CONCO>E TŪHURA

Cultural Change in Aotearoa's Construction and Infrastructure Sector Guidelines Authors: Suzette

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INTRODUCTION

Aotearoa has seen a 157% increase in the number of women entering the construction and infrastructure sectors between 2013 and 2023, equating to 29,700 additional women and 15% of the construction sector (MBIE, 2024). Yet, women encounter harmful environments, with the Human Rights Commission (2022) reporting that in a five-year timeframe, 30% of construction employees experienced sexual harassment, and 17% and 16% experienced bullying and racial discrimination, respectively. Moreover, most of the victims of sexual harassment were women, most of the perpetrators were men in more powerful positions, and most of the incidences of sexual harassment go unreported.

Changing organisational culture and preventing hostility and sexual harassment requires a holistic approach (Campbell & Chinnery, 2018; United Nations Women, 2019). Spearheaded by leadership and based on zero-tolerance policies, holistic responses support and protect targets through fair investigative processes, detail and follow through with consequences for harassment, and importantly, are reinforced by targeted training (United Nations Women, 2019). Against this backdrop, significant work at the government, industry, and firm levels has been undertaken in Aotearoa to address bullying, sexual harassment and incivility within the construction and infrastructure sectors to create safe and inclusive environments for all.

The aim of the current guidelines is to present what the industry is currently doing to create inclusive cultures and safe worksites and offers organisations a starting point to developing a programme of cultural change in their own construction and infrastructure settings. The full report also presents the barriers to change and potential industry systemic action to transform construction and infrastructure.

The guidelines are informed by focus groups held with representatives from Tier 1 and medium-sized firms in industry, government agencies, public and private trades training and apprenticeship providers, and private sector sexual harm consultants and wellbeing trainers who discussed their work and shared their insights on creating inclusive and safe work environments in the construction and infrastructure sectors. The data were analysed using the Systems Change Framework (Kania et al., 2018), which identifies six interdependent conditions: policies, practices, resource flows, relationships, power dynamics, and mental models that shape organisational culture. These conditions were used as thematic categories, with subthemes developed from participant insights to highlight features of best practice training. These conditions are mutually reinforcing; for example, shifts in resource flows can influence relationships, and changes in mental models can reshape policies and practices. Notably, mental models are considered the most influential, as they underpin the acceptability of behaviours and norms within a system.

Five guidelines were identified as follows: 1. Strengthen positive relationships and connections; 2. Get informed about what is going on in your workplace; 3. Stay up to date with legislative requirements and contractual obligations; 4. Get your policies and practices in order; and 5. Provide effective resourcing. The guidelines provide outcomes and present potential actions to achieve the outcomes. The guidelines also include paraphrased participant statements that informed the guidelines and speak to why the actions are important.

CALL TO ACTION

This document invites you to take the first step in transforming your organisation's culture by actively reducing harmful behaviours and fostering safe, inclusive environments. Positive pro-social behaviour must be a shared expectation across all workspaces, not just for employees, but also for visitors, subcontractors, clients, and suppliers. These guidelines offer practical, proven actions drawn from industry experiences to help you begin or strengthen your journey. Use them to reflect, plan, and implement change that is sustainable and meaningful.

HOW WE ENVISION YOU USING THESE GUIDELINES

These guidelines are not a checklist; they are a starting point for deep reflection and strategic planning within your organisation. They were developed through conversations with stakeholders across the construction and infrastructure sectors, who shared real-world actions they've taken to foster a culture of safety, inclusion, and bystander empowerment. These actions, and the outcomes they aimed to achieve, are presented throughout this document.

We encourage you to begin by gaining a clear understanding of your organisation's current state. This means listening deeply and respectfully to the experiences of your people, across all levels and roles, through a strengths-based and mana-enhancing lens. These approaches help ensure that people feel safe, valued, and heard, especially when sharing experiences of harm or exclusion. Reflect on how the guidelines relate to your organisation and consider how you could achieve each outcome.

Once you have this foundation, you can begin to develop a strategic plan that embeds a bystander culture tailored to your unique context. This plan should reflect your organisation's values and challenges and be informed by the real-world actions and outcomes shared throughout these guidelines. Don't wait for sector-wide change, be the change. Use these insights to build a programme for organisational cultural change that is authentic, inclusive, and sustainable. We now turn to the guidelines, followed by a conclusion, and a glossary of terms.

GUIDELINE 1: STRENGTHEN POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS

Outcome: Take a strengths-based and mana-enhancing approach to reducing harmful behaviour	
Potential actions to achieve the outcome	**Paraphrased participant quotes**
These are some of the processes that participants used to develop strength-based and mana-enhancing approaches to address poor behaviour: • Based on internal or external expertise, develop an organisational understanding of what strengths-based and mana-enhancing approaches mean and look like. **Reflective prompts:** • What does a "strengths-based" and "mana-enhancing" culture look like in our organisation today? • How can internal expertise and external perspectives help us clarify and apply these approaches in our day-to-day work? • Which past experiences or successes already reflect these principles, and how can we build on them? • Look for and recognise existing mana-enhancing and strengths-based behaviours within the organisation and build on and embed this throughout the entire process. **Reflective prompts:** • Which behaviours in our teams currently uplift, empower, or demonstrate respect for others? • Who consistently models these behaviours, and how can we make their impact visible and widely adopted? • How can we embed recognition of strengths into our regular practices, meetings, or communications? • Focus on creating pathways to achieve positive behaviours (see discussions below) **Reflective prompts:** • What specific behaviours do we want to see more consistently, and what is preventing them from happening now? • How can we create clear opportunities for staff to practise and reinforce positive behaviours in everyday work? • What support, feedback, or coaching could help individuals move toward these behaviours safely and confidently? • Develop networks among similar firms to share resources **Reflective prompts:** • Which organisations or networks could we connect with to learn from their experiences and share insights? • How could collaboration with peers help us strengthen and sustain strengths-based and mana-enhancing practices? • What practical methods (e.g., workshops, mentoring, forums) would make knowledge-sharing safe, relevant, and actionable?	• Need to look at strengths-based and mana-enhancing approaches • Focus on areas for improvement rather than seeing problems that need to be fixed. • Need to recognise progress and then move the narrative forward.

GUIDELINE 2: GET INFORMED ABOUT YOUR WORKPLACE

Outcome: Find out what is going on	
Potential actions to achieve the outcome	**Paraphrased participant quotes**
These are some of the ways that participants used to gather information about what is going on in their organisations: • Provide opportunities for middle management, tutors and staff to share experiences with leadership in a respectful manner. • Anonymous surveys to capture what is happening on site (e.g., QR code access, paper-based feedback options). • Focus groups with a trusted facilitator (e.g., expert outsider, insider, or leader) who reports anonymised findings to the leadership team. • Chance conversations where staff have disclosed poor behaviours and situations where they feel unsafe and have fed this back to the senior leadership team, which started the process of change. • Being genuinely open to discussions on harmful behaviour experienced by staff on site, in the office, or when dealing with contractors, clients, suppliers etc • Acknowledge and address power dynamics when designing policies and practices to create positive change. • Acknowledged the relationship between gendered power dynamics and the harmful behaviours that target women when designing policies and practices to create positive change.	• Staff, including leadership, need to be aware of the experiences of their colleagues. • Lack of reporting provides leadership with the illusion of "no problems". • Opportunities to share experiences with leadership are not provided. • There is limited knowledge of how middle leaders/tutors experience addressing harmful behaviours at a classroom, site or office level. • Colleagues from different cultures hold different beliefs and values. • There are imbalanced power dynamics involved with harmful behaviours.

Outcome: Believe people when they identify that inappropriate behaviours are occurring and acknowledge that these behaviours cause harm

Potential actions to achieve the outcome	Paraphrased participant quotes
These are some of the actions participants took to ensure people, including leadership, believed the disclosures of inappropriate behaviour and understood that inappropriate behaviours cause harm: • Used the anonymised information gathered from affected staff and provided this as extensive evidence of inappropriate behaviour to leadership. • Sought expert advice to develop organisational-wide understanding that inappropriate behaviour is harmful and does cause psychosocial harm. • Provided clear communication detailing harmful, inappropriate, and unacceptable behaviour. **Reflective prompts for leadership** Consider these questions to guide thinking and strategic planning: • How do we ensure that all disclosures of inappropriate behaviour are taken seriously and responded to respectfully, regardless of the seniority or role of the person involved? • How can leadership communicate consistently that harmful behaviours are unacceptable and cause real psychosocial harm, so that the message resonates across all levels? • What mechanisms or supports do we need in place to reinforce belief and validation for people making disclosures, while also ensuring fair and transparent processes for all involved?	• Complaints and complainants are dismissed • Colleagues and leadership do not believe harm results from inappropriate behaviour. • Colleagues and leaders do not believe behaviours are harmful. • People make excuses or try to explain why the behaviour is not harmful. • Colleagues do not believe their peers intended to or are capable of harmful behaviours and brush off the report. • People excuse the person for the harmful behaviour.

GUIDELINE 3: STAY UP TO DATE WITH LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS AND CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS

Outcome: Clear and up-to-date knowledge of the legislative framework and requirements	
Potential actions to achieve the outcome	**Paraphrased participant quotes**
Some of the approaches participants used to stay current and compliant with their legislative requirements included: • Larger SMEs and Tier one companies have HR staff review policies for compliance when legislative changes occur. • Some firms sought legal advice or other expert advice to review policies considering legislation changes. • Smaller firms took advantage of training and materials provided by industry members, including attending toolbox talks, professional development opportunities provided by franchise collectives, and trade supplier shows, and accessing information from knowledgeable online influencers and credible government websites for updated information. **Reflective prompts:** • How do we ensure that updated legislative requirements are effectively communicated and understood by all staff, contractors, and suppliers? • How can we integrate legal and contractual obligations into everyday behaviours and site practices, rather than leaving them as documents on a shelf? • Are there gaps between the templates, advice, or training we access and the practical realities of our worksites or learning environments, and how can we address them?	• All policies need to align with legal requirements and frameworks. • There are templates aplenty, not always appropriate or current.

GUIDELINE 4: GET YOUR POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN ORDER

Outcome: Embed transformational change in the organisation's strategy

Potential actions to achieve the outcome	Paraphrased participant quotes
Participants identified that successful change programmes linked policies and practices to the firm's overall long-term strategy of the business, and involved: • Developing a communication plan. • Developing an ongoing training cycle. • Establishing and monitoring feedback loops. • Reporting on progress to key stakeholders, including staff. **Reflective prompts for leadership:** • How can we ensure that policies and practices are truly embedded into our long-term organisational strategy, not just procedural updates? • How can communication and reporting processes reach all levels of the organisation effectively? • Are feedback loops structured to capture learning, adjust practices, and recognise progress?	• The training needs to be frequent and often rather than a one-and-done approach. • A review process had not begun as the programmes were new, but it was discussed as a key factor for success. • Increased reporting was seen as a positive measure and was expected. • No clear plan for the roll-out of the project.

Outcome: Define acceptable and inappropriate behaviours and tell everyone about them

Potential actions to achieve the outcome	Paraphrased participant quotes
These are some of the ways that participants set and communicated new positive behavioural expectations of all staff, leaders, subcontractors, clients, and suppliers: • Expect all staff, including leaders, to display positive behavioural standards across all the work environments that they work in, such as worksites, offices or learning environments. • Expected sub-contractors, clients and suppliers to uphold positive behavioural standards. • Embedded new behavioural expectations in site access agreements and in contracts with employees, clients, suppliers, and subcontractors. • Used toolbox talks, posters, and contract clauses to communicate policies, practices, and consequences across all the sites where staff work and come into contact with suppliers, contractors, clients, and so on. **Reflective prompts for leadership:** • How consistently are behavioural expectations communicated and applied across different sites and teams? • How do we ensure subcontractors, clients, and suppliers understand and uphold these behavioural standards? • Are there mechanisms to monitor and reinforce behaviours over time rather than relying on one-off communication?	• Policies are developed but not enacted in the workplace. • It is essential to be clear on the policies and procedures when things don't go well. • Inconsistent behaviour across sites and learning environments. • Can visit a site for an apprentice and it be ok, but the next day a new person changes the culture. • Knowledge of leaders' involvement in the current culture and subsequent change.

Outcome: Design expert-informed and targeted training that identifies, challenges, and changes harmful behaviour.

Potential actions to achieve the outcome	Paraphrased participant quotes
Participants recognised the importance of expertly informed and co-created training. Some of the things they did to develop or access such training included: • Some hired external training experts to help develop mana-enhancing, strength-based, and trauma-informed training resources to guide behavioural changes that were tailored to address the needs of their organisations. • Some developed professional development training to upskill leaders' capability to act on incidents in accordance with policy. • Specialised training was designed to upskill peer-to-peer support staff • Developed appropriate resources to support regular discussions in staff meetings and toolbox talks. • Developed ongoing support programmes for staff members who manage or facilitate the training and reporting processes. • Used a mix of training approaches, including face-to-face onsite training, one-on-one coaching, online training, and the use of external and internal trainers. • Smaller firms accessed training by attending onsite toolbox talks, taking advantage of developmental opportunities provided through trade suppliers and franchise, and accessing online talks by experts in the field. **Reflective prompts for leadership:** • How can we ensure training is relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all staff, leaders, and subcontractors? • How will we measure whether training is translating into behaviour change rather than just knowledge? • What ongoing support structures are needed to embed learning and maintain momentum?	• Resources developed that are not appropriate or relevant • Resources speak to the target, not the culture or perpetrator. • Seek experts to support the development and delivery of training. • When someone is promoted, they are not provided with the training to act on reports of inappropriate behaviour. • Education and training frameworks still focus on technical skills. Challenging conversations on addressing harmful behaviour are not part of the current leadership training. • Ensure that on-site supporters receive adequate training and ongoing support. • Courses, including online modules, are provided infrequently to staff. • Limited follow-up from any training programme, not translating into practice. • There are templates aplenty, not always appropriate or current.

Outcome: Ensure the right people provide support, train, and have the knowledge and skills to connect people affected by inappropriate behaviour to wider systems, services, and procedures.

Potential actions to achieve the outcome	Paraphrased participant quotes
Participants identified that choosing the 'right' support people and trainers was based on firm size, the power-dynamics in their organisations, the skills required by the job, and the capacity and capabilities of current staff versus external expertise. Some of the things participants considered when deciding who the right support people and trainers were included: • Engaged external experts to help co-design, support and develop internal staff capabilities to roll out polices, practices, training and support networks. • Selected internal staff based on their capacity and suitability, and developed their capabilities. • To address power imbalances, people who were recognised and respected by their peers were selected and then trained to provide peer-to-peer support, provide first response contact, and provide a safe path to navigate the informal and formal processes alongside the target. • Managers, leaders, HR and Health and Safety personnel were offered professional development training to both support them and to enable them to implement and administer formal reporting processes. • Provided support to the people facilitating the processes so they remain safe while helping those affected by inappropriate behaviours navigate the system. • Smaller firms accessed publicly available resources or sought help from external expertise to identify ways to develop the skills to manage these processes. **Reflective prompts for leadership:** • How do we ensure that support and training roles are assigned appropriately to balance capability, capacity, and credibility? • Are there structures in place to mitigate power imbalances when providing support? • How do we support facilitators to remain effective and safe in their roles over time?	• Colleagues need to have a relationship with the person providing the training or support. • Pair an "expert" with a colleague. • Develop a system that provides survivors a voice outside of the formal structures. • Can't be a one-person "thing", need more than one. • Needs to be the right person – like me, for me • If leadership are not actively engaged, it limits the impact and embedding. • Leadership is part of the messaging and rollout of the project.

Outcome: Have safe and secure reporting practices

Potential actions to achieve the outcome	Paraphrased participant quotes
Ensure employees, contractors, suppliers and clients can access safe and secure reporting practices for harmful behaviour. Reporting processes used by participants included: • Anonymous reporting process that is easy to access across multiple sites, such as QR codes, websites, paper-based feedback forms, or peer-to-peer supporters. • Reporting process provided as part of site induction. • Many identified the need to develop a safe sector-wide reporting process to support smaller businesses. **Reflective prompts for leadership:** • Are reporting mechanisms accessible, safe, and trusted by all staff, contractors, and clients? • How do we ensure that reporting processes are consistent across multiple sites and contractors? • Do our reporting systems balance confidentiality, transparency, and accountability effectively?	• Recognition of the power of formal structures and the impact on reporting of sexual harm. • Have anonymous reporting • Develop systems that use formal or informal structures, e.g. peer-to-peer. • Unclear reporting processes when working across multiple sites. • Unclear reporting processes when there are multiple contractors on one site. • Power dynamics within small businesses can be difficult to address • Unclear reporting processes for small business operators. • No penalty for making complaints.

Outcome: Act on reporting

Potential actions to achieve the outcome	Paraphrased participant quotes
Acting on reporting requires responding to both the target and the alleged perpetrator. Examples of support provided to the target when responding to reporting: • Provided information and resources about processes and options. • Supported the target's decision on how best and how far to proceed with the complaint. • Ensuring the target is in control of the process; nothing "for me without me". • Offering counselling services (in-house and or Employee Assistance Program) Examples of organisational support for the perpetrator when responding to a complaint: • Mana-enhancing discussion on why the behaviour is harmful. • Providing resources to facilitate behaviour change. • Offered counselling services (in-house and/or Employee Assistance Program) • Be clear on the policies and practices and the consequences of continued harmful behaviour. **Reflective prompts for leadership:** • Are processes trauma-informed, survivor-focused, and strengths-based? • How do we ensure that both targets and alleged perpetrators receive appropriate support and guidance? • Are leaders actively visible, accountable, and consistent in responding to reports?	• Requires a strengths-based approach. • Needs to be survivor-focused and trauma-informed. • Inappropriate leadership responses which place responsibility for addressing the behaviour on the survivor. • Meet people where they are and support them to move forward.

Outcome: Communicate and consistently apply consequences to repeated harmful behaviours.

Potential actions to achieve the outcome	Paraphrased participant quotes
Participants defined legally compliant harmful behaviours and detailed the consequences of non-compliance. These definitions were communicated and consistently applied to all, including leaders, key personnel, specialists, contractors, suppliers, and clients, and those in more powerful positions to the target and to the firm. Some of the examples of the consequences used by participants included: • Dismissed staff, including specialists, leaders and peers • Refused to work with specific contractors • Refused to hire certain individuals with a reputation for harmful behaviour • Refused to allow specific individuals on site • Refused to allow their own staff on sites where there was a known repeat offender of harmful behaviours. • Discontinued business connections with suppliers and clients **Reflective prompts for leadership:** • How do we ensure consequences are applied consistently and fairly, regardless of role, power, or relationship? • Are consequences aligned with organisational values and legal frameworks? • How do we monitor long-term impact on culture and behaviour across the organisation?	• Consequences for harmful behaviour were enacted. • Consequences are inconsistent for harmful behaviour. • Inappropriate consequences for harmful behaviour were enacted. • Some colleagues, including leaders, excuse the harmful behaviour, for example, based on the perpetrator's age, skill level, or personal connections. • Contractors, clients or students face consequences for not meeting behavioural expectations. • Harassment is a power-based problem. • Leaders, specialists, and clients have power over the trades staff, especially women. • Disregard for leaders who are women. • Industry power dynamics can be hard for small to medium-sized businesses to address.

GUIDELINE 5: PROVIDE EFFECTIVE RESOURCING

Outcome: Acknowledge the time and finance required to create transformative change.	
Potential actions to achieve the outcome	**Paraphrased participant quotes**
• Allocate dedicated and regular time in job descriptions and procurement contracts for onsite support training delivery and engagement. • Create regular space in meeting schedules, such as toolbox talks. • Create purposeful and actionable short, medium and long-term cycles to support change. • Build internal capability to manage bystander processes and support colleagues impacted by harmful behaviour effectively. • Enforcing procurement and contractual obligations in terms of behavioural expectations. • Set a budget that is set for more than one year. **Reflective prompts for leadership:** • How are time and resources allocated to support cultural change initiatives across all levels of the organisation? • Are budgets and staffing arrangements sufficient to sustain long-term change, rather than short-term interventions? • How do we ensure that programmes and support structures are accessible and inclusive for all staff, subcontractors, and stakeholders? • What mechanisms are in place to measure impact and adjust resourcing as the programme evolves? • How can leadership model commitment to resourcing, showing that cultural change is a priority for the whole organisation?	• Ensure there is sufficient time to deliver the message regularly. • Make space in a toolbox. • There is an expectation that this type of cultural change can be done alongside other work in HR or H&S. • Develop a programme that is delivered by a team on top of their other roles. • Resource not accessible to all team members. • Implementation is left to a small team or unprepared site staff. • Change takes time and action. • We can't wait for the next generation to make a change. • Allocate budget for an ongoing project, not a one-and-done course.

CONCLUSION

We invite you to take the first steps to transform your organisation's culture, foster safe, inclusive environments, set shared expectations for positive behaviour by everyone, and actively reduce harmful behaviours across all workspaces by reflecting on how the guidelines be integrated into your organisation. Informed by industry experiences, the guidelines offer practical, proven actions that can help reflect, plan, and implement sustainable and meaningful change to start or strengthen your journey. Creating a culture of respect and accountability is not optional, it's essential.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Cultural change is when the values, beliefs and attitudes that overtly and covertly create and support norms that underly a culture of inequality and inequity are called out as unacceptable within the environment and the organisation shows a commitment to messaging that shifts the cultural norms (UN Women, 2019).

Mana-enhancing practices are culturally grounded and healing-centred approach that recognises and upholds each person's inherent worth (mana), identity, culture and whakapapa. It focuses on restoring and sustaining mana through respectful relationships, connection, and holistic wellbeing rather than deficit or "fixing" models (Wi-Kaitaia, Ruwhiu & Eruera, 2021; Mitchell, 2018).

A strengths-based approach is a way of working that focuses on people's inherent characteristics, the environments they live in, and the multiple contexts shaping their lives. The purpose is to empower positive change (Caiels, Milne & Beadle-Brown, 2021)

A trauma-informed approach recognises the widespread impact of trauma and integrates this understanding into all aspects of practice, policy, and culture. It aims to promote recovery, recognise signs of trauma, and actively prevent re-traumatisation for all involved (Dannenberg, Sato, Astal, Murray, Wu and Farley, 2025).

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