



Case study: Embedding innovation as BAU

energyWORKS

Four years after introducing *safety differently* concepts to its business, Taranaki-based engineering company Energyworks, believes taking an innovative approach to the way they work has now become business as usual.

And while it has the benefit of a regionally-based business with a number of long-serving team members, it credits two things to embedding innovation in its work;

- **response matters**
- **ensuring people feel safe to speak up.**

“We acknowledge that if things don’t go well then we hear about it from our workers very quickly,” says Organisation Performance Manager Rob Kirkwood.

“We aim for a high psychologically safe working environment. We know that a worker’s confidence and the desire to innovate will be lost if we were to respond to failure poorly.”

Rob says senior leaders chose early to respond in a way that means workers are not discouraged to speak up and report failure – acknowledging that they don’t get things right all of the time and it’s crucial the organisation learns and improves, rather than blames and punishes.

And the business didn’t hold back when it started introducing innovation processes – starting with one of its more high-risk activities – laying gas pipelines across challenging, rough farmland.

“It was the pipeline crew that raised the idea of flying the pipes into position via helicopter. This option required bespoke lifting mechanisms to be designed as well as extensive training for those workers involved.”

The overall results spoke for themselves – a huge saving of time (a job that would have taken weeks reduced to a few days), as well as reducing damage to farmland from the traditional method of using trucks and trailers.

Rob says as the innovative ideas come from within the teams, Energyworks has been clear to ensure workers are at the forefront of any solution to a problem that may arise.

The results?

“Workers see innovation as a positive attribute of our business, and therefore feel safe in innovating themselves or suggesting new ideas,” says Rob.

Energyworks has also seen event reporting increase, and injury rates decline since these approaches have been adopted.

What can others learn?

“My advice is to remind senior managers that things go right most of the time in your business – so focus on this, more than you may have done before.”

“Failure has always happened and will continue to happen. But it’s how you respond that matters – and gives workers the courage to create innovative solutions to the way we work,” says Rob.