

The leadership support gap



New research from *The Nation's Wellbeing Report 2025* by Human Synergistics has highlighted a concerning gap in leadership support and workplace stress within our local government sector, writes **Carina Hull**, a Senior Consultant at Human Synergistics NZ.

With councils under increasing pressure to deliver services while managing funding constraints and rising public expectations, these findings raise serious questions about how well leadership is supporting employees at all levels.

The data, drawn from over 70,000 leaders, managers, and employees across New Zealand and Australia, presents a troubling picture. Stress levels remain high across job levels, but frontline leaders report experiencing the most stress with the least ability to manage it.

At the same time, senior executives and chief executives often feel unsupported despite their position of influence. Interestingly, while those in higher positions tend to feel more capable of managing stress, job satisfaction declines at lower levels of the organisation. If left unaddressed, this imbalance could have significant consequences for staff retention, performance, and overall workplace well-being.

These findings raise several critical questions for councils to consider. How can they prevent burnout among frontline leaders and staff? What steps should senior leaders take to strengthen the long-term resilience of their teams? And what practical strategies can be implemented to improve workplace satisfaction and leadership support in high-pressure environments?

One of the key areas councils need to focus on is managing workloads and setting realistic expectations. Many frontline leaders are stretched too thin, making it difficult for them to perform effectively or support their

teams. Ensuring workloads are evenly distributed and clearly communicated is crucial.

At the same time, mental health support needs to be embedded into everyday operations, with regular check-ins and accessible resources available for staff who need them. Encouraging regular breaks and promoting flexible working arrangements can also make a significant difference in preventing burnout.

However, it's not just about offering these initiatives; councils must foster a workplace culture where staff feel genuinely supported, valued, and able to speak openly about challenges without fear of judgement.

For senior leaders, there is a clear need to develop stronger leadership capabilities and build meaningful connections with their teams. Leadership development programmes can help managers and executives refine their ability to navigate stress and lead through change. Just as importantly, teams need clarity of purpose; when employees understand how their work contributes to a larger vision, they are often more engaged and resilient. Senior leaders' commitment to communicating this vision consistently, helping teams stay motivated even when faced with demanding workloads or difficult tasks is vital.

Workplace culture is another critical factor in job satisfaction and leadership support. If councils want to improve these areas, they need to measure culture and understand the behaviours and attitudes shaping their environment.

Tools such as Human Synergistics' Organisational Culture Inventory and Life Styles Inventory can provide insights into whether workplace dynamics are contributing to stress or fostering a more constructive environment.

Rachel Wells, Group Manager People & Capability at Kapiti Coast District Council, acknowledges the importance of this; *"Recent research has emphasised the connection between mental health and employee experience, with both being crucial factors influencing organisational performance. At Kapiti Coast District Council, we are rethinking how we engage across the Council to collaboratively create and develop practical frameworks that support mental health and wellbeing. We are also focusing on clearly defining our current and desired culture, along with developing a program of work aimed at achieving these goals."*

Beyond measurement, councils should actively encourage constructive behaviours such as collaboration, innovation, and emotional support within teams. When leaders set the tone for open communication and positive reinforcement, employees are more likely to feel engaged and less overwhelmed.

Feedback mechanisms also play a key role – giving employees regular opportunities to voice concerns, celebrate achievements, and suggest improvements fosters a more supportive and adaptive work environment.

If councils commit to these steps, they can create a more sustainable and resilient workplace; one that not only prevents burnout but also empowers employees to thrive in high-pressure environments. Leadership support and workplace culture are not just HR concerns; they are essential for ensuring that local government remains effective, adaptable, and capable of meeting the needs of the communities they serve.

To read the full report visit: www.hsnz.co.nz/resources/the-way-we-work-report-2025/ **LG**



NZMCA supports banning green stickers

When the NZMCA supported calls from councils to raise the bar for certified self-contained vehicles, it was to help address concerns local communities had over the impact some freedom campers were having on the environment and to improve confidence in the certification system.

But that confidence is at risk because of confusion arising from the display of green stickers on vehicles. Certified self-contained vehicles only need to display a green warrant card to verify compliance with the government's new regulations, however some vehicles are displaying green stickers for marketing purposes or without proper certification.

The NZMCA and the new Regulator have been inundated with concerns about the validity of these stickers. Public perception is that the sticker is part of the new certification requirements, which is incorrect. A sticker can be placed on any vehicle regardless of its certification status and, as with the earlier blue self-containment sticker, counterfeit versions can easily be made.

NZMCA CEO Bruce Lochore says if the problem is left unchecked, there is a serious risk local communities will lose confidence in the government's new regime, undermining its efforts to protect tourism's social licence. Under the legislation it is only an offence to display an altered or fraudulent green warrant card. Displaying a green sticker is not an offence.

"In our view the legislation needs to be strengthened to enable local authorities, the Department of Conservation and the Regulator to enforce a ban on green stickers and the like," he says.

"In lieu of enforcement powers, the regulator has taken an educational approach with certification authorities explaining the problems the stickers have created and asking them to refrain from using them. Unfortunately, this won't prevent others from creating fake stickers and displaying them on vehicles that don't comply."

If section 20C of the Freedom Camping Act 2011 were amended, it could become an offence to display green stickers or other material that mislead people into believing a vehicle complies with the new self-containment regulations.

The NZMCA has written to the Minister of Tourism & Hospitality, Louise Upston, explaining the problem with recommended solutions.