

# GOVERNANCE: A DRIVER FOR DEVELOPING AND GROWING ORGANISATIONS.

Gavin Dawson and Malcolm Macpherson

## INTRODUCTION

This case study reviews the Master of Professional Practice (MPP) experience of Gavin Dawson. Firstly, the case study describes the course structure that Dawson worked through with his academic mentor. Secondly, the MPP project background, aims, rationale, and deliverables will be discussed. Thirdly, the impacts of the MPP programme will be described. Finally, the opportunities for further graduate studies that Dawson has been able to undertake as a result of the MPP programme will be highlighted.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND, RATIONALE, AND DELIVERABLES

Prior to Dawson commencing the programme, he had 12 years experience in governance, policy, and administrative roles for the public, private, and not-for-profit (NFP) sectors in New Zealand, Australia, and China. The roles he undertook over this time varied from NFP national and regional level board directorships and trusteeships, central government governance advisory and contract management roles, and policy writing and co-ordination roles for New Zealand and multi-national companies.

Dawson also has a Bachelor of Applied Management in Strategic Management (Otago Polytechnic/Capable NZ); a certificate of Arts in Politics, Communications, and Linguistics (Massey University); and certificates in Project Management and International Human Resource Management (Auckland University of Technology).

Throughout his professional experience he developed a passion for governance systems, procedures, and secretariat. His passion for these areas developed overtime, as he experienced or observed issues or problems in governance that could have been avoided or mitigated through more pro-active and robust approaches.

Dawson felt that there was a need for a range of major improvements across the entire governance sector. Firstly, he observed a greater need for the accountability of the decisions or inaction that governance allow. Secondly, he observed major skill gaps among a number of NFP governance entities in the areas of strategic planning, policy, risk management, objective decision making, and a lack of knowledge of the legal expectations and obligations of governance entities. Thirdly, there was a lack of plain English and accessible resources for guidance and information. Finally, there was a need to focus on how those responsible for the governance of a system fail to govern, due to vital skill gaps, poor governance practice, and not taking responsibility for their decisions or actions.

The final approved research project was designed to encourage high levels of critical self- reflection on Dawson's governance knowledge and practice, undertake research, and develop his knowledge of the opportunities for improvement noted above, and to produce an accessible and relevant governance practice guidance manual titled Governance: A Driver for Developing and Growing Organisations.

Throughout his project Dawson collaborated with Te Roroa Learning Assistance and Development (TLAD), an adult education and community development charitable trust working in the Kaipara Region, New Zealand. TLAD operates and delivers its services on a Treaty of Waitangi partnership model that combined Maori cultural and worldviews, with mainstream western approaches in its business as usual activities and services.

He was the chairperson of the board of trustees for TLAD, and saw the MPP research project as an opportunity to advance a number of community development projects that involved governance training. TLAD provided a strong and engaged network of community education and development specialists, and Maori cultural, governance, and Treaty of Waitangi settlement advisers.

## IMPACTS OF THE MPP PROGRAMME

- At the completion of his project, Dawson identified a number of impacts that resulted in a change and/or development in his governance practice and knowledge base, including:
- More clarity on what governance broadly involves, the principles that underpin good governance, and internal and external attitudes toward governance
- Strong emphasis on the threats to the development and maintenance of good governance in New Zealand, and a sense of urgency to make sure that governance is taken seriously and good governance is promoted
- An enhanced commitment to good governance and a desire to see governance used to its full potential, with good governance practice linked to organisational development
- His enquiry challenged and developed his previously held attitudes to governance, and strengthened his skills, experience, and qualifications
- Confirmation that governance should be pro-active and engaging, and not just a rubber stamp

Successful completion of his MPP increased Dawson's standing as a governance and policy professional. The research confirmed his belief that the attitudes and expectations of younger generations do put pressure on existing governance systems and governors, but that these new attitudes and expectations need to be reviewed and a realistic view of them established from a system wide perspective. The project highlighted the need for governance entities to remind all stakeholders that they each have a part to play in their governance system. However, limits and processes do apply and these must be respected and followed. His previous way of thinking, that governance failure was purely the fault of governors, was challenged, and he wrote " ... the more I researched topics and incidents of a failure to govern, the more I realised that stakeholders must also shoulder some responsibility, as they provide the checks and balances, and accountability mechanisms."

## FURTHER GRADUATE STUDY OPPORTUNITIES

The MPP programme provides graduates with strong framework that they can continue to use in their professional and academic life. In November 2016, Dawson graduated with an MPP (with distinction) and believes that it has provided him with the necessary skills for further graduate research.

At the time of publication he was undertaking a Postgraduate Diploma of Law at the University of Waikato - Faculty of Law, where he is studying the law of charities, and writing a dissertation on charitable entities and a failure to govern. He intends to proceed through to a doctorate level on the research topic after completing this qualification.

**Gavin Dawson** has a career in government administration working for the Waikato District Council and Te Roroa Learning Assistance and Development.

**Malcolm McPherson** is a facilitator, academic mentor and assessor for CAPABLE NZ, specialising in business excellence. His PhD from the University of Canterbury was on the Environmental Geology of the Avon-Heathcote Estuary. Malcolm is a past Mayor of Central Otago District (three terms), a past member of the Southern District Health Board (four terms), and the Otago Polytechnic Council (2005-2013). He is an elected member (and past chair) of the Central Lakes Trust, a \$300m community funder in Central Otago and Queenstown-Lakes, and chairs several other community organisations, including the Alexandra Men's Shed and the board of Central Stories Museum and Art Gallery. He is chairman of Central Otago Premium Fruit Ltd – an export brand owner intermediating in direct-to-consumer social media marketing in China – and a director of Centennial Health (2013) Ltd. He is a US-qualified Baldrige examiner, and has coached and consulted internationally and written widely on organisational excellence.