Insights.

Sonder

Agents of change

5 roles of CEOs and leaders who are reshaping organisational wellbeing

Contents

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Introduction

In today's complex business environment, shareholder value is no longer the only north star. Modern leaders "must focus on co-creating meaningful value with and for all stakeholders, expanding beyond shareholders to include customers, employees, partners and our broader society," said Lurie and Tegelberg from McKinsey & Company.[1]

Health-savvy CEOs, board members and senior managers are no longer leading a single organisation - they're "leading a community"[2] and participating in "a new social contract [where their choices] fundamentally affect the health of all stakeholders with whom their organisations engage".[3]

They're no longer setting a vision and purpose only to inspire team members - they're "connecting purpose, productivity and impact"[4] to inspire change across an entire ecosystem, where "everyone must win".[5]

The new style of leader is an agent of change who collaboratively and proactively co-architects a healthier organisation - and a better world.

1 McKinsey & Company   2 Korn Ferry   3 Deloitte   4 Korn Ferry   5 McKinsey & Company   6 Deloitte

What is a health-savvy CEO?

"A CEO who appreciates that decisions relating to health and health care can have a significant impact on the culture of the organisation, the way in which work gets done, the cascading effects of that work in spaces and places beyond the organisation's four walls, and the power of the CEO's personal brand to support people's health."[6]
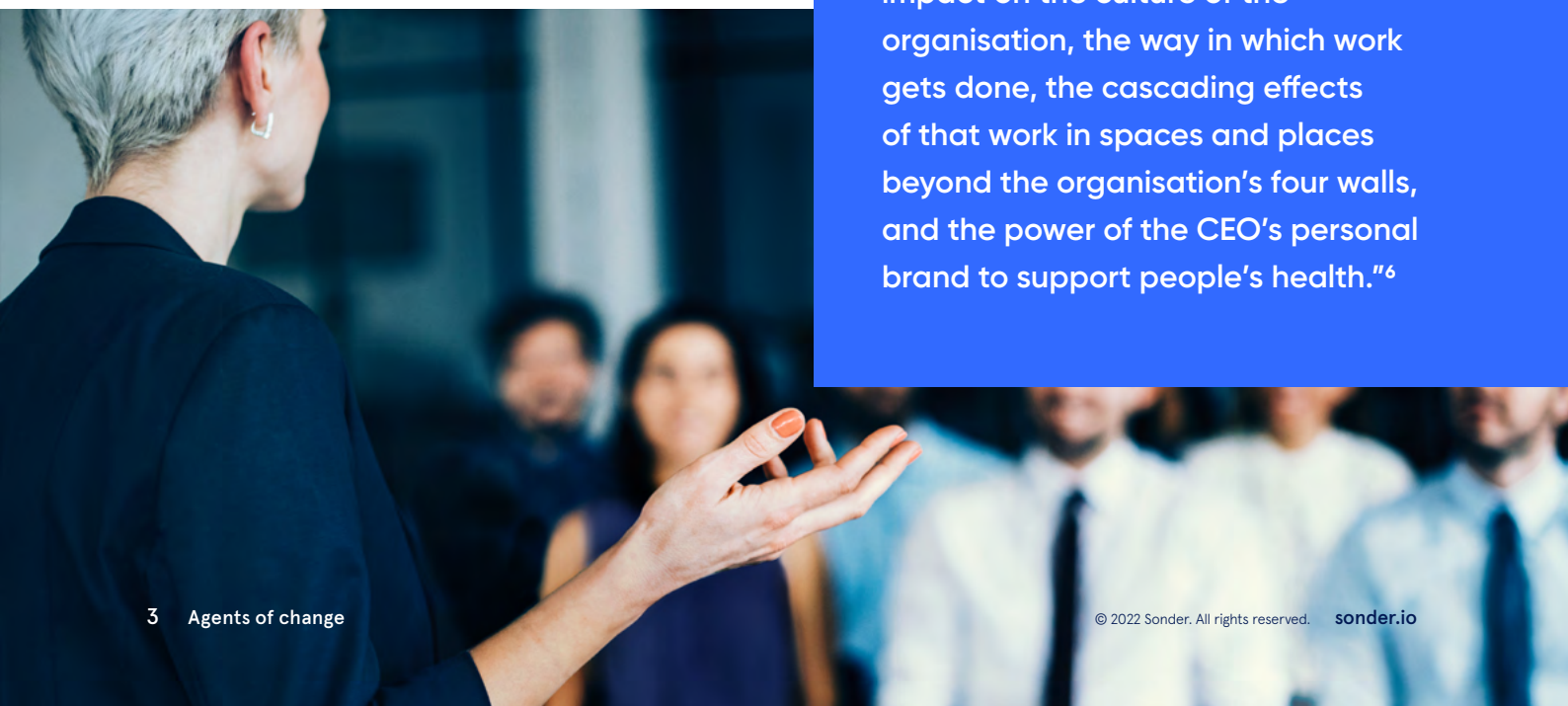
5 roles of CEOs and leaders who are reshaping organisational wellbeing

Health-savvy CEOs and leaders who are reshaping organisational wellbeing are agents of change who pioneer difficult conversations about wellbeing with their teams, peers and community - to provoke responses that demand greater collective tempo.

They:

Embrace, not delegate, their responsibility for wellbeing;

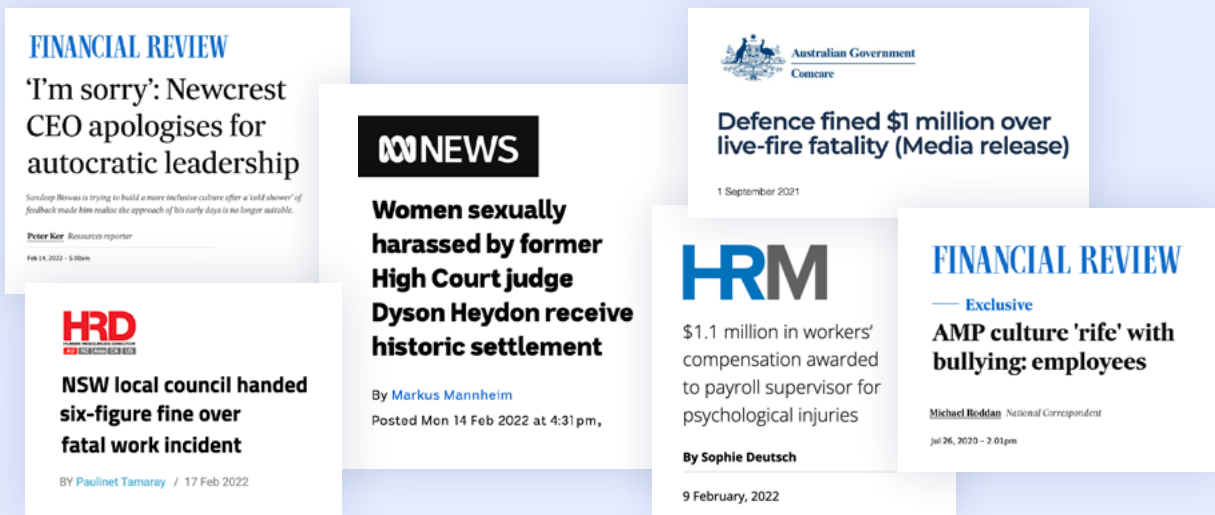**Investigate** truths, not believe wellbeing myths;

Challenge the status quo and break existing conventions;

Integrate wellbeing into their organisational practices; and

Advocate for social change.

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They don't:

· Need a public apology for their "autocratic" and "destructive" leadership;[7]

· Tolerate workplace stress to the tune of $1.1 million in compensation bills;[8]

· Overlook "a culture rife with bullying and intimidation";[9]

· Make headlines with a "historic settlement" for sexual harassment;[10] or

· Tragically lose team members, and get fined for "foreseeable" safety risks.[11]

FINANCIAL REVIEW
'I'm sorry': Newcrest CEO apologises for autocratic leadership
Sandeep Biswas is trying to build a more inclusive culture after a 'cold shower' of feedback made him realise the approach of his early days is no longer suitable.

Peter Ker *Resources reporter*
Feb 14, 2022 - 5.00am

HRD
NSW local council handed six-figure fine over fatal work incident
BY Paulinet Tamaray / 17 Feb 2022

ABC NEWS
Women sexually harassed by former High Court judge Dyson Heydon receive historic settlement
By Markus Mannheim
Posted Mon 14 Feb 2022 at 4:31pm,

Australian Government — Comcare
Defence fined $1 million over live-fire fatality (Media release)
1 September 2021

HRM
$1.1 million in workers' compensation awarded to payroll supervisor for psychological injuries
By Sophie Deutsch
9 February, 2022

FINANCIAL REVIEW
— Exclusive
AMP culture 'rife' with bullying: employees
Michael Roddan *National Correspondent*
Jul 26, 2020 - 2.01pm

Agents of change understand the evolutionary shift from 'wellbeing as a benefit' to wellbeing as part of "The Healthy Organisation Maturity Model" articulated by Josh Bersin, where level one is employee safety, level two is employee wellbeing, level three is "healthy work", and level four is a healthy organisation – where a strategic, holistic view of wellbeing is embedded in the culture, thanks to active leadership support.[12]

To achieve this, agents of change for organisational wellbeing fulfil five pivotal roles: embracer; investigator; challenger; integrator; and advocator.

7 The Australian Financial Review   8 HRM   9 The Australian Financial Review   10 Australian Broadcasting Commission   11 Human Resources Director, Comcare   12 Josh Bersin

ROLE 1

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Embracer

An agent of change for organisational wellbeing embraces, not delegates, their responsibility for wellbeing. They "stay personally close to the latest science, data, and information, creating for themselves a human dashboard of sorts and listening for actionable insight. At this time of prolonged crisis, too much is at stake to outsource crucial decisions, or to delegate being informed and aware," said Abrams, Firth, Lu, and Phelps from Deloitte.[13]

They feel the gravity of the "direct link between productivity levels and the general health and wellbeing of the workforce"[14] and become a voracious learner in this space.

With their team, they study best practices (such as ISO 45003) and deep-dive into current organisational initiatives, systems and support offerings to:

- **Improve their wellbeing practices and processes:**

  - Step 1: Define what wellbeing means for their organisation;

  - Step 2: Determine wellbeing parameters, measurable attributes and indicators;

  - Step 3: Establish a baseline and lead a gap analysis;

  - Step 4: Improve how their organisation measures wellbeing;

  - Step 5: Demonstrate progress and learnings;

  - Step 6: Benchmark externally; and

  - Step 7: Continuously review and improve;

- **Magnify the positive impact for their people;**

- **Enhance their brand's reputation as a wellbeing trailblazer; and**

- **Inspire wellbeing advancements in the broader community.**

13 Deloitte   14 International Labour Organization

Agents of change earnestly embrace, not 'read and forget', employee wellbeing statistics. They understand the onus for action starts with them, so they don't shy away from hard-hitting statistics about workplace aggression, bullying and harassment, suicide, depression, domestic and family violence, absenteeism, and employee expectations.

Instead, their concern for the long-term health and resilience of their organisation drives them to rally key players and question:

- Why are 50 per cent of employees subject to **bullying or harassment**?

- How can we better help the 26 per cent of employees who have considered **suicide**?

- Why are 35 per cent of employees experiencing **workplace aggression** from our managers?

- What more can we do to protect and support the 23 per cent who have experienced **domestic and family violence**?

- How can we improve our culture so 42 per cent of employees don't need to take time off due to concerns about their **mental wellbeing**?

50%
OF EMPLOYEES

currently feel or have felt
**bullied or harassed
at work**

35%
OF EMPLOYEES

have experienced
workplace aggression
from managers

42%
OF EMPLOYEES

of employees have taken time
off work in the last 12 months
due to concerns about
their mental wellbeing

Source: October 2021 McGregor Tan survey (commissioned by Sonder) of 1,025 employees in Australia working a minimum of 20 hours per week.

Industries: Government and social services (28%), retail and wholesale trade (22%), banking and financial services (22%), transportation and distribution (9%), utilities (5%), professional services (4%), insurance (4%), property and real estate (4%), and media (2%).

ROLE 2

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Investigator

An agent of change for wellbeing is an investigator of truth, not a believer of myths. They look beyond media hype, vendor sales talk, and internal rationale defending 'the way it's always done'.

They impress upon their teams the importance of evidence and rigour around all wellbeing business decisions and are rewarded with a culture of better-informed business cases, greater confidence in budget allocations, and reduced organisational risk.

Wellbeing myth	What the evidence says
Employee assistance programs (EAPs) are enough	Sometimes only five per cent[15] of employees use these programs because their use is not built into the culture, the solutions are not the right fit and/or employees have had poor past experiences (due to quality concerns, privacy and/or delays in care).[16]
Paid time off (PTO) cures burnout	PTO can set the tone for a more balanced and healthier workplace, but it is a band-aid for burnout, not a cure. Burnout is a multifaceted, multidimensional issue that can rarely be solved with short bursts of time off work - employer-funded or otherwise.[17]
Digital-only is the answer	Self-help apps can provide valuable initial guidance, but they should complement, not substitute, professional health care and robust clinical governance.[18] They should enhance a more holistic employee wellbeing strategy, not be the strategy.
Wellbeing cannot be measured	There is widespread acceptance that wellbeing can be measured, albeit a lack of consensus on a common measurement standard.[19] There have been at least 30 formal measures of wellbeing developed over the past 50 years.[20]
Employees need psychological debriefing after traumatic events	Psychological debriefing may do more harm than good and most employees should not need direct psychological support in the first instance. Psychological debriefing "is ineffective and has adverse long-term effects".[21]
Perks keep people engaged	Perks can deliver bursts of happiness, but they don't keep people engaged.[22] Long hours, ever-changing roles, ill-trained managers and bullying colleagues can quickly erase any memory of their free organic sandwich and nap in the NASA pod at noon.

15 IBISWorld   16 TNS Social Research (with Beyond Blue), Internal Medicine Journal, British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, Sonder-PwC Australia   17 Yonsei Medical Journal, International Review of Management and Marketing, The Urban Review, Infinite Potential   18 JMIR Mental Health, NPJ Digital Medicine, Journal of Affective Disorders, Evidence-Based Mental Health   19 International Journal of Wellbeing, International Journal of Business and Social Science, International Journal of Nursing Studies   20 University of Technology Sydney, Wellbeing: A Complete Reference Guide, Work and Wellbeing (Vol. 3, pp.9-34)   21 British Journal of Psychiatry, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, World Health Organization International   22 Journal of Business and Management, Personality and Individual Differences, The New York Times

ROLE 3

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Challenger

An agent of change for organisational wellbeing is a challenger who refuses to accept the status quo. They have "ambitions bigger than [their] conventional resources and [are] prepared to do something bold, usually against the existing conventions or codes of [their] category, to break through," according to The Challenger Project, published by global strategic consultancy, eatbigfish.[23]

They are an early adopter who always looks for more innovative, effective and scalable ways to support their people. Their overarching mission is to seek out or build the most compelling wellbeing support framework possible.

They are not afraid to trial a four-day work week, abandon their office attendance policy, or reinvent their employee assistance program (EAP) when as little as five per cent of employees use EAPs.[24]

23 The Challenger Project   24 IBISWorld

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ROLE 4

Integrator

An agent of change for wellbeing doesn't pass the baton to their People and Culture team and then consider the job done. They "put health directly on the CEO agenda - where it belongs".[25]

They integrate wellbeing into their decision-making processes, embed accountability across all parts of their organisation, empower the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, and give their wellbeing teams the profile, training and budget they need to make a genuine difference.

Externally, they promote the alignment of wellbeing goals across supply chain partners and provide mentoring to community stakeholders at an earlier stage of their wellbeing journey - to integrate wellbeing insights across the entire ecosystem in which they operate.

25 Deloitte

ROLE 5

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Advocator

An agent of change for organisational wellbeing makes it their mission to 'walk the talk' and be vocal about embedding wellbeing into organisational culture and financial decisions.

They know, as former U.S. president Barack Obama famously said, "change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek".[26]

Internally, they assume an ongoing advocacy role to keep employee wellbeing at the forefront of conversations across their organisation.

Externally, they champion the importance of collective wellbeing and the dismantlement of health care barriers across the community.

80%

of employees said that **seeing or hearing leaders talk about their own mental wellbeing** makes them feel that they can also talk about their mental wellbeing in the workplace.^

The authentic leader also commits to ongoing openness and vulnerability on their wellbeing journey. They recognise the 'power of permission' this bestows upon their team members, and appreciate that this "goes a long way toward reducing the stigma and setting the tone for transparency".[27]

26 The New York Times   27 Harvard Business Review   ^ Source: October 2021 McGregor Tan survey (commissioned by Sonder)

Case studies

Case study 1 ACCOR

Accor is a world-leading hospitality group employing 260,000 team members, represented by more than 40 hotel brands and 30 residential brands worldwide.[28]

Prior to the pandemic, Accor committed to Heartist® - a unique cultural transformation program that combined a mastery of welcoming, connecting, and serving others, with a company focus on team member wellbeing, diversity, and inclusion.

In April 2020, when the pandemic closed more than two-thirds of Accor-branded hotels, Accor's board members and CEO, Sébastien Bazin, stepped up. Accor's leaders demonstrated what it meant to be agents of change and **'walk the talk'** in a time of crisis, by allocating 25 per cent of Accor's €280m planned dividend to the creation of the ALL Heartist Fund - a €70m fund devoted to helping Group employees and individual partners affected by the COVID-19 crisis.[29]

" We had about 21,000 employees across the Pacific, the area I'm responsible for, and by April that was reduced to about 7,000. And, if you imagine the timeframe we're talking [about], only a four week period… When that happened, we really had to face, "How are we going to look after people and care for them through this?", because, even though we did let casuals go, and people on contracts, we wanted to keep looking after them."

The ALL Heartist Fund meant that Accor was able to give out "grants of well over five million Australian dollars to our team in Fiji, Hawaii, French Polynesia, New Zealand, and Australia, who [were] in severe hardship. That in itself speaks to the Heartist® culture - of who we are, and what we're about. That was a real gift."[30]

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*Sarah Derry,
CEO, Pacific*

28 Accor   29 Accor   30 Sonder

Case study 2   ▲ **ATLASSIAN**

Atlassian is a technology success story. The company employs 7,000 team members, serves 200,000 customers, and inspires 4 million members in their Atlassian community.[31]

Under the **"Team Anywhere"** policy that Atlassian introduced in April 2021, the company's team members can work from anywhere they have the legal right to work, where the time zone they are in is broadly aligned with their team, and where Atlassian has a corporate entity. To facilitate inclusion, if one person in a meeting is on Zoom, everyone must be on Zoom individually.

"It's pretty bold what we're trying to do, there'll be some missteps along the way, no doubt, but we really want to do that because we have to bake it into our product, in our practices, into the way that work happens," said Atlassian co-CEO, Scott Farquhar.[32]

Farquhar and his co-founder Mike Cannon-Brookes personify the role of challenger. They lead by example and are regularly vocal about the responsibility of leaders to push the boundaries and improve people's lives at work and beyond. Recent examples include Atlassian's commitment to net-zero emissions by 2040[33] and Cannon-Brookes' commitment (with his wife Annie) to AU$1.5 billion towards climate initiatives.[34]

31 Atlassian   32 The Sydney Morning Herald   33 Fortune   34 The Australian Financial Review

Case study 3   Woolworths Group

Woolworths is a household name in Australian retail. The Group employs more than 180,000 team members, across approximately 1,000 stores, who serve around 29 million customers every week.[35]

In November 2016, Woolworths CEO, Brad Banducci, bravely shared with the company the tragic news that two Woolworths team members had died by suicide. "Brad's openness about our own team members being here one day and gone the next was both confronting and cathartic. People didn't openly talk about suicide let alone large corporations like Woolworths," reflected Paul Graham - then Managing Director of Woolworths' supply chain division, Primary Connect.

Counselling sessions were offered through the company's EAP, but Banducci wanted to do more. So, the following year, Woolworths launched a program called, "I Am Here", to provide general mental health awareness and training. By mid 2021, 38,000 team members had completed the training and were "more empowered than they were the day before to save a life", noted Graham.

In 2020, determined to make an even more meaningful impact on employee wellbeing, Banducci and his team started reimagining the company's **employee assistance** offering. This led Woolworths to partner with Sonder to provide on-demand, safety, medical, and mental wellbeing support – available 24/7, at the touch of a button. "In our DCs the app is often referred to as 'an angel in your pocket'," explained Graham. "If a team member is in an emergency situation, simply looking for information or is keen to chat with a real person, Sonder's on-demand network of nurses, emergency responders and mental health first aiders provides them with a private and confidential response."

Banducci, thanks to the support of his team, has proven that he is an agent of change who is reshaping organisational wellbeing. "Four and a half years on, Brad and Woolworths Group have not stopped talking about mental health. In fact, the conversation has only grown," said Graham.[36]

35 Woolworths Group (Media Relations Team)   36 Prime Mover

Summary

Today's CEOs and senior leaders have become personal agents of social change and true impact players across their ever-expanding ecosystems of influence. This is different from the late 1990s and early 2000s trend of "corporations as social change agents"[37] and reflects the growing expectation that leaders individually speak up for organisational and societal change.

The newly-amplified platform of CEOs and leaders has been spurred on by structural shifts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic - including its "collective [community] trauma"[38] and transformation of the workplace. A new era of health uncertainty and geopolitical instability has meant people are increasingly looking to their leaders to assume a stronger voice as well as a more active role in instigating meaningful change.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has... shown the possibilities for people to come together in collective mobilisation, mutual aid, and solidarity, and the tangible linking together of mental health, illness, and suffering with the aims and paths of broader social progress and justice," said health influencers Belkin, Appleton and Langlois.[39]

To do this, CEOs and leaders who are reshaping organisational wellbeing have become agents of change. They are: embracing their responsibility for wellbeing; investigating truths not believing wellbeing myths; challenging the status quo and breaking existing conventions; integrating wellbeing into their organisational practices; and advocating for advancements in wellbeing both inside their organisations and on the broader stage.

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37 Academy of Management   38 The Lancet Planet Health   39 The Lancet Planet Health

About us

Sonder is a leading wellbeing and safety company that services hundreds of thousands of members, principally across Australia and New Zealand.

Accredited by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS), Sonder's solution is a technology-driven platform supported by 24/7 safety, medical, and mental health experts.

Sonder's qualified team help with a very broad spectrum of member concerns, from stress and anxiety to depression and suicide prevention, from acute medical issues to family breakdowns and domestic violence, from workplace bullying to frontline manager support, and more.

This is backed up by a physical responder network that can be onsite within 20 minutes for time-sensitive scenarios such as workplace aggression and injuries, domestic violence and accidents, suicide ideations, welfare checks, hospital escorts, car breakdowns, and more.

At the company's heart lies Sonder's wellbeing model (a human-centric methodology that triages all aspects of a person's wellbeing for enhanced long-term outcomes), as well as a capability to deliver unique and timely data insights which drive meaningful business decisions.

FINANCIAL REVIEW BOSS
MOST INNOVATIVE COMPANIES
WINNER 2021

The right mix of tech and human support

Sonder app
Easy access to wellbeing and safety features, a self-help library, location-based alerts, and direct contact with our expert team.

Human support
Our in-house medical team and in-person responders provide emergency support, health advice, medical triage, and counselling.

Data and insights
Anonymised, aggregated data produces valuable reports and dashboards for people-related risks, productivity impacts, and cost savings.

Organisational wellbeing & safety.
Reimagined.

Let's connect

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Sonder