expect a focus on "safe washing"- a company making broad safety claims without evidence - learning from the green washing experience.

From the workshop concept through to facilitation, Howden worked closely with the 23rd World Congress on Health and Safety at Work to align, enable and support OSH representatives from around the world. The Howden Workshop 'From psychosocial risk compliance to an ESG strategy: A strengths-based solution' sought to link control strategies to a model of prevention, protection, promotion and support that can be implemented across any region in the world to define the "S". By promoting a model that includes prevention, the workshop embodies the World Congress's proactive approach to OSH, prioritising harm prevention at every turn.

A future focus on ESG

Accounting for the variance in OSH maturity around the world, Howden sought to bring a future focussed vision that moved the audience from bygone references to an individual's mental health and wellbeing, to an organisation's responsibility to address the element of social issues in ESG. By establishing the current state, Howden sought to promote a future focus on ESG as a key lever for global communities to move from compliance to wellbeing economic reform.

With the opportunity to draw upon the collective expertise of global OSH delegates, Howden sought co-authors to publish their insights on creating a safer global system of work. Howden's position drew upon the current changing Australian legislative frameworks guiding psychosocial risk management, to define the future focussed blueprint for "S" social governance.

The emergence of social issues

As a construct within ESG, Social issues are quickly emerging through international guidelines such as the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals (UNSDG). Organisations around the world are shifting their attention to ESG and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) as a means of reporting on their economic, environmental, and social issues.

The workplace is therefore recognised as a key stakeholder in creating preventative and protective strategies to mitigate the economic, environmental and social issues relevant to its employees. Howden argued that this cannot be achieved without drawing attention to social issues, and clearly defining social impact to the lens of prevention to achieve wellbeing economic reform.

The delegation consistently supported the commentary that establishing work health and safety legislation does not hold organisations to account for the role that they play in creating safer environments for everyone.

Collective power

Harnessing the collective expertise from delegates at the congress presented an ideal opportunity to establish constructs and themes that could contribute to future research and reporting standards globally. Strengthening the "S" would therefore move ESG from an ideology to the architectural framework of wellbeing economic reform.

The workshop group discussions presented challenging recommendations from 54 delegates. The insights were collated digitally during the workshop. The shared control strategies and recommendations communicated in this paper were then redistributed for review by delegates, conference organisers and subject matter experts.

Thanks to the contributors

The workshop's interactive discussions and insight sharing exemplify the World Congress's commitment to participatory knowledge exchange, a key driver in innovating prevention of harm and enhancing workplace safety standards. We would like to thank all delegates that contributed to the research and the delegates that are noted as co-authors for their insight and contribution to defining social governance globally.

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The current landscape of psychosocial risk management

The 2023 World Congress in Australia occurred in a region that was delivering some of the most significant workplace regulatory changes across the globe.

This reform has set the Pacific region apart from the rest of the world, as it strives to increase the accountability of workplaces in managing the mental health and wellbeing of its people by addressing psychosocial hazards in the workplace. Australia and New Zealand's approach to occupational safety and health has provided the foundational architecture to set up a global discussion about social Issues and corporate governance in this space.

Legislative reform is being reinforced

Across Australia in 2023, State and Territory governments continue to adopt the recommendations made by the 2018 Boland Review[1] of the National Model Work Health and Safety laws designed to expressly address how duty holders should deal with the risk to psychological health at work, including setting out the matters that must be considered in developing control measures. The legislative reform that is sweeping across Australia is being continuously reinforced by matters that are brought in front of the courts.

Codes of practice are critical

State and Territory Governments are implementing codes of practice from the Work Health and Safety Amendment Regulation 2022, bringing into effect the key recommendations of the Boland review. It is important to note that Ms Marie Boland, who led the review has been appointed as Chief Executive Officer of Safe Work Australia, as of October 2023.

Immediately following the congress, New Zealand published a draft code of practice, which at the time of this white paper is still out for consultation and will be amended for publication as a Code of Practice to address Psychosocial hazards across workplaces in New Zealand.

The codes of practice which define psychosocial hazards are critical for organisations to manage the social issues that impact their people. Most organisations understand hazards in the workplace but have a limited insight into viewing hazards through a psychosocial lens.

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[1] Boland, M. (2018). *Review of the model Work Health and Safety Laws.* Safe Work Australia. Retrieved: https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1902/review_of_the_model_whs_laws_final_report_0.pdf

It is time for best practice models

It is necessary for organisations to recognise that psychosocial relates to the intersection and interaction of social, cultural and environmental influences on the mind and behaviour. According to WorkSafe Victoria[2], psychosocial hazards are factors in the design or management of work that increase the risk of work-related stress and can lead to psychological or physical harm. This regulatory definition now clearly defines the role that organisations must play in mitigating the risk of harm to people at work.

Howden supports organisations to align with the regulatory guidelines and codes of practice, so that they can not only meet compliance but establish best practice models of safety and psychosocial risk mitigation.

Howden's address to the World Congress aimed to push beyond the current state of compliance and risk management. The objective was to use the safety architecture established to prevent psychosocial hazards to formulate an approach to address Social Governance.

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[2] WorkSafe Victoria (2023). *Psychosocial hazards contributing to work-related stress.* Retrieved: https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/psychosocial-hazards-contributing-work-related-stress

Environmental Social Governance (ESG) can be the carrot vs. the stick.

The workshop helped delegates from all regions of the world understand the proposed pathways from compliance to ESG; the stick vs. the carrot. The workshop positioned solutions for the prevention, protection, promotion and support of all workforces. Through this report the authors aim to identify scalable and sustainable people focussed solutions that align and define components of the "S" in ESG.

The session addressed the need for People Leaders to enable safety behaviours by creating a culture of wellbeing through the "S". Further, at a macro level, this session continued to steer the conversation through the lens of ISO 45003[3] and the SafeWork[4] Guidelines for managing psychosocial risk. Diagram 1 communicates the immersive learning journey Howden took delegates on, to understand how wellbeing economic transformation is more sustainable than a compliance checklist.

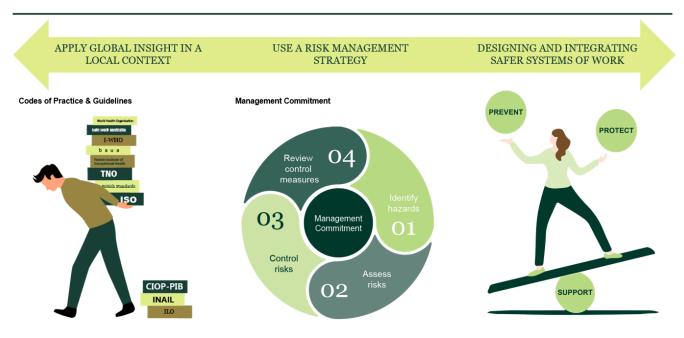## Global psychosocial risk blueprint for local community

Diagram 1: Transition to ESG and a Wellbeing Economy

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[3] ISO 45003:2021. Occupational health and safety management. Psychological health and safety at work
Guidelines for managing psychosocial risks. Retrieved: https://www.iso.org/standard/64283.html
[4] Model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work. Retrieved: https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/model-code-practice-managing-psychosocial-hazards-work

How ESG can support us in achieving wellbeing economic reform

The practice of ESG began in the 1950s and has gained momentum in recent years. ESG is a set of aspects or principles adopted by organisations. ESG takes environmental and corporate governance matters into account with a focus on promoting long term sustainable business practices.

The term ESG was used in a 2004 report titled "Who Cares Wins", which was a joint initiative of financial institutions at the invitation of the UN. With a growing focus on the concept of ESG, many organisations and Governments are grappling with how we define each of these unique pillars of E, S and G. Whilst there has been significant focus on the Environmental aspects, Social Governance presents an opportunity for us to start to quantify the grey areas and associated risks.

The journey from a compliance mindset to social governance frameworks is one of evolution. ESG didn't just appear but has been an evolution from sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), driven by the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). Since 2020, the United Nations (UN) has been pushing to overlay ESG data with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), based on their work, which began in the 1980s. So over the last 20 years, the ESG movement has grown from a corporate social responsibility initiative launched by the United Nations into a global phenomenon which we are now tackling the details of how we bring this to life inside our organisations and countries. Researchers have sought to integrate these models, even through recent events like COP28 (Diagram 2)[5].

Diagram 2. Making Sense of COP28: Understanding the connection to ESG and sustainability.

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[5] Sjolseth, E. (2023). Making sense of COP28: Understanding the connection to ESG and sustainability. Retrieved: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/making-sense-cop28-understanding-connection-esg-erik-sjolseth-eoggc

The UNSDGs provide an overarching framework for developing parameters to govern social issues. Whilst Regulators globally are working towards a more consistent framework, this remains a real obstacle to achieving ESG objectives, in the absence of a global standard and defined metrics, particularly in the social pillar.

Our current landscape is evolving quickly. There is still a gap and absence of a global standard to which we can align. As there is a vast scope for how we define what these key metrics should look like, Howden's efforts to apply the preventative methodologies identified in other occupational safety and health initiatives provides one solution to addressing social issues by engaging organisations to adopt an ESG perspective.

ESG represents more than just compliance, this is a global paradigm shift towards holistic decision-making. The opportunity we have as a global community of practice, established at the World Congress, is to collectively define what governance of social issues looks like. Defining how we start to shift organisational thinking from a mindset of addressing compliance in health and safety to a broader framework of enterprise risk and social governance is the first step that this conference workshop aimed to take.

Collaboration to define the "S"

The reverberating theme through the Congress was "collaboration" and "consultation".

Howden sought to access the collective experience of the delegates in the Congress to define social issues through the model of prevention, protection and support. The model of prevention, protection and support has been recognised across Australian Government regulators.

> It reinforces the elements of control that account for organisation (prevent), leadership (protect and promote) and workforce (support) factors that can create an ecosystem of wellbeing that addresses social issues.

Howden sought to use the architecture to help delegates define social issues within the governance of an organisation and its obligations and capacity to apply controls to eliminate or mitigate the risk of harm.

After establishing the present state of legislative reform, and providing a future focussed direction, delegates were placed into smaller working groups, and allocated three specific questions including:

↘ What does prevention look like in the context of governance of social issues?

↘ How do we protect and promote good health for all?

↘ How do we continue to support people that are ill and injured?

Delegates collectively defined and shared insights that can be summarised in Table 1. The volume of feedback and depth of insights collected under three categories highlights the significant contribution and collective knowledge of the delegation. Represented in Table 1 is the raw data reflections, consolidated and sub-themed. The sub-themes and categories were based on what was represented in the outputs across prevention, protection and support. The co-authors supported the development of a summary of findings and recommendations.

Table 1; An ecosystem of wellbeing that addresses social issues.

PREVENT		
GOVERNMENT	**ORGANISATIONS**	**COMMUNITY**
• Governments from emerging economies are supported in adopting an approach that is aligned to Wellbeing Economic reform. • Leverage the physical safety risk systems at enterprise level and integrate psychosocial hazards. • Learn from and adopt systems from high risk industries such as mining. • Proactive monitoring of organisations, communities, families and individuals. • Adopt international standards for health, labour and working conditions so people have confidence and trust in the system.	• Commitment from organisations to Government guidelines and reform. • Management systems with continuous improvement. • Buy in from the board and the executive. • Normalising the social aspect within the organisation. • Conduct holistic mental health risk assessment and develop a strategy. • Consult with employees to co-design policies and procedures. • Specialised and trained first responders within the organisation or workplace.	• Community promoted social issues such as a zero tolerance to domestic violence. • Championing the right culture of safety and health. • Identify how organisations in your community are harming workers and seek local government support. • Leverage social tools such as movies and radio jingles to keep the conversation at the top of mind. • Address individual cultural conditions for your community.

PROTECT & PROMOTE		
TRAINING	**MEASURE**	**TOOLS**
• Psychosocial risk training for all supervisors and managers to support early intervention. • Train leadership teams to put health on the agenda of management meetings (People First). • Build trust and health literacy. • Training on providing flexibility through increased levels of job control and job support. • Training for first responders (Psychological First Aid, PFA). • Comprehensive health and safety induction & continuous education for work inspection. • Peer to Peer Support programs. • To understand a workers readiness to change, and receive advice. • Training for managers in return to work procedures. • Train staff to prevent victim shaming in their words or their actions.	• Harmonised metrics with standards to ensure effective measurement of the related progress towards the social context element. • A systemic strategy with core KPIs to validate progress. • Measure effectiveness of facilities, ensure flexibility and adopt a mindset that it is not one size fits all. • Use validated tools to measure workplace hazards. • Leadership over management style - influence healthy culture and open discussions about health. • Measure whether we have provided space within the work environment and within the job role to actively pursue good health. • Administer and measure worker grievance mechanism through worker survey. • Assess worker's success in achieving health goals that they have set for themselves.	• Integrate self-assessment tools for wellbeing health checks. • Leaders need to have the insights about their own health to lead by example. • Tools to assess and manage the effectiveness of flexible working arrangements. • AI and wearable technology to provide insights. • Understand the risk and develop an action plan to promote and educate workers and communities on how to make good choices and look after yourself. • Utilise Employee Resource Groups (ERG) and social groups to drive wellness programs. • Robotics to support manual duties for older workers. • Building a safe environment for all employees to have a well balanced work and personal activities. • AI powered triage apps that direct individuals to advice or phone/in-person assistance.

SUPPORT	
• Awareness of where and how to get help. • Building up appropriate health services research. • Robust return to work processes. • Create a safer space for people to have honest discussions about how they feel and what they need. • Early mental health support to help deterioration. • Early return to work, financial and psychological support. • Increase the number of clinical staff that can support and build the capacity of non-clinical staff in a health care environment.	• Dedicated health and rehabilitation specialists in organisations to support return to work. • Regular medical checks (Quarterly) across workforce. • Ensuring people are aware of the hazards that they will face in their role and have the tools available to make a decision to mitigate the risk of illness and injury. • Make sure the organisation has removed or minimised the risk of the hazard that caused the injury, impacting on the person before they return to work.

PREVENT

FAMILY	INDIVIDUAL
• Build a culture of prevention in the family. • Family health and safety is prioritised by addressing key issues such as domestic violence. • Integrate injury prevention and recovery training into the family to create the right ecosystem for recovery for work and life. • Build connected family networks that can assess risk and intervene early to mitigate these risks. • Ensure there is strong peer to peer counselling support for families and employees, from prevention to supporting someone after an injury or illness.	• Responsibility for education and training is owned by each individual. • If you hold a leadership role, you are required to continuously participate in education and training to lead people, families, communities and your organisation. • Lifting your health literacy to adapt to change in your environment and intervene early. • Peer to peer support program participation is required to rebuild safer communities. • Participate in regular health risk assessments of yourself, team and organisation.

PROTECT & PROMOTE

PROGRAMS	MARKETING
• Employee Assistance programs. • Develop a people first culture. • Health literacy programs, supporting the individual family and community. • Consultation programs that provide clear strategies, reflections, execution and a cooperative vision. • Programs where employees can come closer together and build trust. • Guideline/training programs on implementation of data led health intervention programs. • Programs that facilitate cross socialisation across teams. • Buddy system for workers, supervision for managers, link to business benefits for executive team. • Parametric insurance to support communities with impact of climate change. • Casual staff have a different attachment to the staff base of a workforce. • Evidence based bio-psychosocial interventions and approach.	• Awareness at all levels of "Prevention". • Create a social dialogue that is relevant to a local community. • Promote social capital. • Market individual training and tools to manage mental health and wellbeing. • Promote workplace, vacation, exercise clubs. • Socialise policies and procedures through the business as a means or assessing skill and not performance management. • Work-life balance and flexibility. • Clearly define the scope of "good health" and embed this understanding among the leadership team. From this, set indicators and control. • Buy in and consultation with the workforce. • Link to clear business strategies. • Confront jurisdictional conflict between HR and WHS and adopt a transdisciplinary approach.

SUPPORT

• Continue to work collaboratively with the workforce to eliminate the stigma of mental health. • Consult with the workforce about creating opportunities for people to speak up and have a voice. • Promote the recognition of value of each worker and the investment in workers. • Having meaningful and visible suitable duties for the worker to promote value for the injured worker. • Policy and procedural commitment from the organisation.	• Improve collaboration between health insurers and retirement plans. • Collaborate with all stakeholders, including unions and employers that this is the right thing to do for all of us. • Treat non-workplace injuries in the same manner as workplace injuries. • Returning to work in the same role may not be optimal. Make every effort to support new roles even in the same organisation. • Keep staff that are injured still involved in all social aspects of the workplace and the team.

Reflections on key themes

The key themes and recommendations that have been raised by the delegates in the workshop represent a robust range of initiatives. The interpretation of the raw data, reflection and recommendations were delivered in collaboration with the recognised authors.

The findings were divided into various subthemes and categories coupled with recommendations which encompassed the elements of prevention, protection, promotion and support. The sub-themes are not exclusive and need to interact and intersect in a system. A safer system of work is key to achieving a sustainable ESG and a Wellbeing Economy. On further reflection of these findings, co-authors contributed the following key insights that highlight ethnographic and systemic issues that need to be addressed. Ethnographic considerations account for description of people and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences.

Reflections highlighted:

Government leading the way

It is imperative that governments play a leading a role to come out with appropriate legislation or guidelines in line with international best practices, and with strong commitment from organisations to implement and enhance the approach, in accordance to their respective working condition.

Culture of prevention

Community awareness alongside active involvement by family and individuals in building a culture of prevention are equally important for a consolidated effort toward achieving a wellbeing economy. Some organisations in the region are adopting a message that workers return home better than they arrived at work. How this moves from ideology to a measurable reality is yet to be discovered.

Support is needed for businesses of all sizes

The differences between delegates on how to address the themes is telling. The majority of employers globally are small to medium enterprises (SMEs), often family owned and operated, who lack the resources or willingness to implement many of the proposed solutions. There are considerations here for all levels of government, whereby state and local government agencies can be active participants in supporting small to medium businesses make unified reforms in their communities. In Australia, these initiatives can be led by Economic Development Teams that are situated in almost every local council.

Highlighting return on investment

Delegates indicated that a large proportion of the 'Prevent' themes lie outside the control of many employers and there is no clear business driver to prioritise family health and safety, for example. It is expected that the codes of practice will close some of the gap, however more research that produces measurable insights on the return on investment will still reinforce the importance of employers leading the change conversation. Further, there is also opportunity for industry bodies, chambers of commerce and unions to take an active role in prevention.

Defining the roles employers play

There appears to be a desire, not shared by all delegates, for employers and organisations to provide health services for their workforce and families. This is countered by some SMEs with lower profit margins who would not welcome another compliance cost and risk their sustainability as a going concern. The lack of clear guidance – what is in scope and what is not – should be the first step in defining what role employers could play.

Employers' social responsibilities

Social responsibility is a critical aspect of sustainable business practice in ESG. The diversity of responses reflects the challenge of creating a solution that will be applicable across the range of industries, business sizes and cultures around the globe. None the less, it is possible to develop a minimum standard that accounts for organisation (prevent), leadership (protect and promote) and workforce (support) factors by building on existing Occupational Health & Safety Systems and Psychosocial Risk Frameworks. Social Responsibility includes ensuring workers enjoy a safe and healthy work environment, access to healthcare, mental health resources, promotion of work-life balance, and promotion of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Flexible frameworks

Health and safety policies and procedures are designed to protect workers from physical and psychological injury, as well as promote whole-person wellbeing (physical, mental, social). Many of the activities within the psychosocial framework also contribute positively to ESG, including engaging with employees, including workers in decision-making processes, and provide opportunities to speak up. In organisations that participated in the congress it was reported that this is supported internally by the SHE committee, Sustainability committee, ERGs and Mental Health First Aid. By building on these existing frameworks, employers will be prepared to select elements from Table 1 that suit the needs and maturity of their business.

The insight that has been provided by delegates in the workshop continues to highlight the challenges and identify the opportunities for change. Through research collaborations with universities in the region, where Howden employees have been elected to advisory boards, we plan to explore the themes and recommendations that have been highlighted in this report.

Conclusion for transformation

Howden's experts Shehan Peiris and Jacqui Milson addressed the 23rd World Congress on Safety and Health at Work to provide a perspective on occupational safety and health at work from the largest intermediary group in Europe and the largest outside the United States of America. In aligning with the World Congress's foundational mission, Howden's presentation highlighted the pivotal role of prevention of harm, weaving our ethos of wellbeing and safety into the fabric of global workplace strategies.

Howden communicated the current workplace narrative that is unfolding globally, acknowledging the role of the workplace in managing psychosocial risk in the workplace and communities. This perspective was underpinned by a passion to define and lead People Risk solutions for Howden clients globally. This narrative is woven alongside the introduction of global ISO 45003 guidelines and the rapidly evolving legislative landscape in Australia and New Zealand with regards to addressing psychosocial hazards in the workplace.

Howden's message addresses both risk and opportunities, whilst focussing on prevention and positive change. Howden took the congress delegates through a learning journey that shifts perspectives from assessing hazards and risk to creating a culture of wellbeing through safer systems of work. Howden was supported by the Congress to propose a solution to wellbeing economic reform under the umbrella of "Social" issues.

Establishing a culture of wellbeing is a future focussed solution. It challenges our traditional approach to managing social issues through a code of practice or measuring its outputs in the same way we assess climate change. The UNSDGs recognise the global pillars that governments and organisations need to collectively address to tackle social issues in every community around the world.

The outcome of the Howden workshop "From psychosocial risk compliance to an ESG strategy: A strengths-based solution" applied the model of prevention, protection, promotion and support that can be implemented across any region in the world. Those key findings highlighted the opportunity for researchers and practitioners across the world to define and measure the construct of "Social" issues with the same investment and rigour that has been afforded to the "Environment" in ESG.

This report has shared scalable, ethnographic evidence-based insights that will support governments, organisations and researchers in contributing to wellbeing economic reform and building the social architecture we need to coexist, collaborate and thrive on this planet.

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