



# TIME LEADERSHIP

The board's role in productivity, people wellbeing,  
and burnout prevention.



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## The Context

Working too hard, doing too much, being too busy, is not a new thing. Cast back to 400 BC and you find Socrates warning ‘beware the barrenness of a busy life’. Fast forward to modern day workplaces, people are struggling under the weight of relentless busyness with seemingly no alternative. COVID-19 has brought this into stark focus.

People wellbeing is now top of mind for organisations wishing to retain talent and secure their organisation’s future<sup>1</sup>.

Time leadership as a concept is the relentless focus across an organisation to balance conflicting demands and make timely choices and decisions, that are seen and experienced as purpose driven, values based, strategically focused, achievable and equitable.

### Why are we relentlessly busy?

There seems to be something inherent in the human DNA that has us predisposed to thinking, feeling, and being busy – wanting to please, pressure to perform, pride.

Changes to how we work fuelled by technology exacerbate this, with more things to do than time allows - most of us are now our own travel agent, filing clerk and executive assistant. Job descriptions, most unrealistic from the start, don’t capture this.

Peter Drucker predicted it wouldn’t be technological advances that fascinated historians, but the point at which a critical mass of the world’s population had choice, unprepared to self-manage it. Saying yes when choice is about saying no is endemic.

Staying focused in an always-on-internet-connected world has our concentration down to a slither<sup>2</sup>. We hardly pause between meetings, leaving little time to think deeply about important work that progresses strategy.

And very few of us have been taught to work sustainably – prioritising, sizing, and scheduling time for the most important with a laser sharp focus on getting it done despite distractions.

All this feeds our love of easy, fun work that is quick to do and delivers a tick-hit - ‘another thing off our to do list that we feel good about’, but when we think about it not in a way that is deeply rewarding.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannemeister/2021/08/04/the-future-of-work-is-worker-well-being/?sh=289c3ff14aed>

<sup>2</sup> Cal Newport, Deep Work.



## The Impact

Not paying close attention to how we work is bad for people and business.

The World Health Organisation placed 'burnout' on its official diseases list in 2018. With a focus on the workplace, they noted the demands of the job far outweighing the rewards, recognition, and time off to relax, as the cause.

In 2022 businesses in Aotearoa New Zealand are being urged to change the way they control workload following concerning research by Auckland University of Technology:

- 35 percent of respondents have severe burnout but only 4 percent put themselves in that category – many don't know they have it.
- too many businesses respond to resignations by doubling the workload from departing staff onto a now smaller team.
- burnt out workers are five times more likely to be considering resignation.

European research into productivity and wellbeing<sup>3</sup> reveals the following:

- A German study comparing long (two hour) and short (40 minute) commutes with levels of happiness found the satisfaction difference was so great it would take a 40% pay rise to compensate for the longer commuters' unhappiness.
- A study by the Institute of Psychiatry in London found persistent interruptions at work caused a 10-point drop in the IQ of the person being distracted – twice the decline found in studies on the impact of marijuana use.
- Using the time-tracking productivity app DeskTime, Draugiem Group found the 10% of employees with the highest productivity had regular breaks; 17 minutes for every 52 minutes worked.

In the current COVID environment this recent HBR article on moral injury is a sobering reminder of the impact of inequities in workplaces and the need for organisations to act swiftly as the pact between employers and employees changes.

On cue, The Great Resignation with borders opening and the opportunity for people to move away from what is not right in organisations and towards what is<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The Four Day Week by Andrew Barnes

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6952050965231341568/>

# The good news

## The right side of busy

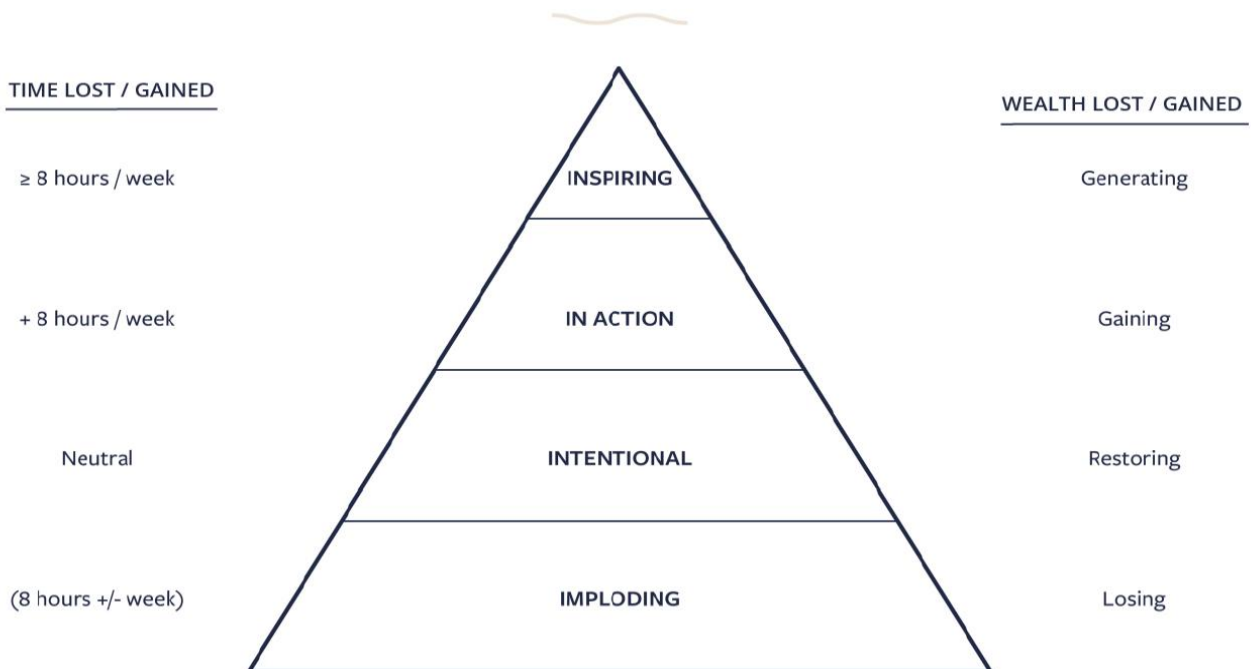
It is entirely possible to get on and stay on the right side of busy - in good times and challenging times.

From an individual perspective everyone has their own descriptors of how it feels to operate this way – head of the game, onto it, nailing it; and not – cyclonic, smashed, on a treadmill.

In the model below, moving up the levels from imploding to inspiring, by working differently, brings a feeling of control, freeing up time to prioritise important work, that can be delivered to a standard that work deserves. Wellbeing gains flow from that.

Applied across an organisation productivity and profitability lifts as wellbeing collectively improves.

### The Right Side of Busy



*“Put your oxygen mask on before helping others”*



## Time Leadership Benchmarking Model

Reflecting on the model and the examples in the assessment framework below, where are you typically positioned? Where would you like to be? What is your way?

Impact	Measures	
Inspiring	25%+ productivity / time  80%+ non-urgent work	Long term planning, mentoring, coaching, special projects, reading and researching.
In action	10-20% lift in productivity /time  70%+ non-urgent work	Prioritised, quality work, proactive forward planning, focused collaboration, process and quality improvement.
Intentional	Productivity / time restored  50% non-urgent work	Workload sized, priorities identified, meetings manageable, space in diaries, 'home on time'.
Imploding	20%+ drop in productivity / lost hours  Less than 20% of work non-urgent	Missed deadlines, email overload, extended hours, back-to-back meetings, rework, reactive.

### Time leadership is a team game

There is a great deal individuals can do to defeat the busy culture and work effectively<sup>5</sup>. When there is organisational commitment to addressing systems, culture and behaviours that are perpetuating the relentless pursuit of more, everyone begins to enjoy the benefits.

Enter the board.

<sup>5</sup> <https://hbr.org/2020/09/how-to-defeat-busy-culture>



## The role of the board

*'People's tolerance of organisational nonsense has reached its limits, and a deeper desire for meaning and belonging has swelled' HBR, February 2022 Carucci and Praslova.*

Individual effectiveness needs organisational leadership. And leadership starts with the board.

As it carries out its work boards have a moral, legal and ethical obligation to keep people safe, productive and well. This includes workloads that are realistic, ways of working that are efficient and effective, and incentives to support positive, lasting change.

Good governance systems, policies, processes, and behaviours – the disciplines of good governance - are the go-to for boards to ensure they are authentically accountable for organisational performance and as part of that people wellbeing and the prevention of burnout.

Good governance supports focused discussions and decisions that allow the board to lead by example while supporting and holding management accountable for delivery. This means prioritised, appropriately resourced strategies, monitoring, evaluating and reporting on progress, and swift action when issues emerge.

Applied across organisations, governance and management workload oversight and proactive support is an antidote to inefficiency, ineffectiveness, unachievable delivery expectations and organisational burnout.

It is the board's role to focus on leading the development, implementation, application and regular review of good governance disciplines if they are to make a meaningful difference to their own work and the work that is delegated by them to others to carry out.

To get started the following model and subsequent examples are three areas boards can focus on to plan their work and work their plan, with artefacts that will be well known to many.

## The role of the board



### Accountability

A board has full time accountability for organisational performance in a part time capacity. Boards are also being held to account by a wider range of stakeholders (legal and moral owners) and for a wider range of responsibilities (financial, environmental, social, governance) than they once were.

They are expected to do that with a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, following the law, and looking well ahead to see what is coming in an ever changing environment in order to adapt. Many in the not-for-profit world do this without remuneration and with limited and sometimes no management resource.

In order to be effective a board has to get organised, think in advance about what it wants to do, and make time to do it.

Boards leading by example:

- Being specific and focused about why their organisation exists, the change it wishes to make for its owners / community and how it will know it has achieved that: **outcome focused measurable statement of intent and aligned strategy.**
- Saying how it wishes things to be done and how work will be delegated in advance – **board policy.**
- Providing sufficient time, money and resources to deliver impact: **aligned planning, budgeting, resource allocation, key performance indicators.**
- Regularly monitoring, evaluating and reporting on strategic progress; **board work plan, strategic risk assessment, stakeholder engagement.**



## Balance

Time is a non-renewable precious resource.

A board and its members have more demands on time than the amount available. They can do anything but not everything with the time they have. How they use their time sets the tone for others.

This includes a radar on workloads across the organisation, a focus on priorities, saying NO in order to say YES to those, and helping management do the same. It's balancing productivity, profitability and well-being in a way that sustains people and organisational success.

Boards leading by example:

- Make time for their role – **realistic governance portfolio, reliable meeting attendance, prepared.**
- Balance their board– **diverse and inclusive, contemporary skills, regularly refreshed.**
- Set realistic workloads– **annual plan, agendas, meeting rhythms.**
- Judiciously delegate: **equitable resources (people and money), management priorities**

## Culture

Culture eats strategy for breakfast<sup>6</sup> is a reminder for boards to demonstrate by example and support ways of working that are fair, equitable, and values and wellbeing based. Once delegated to the CEO, it is now the board's role to oversee culture. Without time leadership all the planning in the world will end up under par on execution.

Boards leading by example:

- Notice: **deadlines under pressure, recurring mistakes, signs of stress.**
- Address - **busy as a badge of honour, over-reporting, unfettered delegation<sup>7</sup>**
- Leverage – **technology, free up decision making.**
- Measure – **outcomes, burnout and turnover.**
- Change - **four-day week<sup>8</sup>, 'stay' interviews, paid sabbaticals, work-free holidays. back-fill roles.**

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<sup>6</sup> Now agreed not to be a Drucker quote

<sup>7</sup> Appendix One Board Effectiveness Model

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.4dayweek.com/research-prof-jarrood-haar-quantitative-research>

## Questions for boards

Good boards regularly check in on how they are performing.

This can be done at the end of each board meeting as well as through formal reviews. The following questions are prompts for boards who are genuine about doing things differently to create better wellbeing outcomes for themselves and those they serve and protect:

- Do we typically do everything we say we will do when we say we will do it?
- How high are the levels of trust in our organisation? Where are examples?
- Is it ok for us to say NO so we can say YES to our priorities? Does the board speak with one voice on this?
- How do we know if our people are burning out?
- How do we know we are working effectively?
- What policy levers do we have?
- What are we pretending not to know or see?
- What do we need to learn?
- How do we know what's important?

The board effectiveness model in Appendix One can be used by boards to benchmark current ways of working and identify changes that when implemented will deliver valuable productivity and wellbeing benefits.

### **The two most underutilised tools in our toolbox for spotting issues...**

Eyes and ears

## Appendix One

### Governance Time Leadership Benchmarking Model

Inspiring	25%+ increase in productivity / time  80%+ work non-urgent and important	<b>As a director</b> makes time to understand organisational environment (site visits, monitors trends), highly focused on the strategically important, holds self and others to account for wellbeing. <b>As a board</b> well-resourced strategies, innovative wellbeing culture & policies <sup>9</sup> make hard strategic choices, aligned stakeholders, role model.
In action	10-20% lift in productivity / time  70%+ work non-urgent and important	<b>As a director</b> speaks to progress discussions, steps up (chairing committees and boards), supports prioritised board & management workload / wellbeing. <b>As a board</b> monitoring prioritised strategic progress, clear line of sight on organisational capacity and wellbeing, director training (including subcommittees), contemporary policy, lived values.
Intentional	Productivity / time restored  50% work non-urgent and important	<b>As a director</b> prepared, focused questions, good attendance, learns and applies governance role, avoids adding to management / board workload. Wellbeing radar. <b>As a board</b> , aligned policy, achievable agenda and annual plan, efficient board processes, papers out on time, focused board packs, relevant information, timely decisions, workload/ wellbeing radar.
Imploding	20%+ drop in productivity / time  < 20%+ of work non urgent and important	<b>As a director</b> , unprepared / poor attendance, distracted (cell phones), reactive responses, lack of clarity on role, unrealistic expectations of management, speaks more than listens, busy as a badge of honour. <b>As a board</b> , focused on management busyness, late papers, long meetings & action lists, large board packs, prolonged discussions / few decisions, little policy, people churn (board / staff)

<sup>9</sup> paid sabbaticals, working from home, stay-interviews, 4-day weeks, reverse mentoring, workload / burnout surveys),



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