

Lessons learned from one of New Zealand's most challenging civil engineering projects: rebuilding the earthquake damaged pipes, roads, bridges and retaining walls in the city of Christchurch 2011 - 2016.

Case Study – Creating a High Performance Environment, with Intent

Story: Creating an Environment that Delivers High Performance

Theme: People and Culture

A document that describes a case study on how SCIRT has been designed to create an environment that delivers high performance.

This document has been provided as an example of a tool that might be useful for other organisations undertaking complex disaster recovery or infrastructure rebuild programmes.

For more information about this document, visit www.scirtlearninglegacy.org.nz



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Creating a High Performance Environment, with Intent

We recently had the opportunity to talk with Duncan Gibb, CEO of the Stronger Christchurch Rebuild Team (SCIRT) during his last few weeks as CEO. We wanted to explore with him the underpinnings of what has made SCIRT such a special organisation.

So who are SCIRT?

For those not familiar with SCIRT, it is an alliance that was set up in the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquakes, to deliver the more than \$2 billion rebuild of damaged horizontal infrastructure across Christchurch. Bringing together local government and central government infrastructure owners, along with five major contracting firms, SCIRT is repairing and rebuilding earthquake damaged fresh-water, storm-water, waste-water and roading networks across Christchurch.

Forming a new organisation, from scratch, in the midst of a disaster affected city, and ramping up to deliver one of the largest infrastructure investments New Zealand has ever seen, is no mean feat. Our team in Resilient Organisations have been researching SCIRT over the past four years, and have been impressed overall by what we have found. It is an organisation that not only uses an innovative model for delivering projects and rewarding performance, but they also have embraced the challenges of working with affected communities and ensuring a collaborative ethos pervades all that they do.

The idea of alliancing in the construction industry is not new. Alliances are performance-incentivised contractual arrangements, usually involving an element of shared risk and reward.

What makes SCIRT stand out?

Their deliberate adoption of non-monetary incentives to ensure contract delivery.

Our researchers identified **five key aspects** that make the SCIRT alliance particularly distinctive:

- 1. Alignment of stakeholders to a noble purpose:** creating resilient infrastructure that gives people security and confidence in the future of Christchurch
- 2. Collaboration** that is driven by a set of six values: zero harm, community welfare, openness to learning, collective orientation, generosity & trust, and development of people
- 3. Action** based on six exemplar behaviours: striving for excellence, active listening, open & honest conversations, courage to speak up, working together and leading by example
- 4. Collective sharing** of both profit (gain) and loss (pain): resulting from project completion across all alliance partners
- 5. Proactive human resource practices**, developed through their Peak Performance Plan, to ensure: staff engagement & wellbeing, appropriate leadership styles, teamwork, collaboration, ongoing learning, improvement & innovation, and transfer of learning to parent organisations





In short, SCIRT is intended to be a high performance work system with a shared vision and strong values that emphasise collaboration, learning, and collective ownership.

So what helps translate these goals into a high performance work culture at SCIRT?

We went to SCIRT to tease that out. During our discussions with Duncan Gibb (CEO), Belinda de Zwart (HR manager) and Rod Cameron (Value Manager) at SCIRT, the thing that struck us was their very deliberate and intentional approach to shaping the environment within SCIRT to encourage high performance. Many of us have read various management books espousing the importance of a good workplace culture for delivering high performance. And yet, even though we know the importance of investing in developing the right organisational culture, when the pressure comes on, we let our focus slip onto other aspects. SCIRT is working in the ultimate high-pressure environment and yet, right from day one, the SCIRT leadership team have kept this as a top priority.

Delivering High Performance

Everything about the organisation is intentionally designed to create an environment that delivers high performance. The offices are designed especially to encourage teams to innovate and collaborate. When staff are seconded to SCIRT they are encouraged to put aside their 'home' organisation identity and start working in teams named the Red Team, Blue Team, Yellow Team etc, to break down traditional affiliations. The funding structure is designed so that the highest performing teams get to grow their share of the available work (encouraging competition), but all teams share the financial penalties if one team doesn't deliver (encouraging collaboration, where high performing teams support the lower performing teams to deliver).

Key performance indicators used to judge performance specifically include aspects related to how groups are contributing to a high performance environment – with metrics relating to levels of innovation, collaboration, and learning. Budget is committed to supporting a peak performance environment and teams are proactively coached to work together effectively. The organisation has a can-do culture, with staff encouraged to lead from where they are, taking initiative and being proactive.

Creating the Right Environment

We know creating the right environment is vital for an organisation to deliver success, and although SCIRT is not perfect, they have done an impressive job in a very difficult setting. The key lesson from SCIRT is that an organisation's culture doesn't just emerge – it is a function of the way the organisation is designed, and the values and behaviours that the organisation rewards.

Delivering high performance requires intentionality, investment and infrastructure. SCIRT illustrates this through its vision and values (intentionality), investment (training, coaching and mentoring) and infrastructure (peak performance plan).

Creating the right environment within your organisation needs to feature in every decision you make. In Duncan's words **"Why leave high performance to chance?"**



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