

Strengthening health and safety governance beyond compliance

May 2026



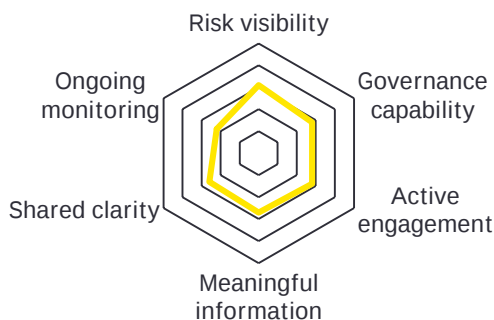
Shape the future with confidence

This paper builds on [A new architecture for effective health and safety governance](#) (EY, March 2026), which set out a new approach to health and safety governance. That paper proposed six interconnected elements that underpin dynamic and effective health, safety and wellbeing (HSW) governance: risk visibility, shared clarity, governance capability, meaningful information, active engagement and ongoing monitoring.

In March 2026, EY teams attended and hosted events across Oceania, and polled more than 100 executive-level health and safety professionals from a variety of industries about their level of confidence in health and safety governance arrangements in their organisations. In this paper, we share the polling results.

Surprisingly, polling from the OHS Leaders' Summit (March 2026) showed low confidence in all aspects of the architecture for effective safety governance:

HSW leaders were clear: health and safety governance exists, but confidence in what it delivers is fragile.



Leaders held a consistent view that governance should enable clear visibility of critical risks and control effectiveness and were most confident in the 'risk visibility' aspect of their organisation's governance arrangements, compared to the other elements. However, that confidence was actually only in the mid-range indicating improvement is required for governance arrangements to meet one of their key, fundamental objectives. Polling also found leaders were least confident in the processes to continuously monitor the effectiveness of governance arrangements, suggesting a "set and forget" approach to health and safety governance without a focus on validating the effectiveness of governance and continuously improving related systems and processes.

Reporting effort is high, but decision value is low. Why are we still here?

Polling results told us that health and safety leaders' experience is that governance is resource-intensive, complex and heavily metric-driven, yet it often falls short of providing insight into real risk exposure and enabling effective decision-making. This can be attributed to four reasons:

Metrics are driving false confidence

Governance, assurance and management roles are blurred

Lack of curiosity and accountability

Systems and data remain a constraint

Attendees at the OHS Leaders Summit (March 2026) were asked the following questions and rated their confidence out of five. The results are listed from highest to lowest confidence:

Risk visibility

How confident are you that your organisation's HSW governance framework provides accurate visibility of health and safety risks?

Governance capability

How confident are you that your organisation's HSW governance framework supports those in governance roles to effectively execute their responsibilities?

Active engagement

How confident are you that your governance framework encourages and enables active engagement in health and safety by governance stakeholders?

Meaningful information

How confident are you that your organisation's governance framework presents the right information in the right way to enable effective decision-making?

Shared clarity

How confident are you that your organisation's HSW governance framework enables a shared and consistent understanding of health and safety expectations and goals?

Ongoing monitoring

How confident are you that there are processes in place to monitor and continuously improve the effectiveness of your governance framework?

Highest confidence (3-4)

Lowest confidence (2-2)

EY definition of health and safety governance:

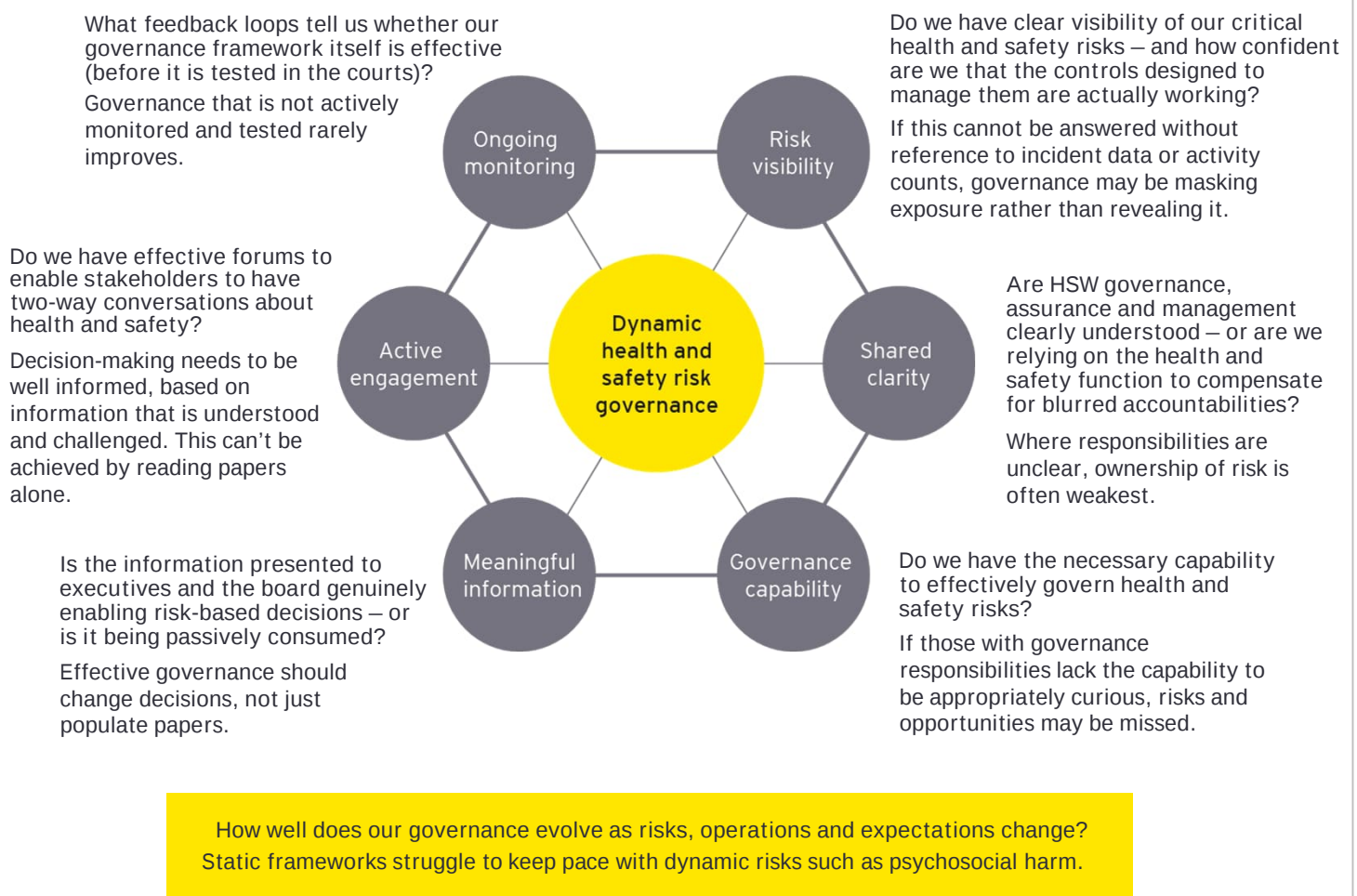
The structures and systems in place to help enable the flow and engagement with relevant data and information to understand and have trust in the management of an organisation's HSW risks.

The better the question. The better the answer.
The better the world works.

How do we prioritise what matters most?

The collective message from senior health and safety leaders is consistent and clear. Health and safety governance must move from volume reporting, compliance and lag metrics towards insight, curiosity and risk-based decision support. Organisations that refocus governance on critical risks, accountability and learning will be better positioned to meet both regulatory expectations and real-world safety challenges.

EY teams help organisations assess current arrangements and design effective health and safety governance frameworks that support information flow, trust and effective decision-making. Leaders should be asking these questions now::



If you are unsure of the answer to any of these questions, EY teams can help. Whether you need to assess your current approach to HSW governance or improve known areas of weakness, EY can help you shift from assurance to insight.



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