
FROM BUILT TO RUN BY IT

An operations foundation and governance model for electricity distribution businesses operating digital field platforms

An FY26 case briefing drawn from the PowerNet deployment

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ABOUT

About this briefing

Risk Mentor works with electricity distribution businesses (EDBs) and other physical-operations organisations to embed critical-risk management into the way work is actually planned and executed. Across the sector, a growing number of organisations are investing in digital field platforms and governance reporting. The harder question is no longer whether to build them. It is how to run the business by them.

This briefing sets out a transferable model for doing exactly that, illustrated with PowerNet's FY26 experience. It is authored by Risk Mentor and shared with PowerNet's agreement. The FY26 operating figures it contains are real and are used with PowerNet's permission. It is written for senior leaders across all New Zealand electricity distribution businesses, offered for sector benefit, and is not a representation of any other organisation's deployment.

CONTEXT

From building it to running by it

Building the digital architecture is demanding, sustained work: mapping legislation, digitising operating requirements, co-designing workflows with field staff that embed controls at the point of work. It is not a small undertaking, and the organisations that complete it have earned something real. The value add begins by asking these questions:

- What information and support do frontline staff need to make reliably good decisions?
- How do we detect and correct performance drift in task planning and execution, before something goes wrong?

Answering these questions well rebalances risk and control management from the task level up. It challenges how an organisation delivers its standards, procedures, manuals, guidelines and plans to the frontline, and it embeds governance into task planning and execution rather than adding it on top.

The payoff compounds from the go-live when field teams start using digital workflows that deliver point-of-work decision support for staff, real-time confirmation that controls for critical risks are in place, and governance-grade records generated in the ordinary course of doing the work. Once the data starts flowing, recursive improvement begins, and it is driven by the people best placed to drive it: the field users who are exposed to the critical risks and accountable for applying most of the controls. Two effects matter most.

More consistent and reliable outcomes. What is required is confirmed at the point of decision, and the controls for critical risks are understood and applied. Problems are framed the way they present to field staff: when a particular task hazard is present, apply these known controls.

A business ready for new and different work. This readiness rests on applying an architecture to sort, connect and deliver information to the frontline. At PowerNet, 52 standards, 171 procedures, 24 manuals and guidelines, 16 plans and over 1,500 external sector requirements have direct or indirect links to the Field Portal workflows, drawing risk and control processes, business systems, regulatory expectations and sector good practice into one place. That mapping also confirms agreed points of truth across the business

systems the work depends on, reconciling sources such as training records, work-order use, fleet details, contractor prequalification and the links between planning and operations, so the workflows draw on one trusted picture rather than several competing ones. Field staff using co-developed digital workflows then generate the contextual, trustworthy, structured data used to run the business, and acting on that data, including the early detection of performance drift, improves operational and safety outcomes.

This is the foundation, not the finish line. The same data and architecture can be leveraged as depth of use grows at every level of the organisation, from the line mechanic completing a workflow to the director reviewing the quarterly critical-risk picture. What rewards continued leadership effort is defining what good operational performance looks like, setting the expectations the data can be measured against, and building the habit of using the dashboards rather than waiting for a summary to be prepared. This briefing is about leveraging that foundation, and how the PowerNet experience lights the path.

FOUNDATION

One data set, five levels of governance

The model rests on three platform components: a Field Portal, a Configured Digital System Model, and Governance and Performance Reporting (GPR) platforms. At PowerNet these have been in production since 2023. Together they generate one primary data set that supports five distinct levels of governance:

1. **Level 1: embedded in the workflow.** Governance lives inside the workflows field staff use every day. Each workflow links back to the relevant performance requirements (standards, procedures, manuals, guidelines and plans), connecting work-as-documented to work-as-done at the point of work.
2. **Level 2: superuser monitoring.** Experienced superusers with deep field and platform knowledge monitor the data field users generate, coach on workflow application where needed, and work with Risk Mentor to refine and add workflows as operational needs change.
3. **Level 3: supervisors.** Supervisors combine personal field verifications with routine use of GPR dashboards, reports and access to field-crew operational logs.
4. **Level 4: managers and senior leaders.** Managers and the senior leadership team combine field verifications with reviews through the GPR platform, managing by exception across work they do not personally observe.
5. **Level 5: the board.** The board's quarterly critical-risk framework analysis and reporting draws on the same underlying data.

INSIGHT

The same primary data supports five levels of governance, from the technician completing a workflow to the director reviewing the quarterly critical-risk picture. The architecture delivers value from the moment it is in use; the opportunity is to leverage it further through depth of use at each level.

DATA CONFIDENCE

Why the data can be trusted

A governance model is only as good as the trustworthiness of the data beneath it. This is where the design intent matters, and where a distinction worth understanding sits.

The initial use case for the field workflows was understanding when critical risks were present and confirming that their controls were in place. That remains a core output. But the field build itself is designed primarily around something else: supporting staff through task planning and execution, based on their own input into how the workflows capture the work that they do.

That distinction is the source of data confidence. The governance and assurance value of the data is largely a by-product of tools that field teams genuinely use because the tools help them do their job and were shaped by them. The data is therefore structured, contextual and reliable because it is generated in the ordinary course of doing the work, not assembled afterwards to satisfy a compliance requirement, nor reconstructed from aggregated reports, paper or digital checklists, or notes in a manager's notebook.

Each critical-risk check is not a simple tick. It sits inside a structured workflow that captures hazard details, operating conditions, competencies, PPE in use, equipment status, site photographs, a site ranking, comments and any corrective actions, and is analysable by date, user, work order, work authority number, fault identifier, location, depot, network and vehicle. That depth is what makes the data defensible as evidence of due diligence — evidence not that controls were documented, but that they were confirmed in place at the point of work — and useful as an operational picture.



A field tablet on site, mid-task, with the workflow open: hazard review, PPE confirmation and risk matrix at the point of decision.

INSIGHT

Confidence in the data comes from how it is generated: as a by-product of task-planning and execution tools that field staff helped

design and use to do the work, not as a compliance overlay on top of it.

EVIDENCE

FY26 in numbers

The scale of the data generated at PowerNet in FY26 illustrates what a mature deployment produces. These are actual FY26 figures, used with permission:

- **11,685** task planning and execution workflows completed by field staff across all operational activities.
- **71,368** fields prompting a review of whether critical risks are present and the status of their controls, an average of 196 checks per day.
- **7,544** daily and weekly pre-use checks for vehicles, cranes, MEWPs and trailers, supported by a further 714 additional pre-start comments.

Leadership presence in the field is equally measurable. PowerNet completed 388 comprehensive field verifications in FY26, complemented by 221 additional observations. The distribution shows real, well-spread leadership effort rather than the work of one or two committed individuals:

FY26	Leadership field verifications by role
19	Director verifications
40	Senior Leadership Team verifications
72	Manager verifications
219	Supervisor verifications
38	Peer-on-peer verifications
388	Comprehensive field verifications in total

Each verification carries the same structural depth as the field workflows: site information and hazard identification, critical-risk sub-forms for isolation, minimum approach distances, working at heights and lifting where required, confirmation of field-staff competencies, site photographs and a site ranking.



Field verification, December 2025. Site rated Excellent; isolation, MADs, working at heights and lifting separately verified, with photographs at each.

THE SHARED CHALLENGE

The challenge every EDB meets next

In our experience across deployments, three things consistently mark the difference between an organisation that has built a capable platform and one that is leveraging it fully.

1. “What good looks like” has to be defined

The platforms present rich, structured data with drill-down review and analysis. Field acceptance is typically high, evidenced by completion volumes. What takes deliberate leadership effort is confirming performance expectations, for example field staff syncing cycles, workflow quality, and the cadence of supervisor and leader dashboard use. Completion visibility is a common early gap: without an explicit expectation, it is easy to see what was done and harder to see what was not. The data is rich; the benchmarks are what unlock it. Until leaders set them, the data cannot be fully leveraged for operational performance and safety improvement.

2. Cross-checks against operational expectations sharpen the data

Once leaders define their expectations, the existing data supports a range of cross-checks that turn good activity data into insights. A mature deployment can examine:

- Workflows generated by depot, crew and individuals, to establish an expected-use baseline.
- Depot housekeeping inspections against actual depot count, and vehicle pre-use checks against actual fleet numbers.
- Work-authority record alignment with line-work workflows.
- Workflow closing-comment analysis and action tracking, and review of vehicle pre-start comments.
- Frequency of supervisor sign-in to their dashboards, and the number of field verifications expected of supervisors, managers and senior leaders.

The data to perform these checks already exists. The step that adds value is for leaders to nominate which cross-checks matter most and to set the expected performance thresholds.

3. Supervisor dashboard engagement is the leverage point

Supervisors generated 219 of PowerNet's 388 field verifications in FY26, the largest share by some distance. They are already the engine of the field verification system, and their dashboards give them visibility across distributed crew work without needing to be present at every site. In our experience, constructive, consistent senior-leader questions about supervisor dashboard use (what they are finding, what actions they are taking, how processes can be improved) are the single most reliable way to lift engagement and, indirectly, the quality and quantity of completed workflows.

INSIGHT

The data a mature platform generates is rich. Defining expected supervisor performance, supported by senior-leader monitoring, is the next leverage point.

DEPTH OF USE

What depth of use looks like, by leadership role

The leadership roles below span the full governance model, from frontline employees at Level 1 to directors at Level 5, connected by the superuser monitoring at Level 2 described earlier. Before depth of use can be set for each leadership role, leaders need to define what good operational performance looks like and how those expectations map to the data behind the dashboards. The dashboards are built from the data being captured; without clear expectations, they cannot show where the gaps are. A simple cadence works well: weekly sign-in, a monthly standing agenda item, and a quarterly critical-risk deep-dive.

Directors

Director field verifications establish board-level field presence, and the quarterly critical-risk framework reviews provide analysis of control checks and interventions. The opportunity for directors is to extend board reporting to confirm that managers and senior leaders are using their dashboards, asking the right questions of the data, and keeping their performance expectations current. The director role is to confirm that the leadership team is actively engaged, not to interrogate every detail. For that reason, in our view, a director-level dashboard is generally not necessary; assurance is better served through board reporting.

Senior leadership team

Senior-leader field verifications anchor work-as-done personal presence. The most valuable related activity is to ask supervisors directly how they are using their dashboards, what they are finding and what actions they are taking. Formalising senior-leader use of the GPR platform (a weekly leadership review focused on the workflow types carrying the highest critical-risk densities, reported activity against expectation, and any low site ratings or comments needing action) turns the platform from a reporting tool into a decision tool. The same data also supports broader "what if?" questions about the design and application of standards and work processes.

Managers

Manager verifications are the deepest tier of leadership presence at the work face. The dashboard is the manager's tool for managing by exception across work they do not personally observe: a weekly review with clear action ownership for any flagged item, plus monthly trend reviews across their area of responsibility. Managers are the integration point between supervisor visibility and senior-leader confidence.

Supervisors: the leverage point

Three habits are worth encouraging: regular review of dashboards for crew workflow completions and anomalies; a weekly review of patterns across areas of accountability (for example, consistency of MAD checks across crews, consistency of pre-start vehicle comments, distribution of work-rating outcomes); and, where appropriate, peer-on-peer verification as a discipline that strengthens supervisor judgement by exposing it to peer review. This is what supervisor professionalism can look like in practice.

Frontline employees: the point of control

Frontline employees are where Level 1 governance lives, and treating the role as a leadership one is deliberate. Skills shortages, high turnover, the retirement of experienced staff, rising health and safety expectations and growing customer demands all raise the premium on frontline capability, and they put hard-won judgement at risk of walking out the door. The workflows answer this in two ways. They make professionalism visible: field staff self-monitor and record that each task is completed to standard, confirming as they work that the activity is planned and approved, that the people assigned are competent, and that hazards have been identified and controlled. And they capture that judgement as it is exercised, rather than relying on it being passed on informally. As individuals and work groups, staff also feed back what works and what should change, confirming, reviewing and improving the information and process support they need to make consistently good decisions. That feedback is the engine of the recursive improvement described earlier: the people exposed to the critical risks are the ones who make the system better at managing them.

DIRECTION

Where this is heading

Two development directions build directly on the same primary data that field activity already generates.

Drift reporting

Drift reporting identifies and questions gaps in critical-risk workflow steps. The use case is supporting field staff to manage critical risks through their own task planning and execution, with leader visibility a by-product. It is designed to nudge the field user, inform the supervisor, and escalate where no action is taken. In development at PowerNet, it aligns with the 13-critical-risk catalogue and with the section 25B prioritisation expectation in the proposed 2026 HSWA amendments.

Actionable insights and gap identification

Actionable insights turn the data the platform generates into the operational picture leaders need. The dependency is the one set out above: actionable insights require leaders to have defined what good looks like. Once that is specified, the dashboards and reports can show where the gap is and who needs to know.

Field-side work

The next field-form version is being optimised for phones, with an improved interface and data capture to support drift reporting. The current deployment is already dynamic and task-based, with unique reference generation, drop-down Trigger Action Response Plans, tool-tips by task step, and daily and weekly data harvests from training, work-order, contractor and vehicle systems. Low-connectivity functionality remains offline by default, with online access where coverage allows and a QR-code access to online documents already built.

A NOTE ON INTENT

Not league tables

The cross-checks and dashboards this model enables will always show variation between depots, crews and individuals. The purpose is not to produce league tables. It is to give leaders a clean picture of where the engagement habit has taken hold and where it needs support, and support is the operative word. Coaching, time, recognition and the removal of competing demands are the right responses to variation. Published rankings are not.

INSIGHT

The loop closes when leaders use the data the field is already generating. Setting clear expectations, and asking supervisors what they see, is how an EDB completes it.

ABOUT RISK MENTOR

Working with Risk Mentor

Risk Mentor New Zealand designs and deploys field, data and governance platforms that embed critical-risk management into operational work. The PowerNet deployment described here has been recognised with the 2022 EEA Workplace Safety Award and the 2023 Grand Business South Award, and featured in Risk Mentor's published case study in August 2024.

We would welcome a conversation with any EDB considering how to move from building a platform to running the business by one.

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