

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.

## Peak performance coaching at SCIRT

**Story:** Peak Performance Coaching at SCIRT

**Theme:** People and Culture

---

A document which outlines SCIRT's use of peak performance coaches.

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](http://www.scirtlearninglegacy.org.nz)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).

The authors, and Stronger Christchurch Infrastructure Rebuild Team (SCIRT) have taken all reasonable care to ensure the accuracy of the information supplied in this legacy document. However, neither the authors nor SCIRT, warrant that the information contained in this legacy document will be complete or free of errors or inaccuracies. By using this legacy document you accept all liability arising from your use of it. Neither the authors nor SCIRT, will be liable for any loss or damage suffered by any person arising from the use of this legacy document, however caused.

## Peak performance coaching at SCIRT

An integral enabler of SCIRT’s capability and culture was the use of peak performance coaches.



*Coaching in action: Peak performance coach Moira Mallon facilitates a brainstorming session.*

An integral enabler of SCIRT’s capability and culture was the use of peak performance coaches. Whereas SCIRT’s peak performance framework provided structure and focus, peak performance coaches worked with leaders to realise actions and outcomes relating to that framework. SCIRT deliberately used a number of coaches with different skill sets throughout the programme. Focus was also given to ensuring the coaches’ approaches were aligned and collaborative and that coaching was varied in approach. Outcomes were tracked and measured to ensure impact and a return on investment.

In August 2016, five of the peak performance coaches came together with SCIRT’s Human Resources (HR) and Peak Performance team to explore the learnings that could be passed on to others. Six key themes emerged:

1. Leaving a legacy of more New Zealand coaches who understand alliance coaching;
2. Varying coaching approaches to drive peak performance;
3. Collaboration and alignment of coaches – sharing for better outcomes for programmes and teams;

4. Common goal and framework – adaptable to different organisational contexts;
5. Developing our people – the coaches contribution;
6. Demonstrating the impact and the value of investment in peak performance coaching.

### 1. Leaving a legacy of more New Zealand coaches who understand alliance coaching

While the primary objective of the first SCIRT Peak Performance Plan was to deliver high performance and resilience in an environment of uncertainty, its secondary objective was to introduce New Zealand-based coaching to the civil construction industry. Prior to SCIRT, there were no New Zealand-based executive-level coaches in existence who had alliance experience. SCIRT’s aim was to change this situation.

Over five and a half years, SCIRT engaged more than eight coaching organisations in its peak performance activities. Key ones were (in alphabetical order): Alchimie, CareerBalance, Creative Spirit, Elevate Coaching, JMW, Leadership Lab, Moira Mallon Ltd, and Vital Futures. This is unusual in alliance coaching as usually one supplier provides all coaching throughout the project duration.

SCIRT facilitated an opportunity to coach coaches, with the aim of creating a larger pool. “It was the ultimate collaboration because coaches were coaching potential new competitors,” says SCIRT Human Resources and Peak Performance Manager Belinda de Zwart.

SCIRT valued the diversity of skills each coaching supplier offered and brought in different coaches simultaneously to draw on their strengths to support the programme in different ways.

When SCIRT started in 2011, the consulting group Alchimie was the sole provider of coaching (Alchimie also played a key role in the formation of SCIRT. See

separate story, Laying the Foundations). With SCIRT they interviewed and chose a group of five coaches who worked under the PPP framework and for the first 12 months, under the mentorship of Alchimie.

When the SCIRT board saw the impact coaches were having on outcomes within the Integrated Services Team (IST), it decided Delivery Teams could also benefit, so one coach was allocated to each team.

Coaches were extensively engaged in the Delivery Teams and in the IST through to the close of the programme in 2017. A number of the coaches moved on to support other alliance arrangements in New Zealand, thus realising the secondary objective of the PPP.

## 2. Varying coaching approaches to drive peak performance

SCIRT's peak performance coaching involved more than just one-on-one coaching. The Peak Performance team ensured there was a varied approach to coaching, thus maximising the value the SCIRT programme got from the coaching.

From October 2012 each of the five Delivery Teams had a dedicated peak performance coach for two days a month. Coaches also worked with teams and individuals in the IST.

Part of the coaches' role was to help shape leaders appreciation and understanding of what coaching was and what it could deliver. Leaders who gained a better appreciation and who worked in partnership with their team's coach realised deeper benefits and value for their team.

To assist with defining what peak performance was and all the ways it could be applied, the Peak Performance team (Coaches and the SCIRT HR team) collaborated to produce an information booklet (see attachment).

Peak performance coaching activities at SCIRT included one to one leadership coaching; emerging leaders group coaching; action learning groups; functional group collaboration facilitation; peak performance planning facilitation; design and delivery of bespoke workshops; performance conversation



*Collaboration underway: Peak performance coach Ruth Donde, right, facilitates a discussion between project managers.*

coaching; career coaching; transition support; board alignment and reviews; breakthrough performance support; and workshops on achieving individual peak performance.

The varied approach ensured that value was maximised and adaptability was "built in"; essential in a complex organisation where uncertainty and change were ever present. Varied approaches also provided opportunities to match preferences for learning which meant that the impact of coaching was broader and deeper. At the close out session, the coaches reflected that some teams grew in their use of coaches and others didn't. The key factor was the relationship between the coach and the leader, and the leader's openness to exploring what could be achieved through a varied approach.

## 3. Collaboration and alignment of coaches

Because the six teams (five Delivery Teams and the IST) were geographically, structurally, and commercially separated, coaches had to work in a consistent and aligned way. This meant not doing exactly the same thing, but having a synthesis that clearly met the objectives of the PPP: each team had the same goals but worked towards them in different ways, depending on the Delivery Team's culture, systems, leadership framework and specific needs.

Coaches supported their Delivery Team while also challenging it to collaborate and align with other Delivery Teams (See separate story, [One for All and](#)

All for One: The SCIRT Competitive-Collaborative Model). The coaches were champions who role modelled how to navigate the paradoxes of the SCIRT model. They had dual roles; supporting their individual team while working for a wider organisation.

One of the main ways coaches created an aligned approach was by meeting and reporting monthly. This gave the coached opportunity to share what they were working on. Meetings included the coaches, the Peak Performance Manager, the SCIRT Executive General Manager and two Delivery Managers.

At these meetings the coaches stayed connected with the bigger picture by receiving Executive General Manager updates and from the updates of their fellow coaches.

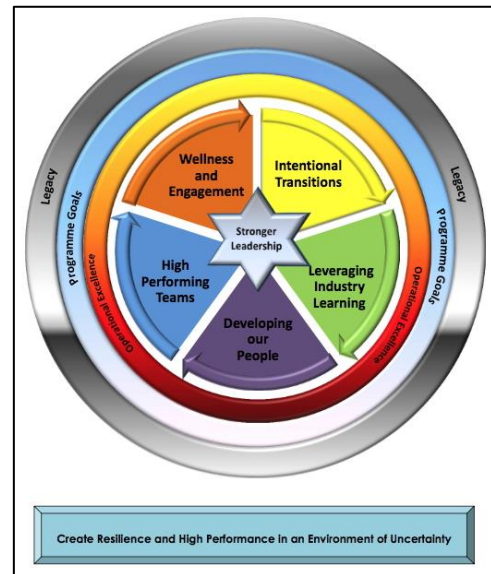
Through these meetings priorities for focus were discussed, coaches shared their varied approaches and opportunities for providing more value were explored.

Coaches often asked each other for advice and support in different areas. The Peak Performance Team found it useful to hear how other teams were faring, how engagement exercises were working and what approaches were working.

Annual planning sessions were held, at which coaches reflected on what they had achieved, what had gone well, and what could be improved upon, as well as identifying priorities for the next year. Leaders from the Management Team and the Delivery Leaders were included in these planning sessions to make sure the plan for the year was linked to the needs of the organisation.

When reviewing their learnings in August 2016, the coaches said that by sharing how and what they were doing through the reports and meetings, they were helping other coaches to expand their approaches. They were not working in isolation, and could better connect their teams to priorities as they were made aware of them - all of which resulted in accelerating alignment outcomes.

In the last PPP planning session for the final year of coaching for the programme (July 2015 – June 2016),



*SCIRT's peak performance framework.*

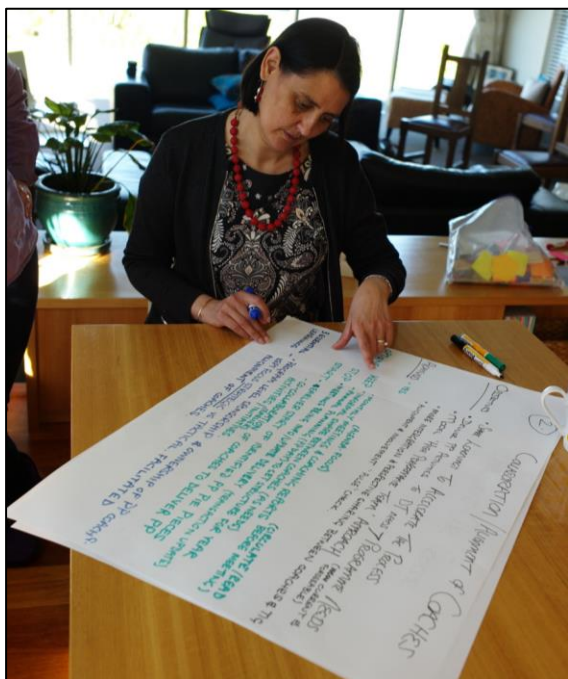
each coach was nominated as a 'champion' of a piece of the peak performance framework. Their roles were extended beyond supporting their respective Delivery Teams to also taking a SCIRT wide approach to developing initiatives for their champion area, which were generally matched to their coaching passions and strengths. This proved to be a sound strategy and upon reflection, all would have benefited had this approach been undertaken earlier in the programme.

#### 4. Common Goal and Framework

A fourth learning that the peak performance coaches wanted to share was that it was very useful to have an overarching common peak performance framework and goal to align to.

Each of the six teams (Delivery Teams and the IST) had their own culture and people performance system. Trying to make each organisation the same wouldn't work, and it didn't make sense to have the peak performance framework apply to all teams. The challenge was to create a common and aligned framework (ideally one that was measurable), but to make it flexible so it could be modified for each team to match its own teams, systems, and culture.

The main objectives were to create a leadership mindset and capability by intentionally building a peak



*All covered: Peak performance coach Tia Chakravarty captures some of the lessons from SCIRT.*

performance plan and to ‘super-charge’ existing home organisation people processes by integrating them into that framework. In this way, each team was creating an environment where high performance and resilience would happen, thus achieving the goal.

By the time the SCIRT coaches formally finished with their teams (June 2016) there had been variable success in each team having a ‘customised’ peak performance framework. Some teams had mature models that were operating well, others were ‘late starters’ and some had started early but the emphasis had waned with the changes in leadership. A key variable was leadership understanding and ownership.

The overarching framework proved to act as a useful “compass” for the coaches. It was reviewed, refined and adapted to the changing contexts and evolution of the programme timeline.

### 5. Developing our people – the coaches contribution

“Developing our People” was a SCIRT Mindset and Value from day one. That mindset was endorsed by the SCIRT Board and embedded into the SCIRT way of being, through activities such as quarterly reviews - “My

Growth Journey”; lunch and learns and supported training funding.

The SCIRT coaches’ contribution to providing opportunities for people to develop was significant. Peak performance coaching provided everyone in SCIRT with development opportunities.

The best way to sum up the coaches contribution is through the “tally sheet” of their numbers. Please see the attached document to see the output from the coaches – all achieved in an average of two coaching days per coach, per month.

### 6. Demonstrating the impact and value of coaching

Conscious focus was given to providing data which quantified and qualified the outcomes and benefits of peak performance coaching. The Peak Performance team acknowledged coaching was an investment and therefore the value and return needed to be demonstrated. The team held themselves accountable, providing an annual board paper demonstrating the value of peak performance coaching and seeking the boards’ endorsement to reinvest in coaching for the following year.

The impact of coaching was reported via monthly reports on activities and outcomes on a standard template; coaching completion reports for one on one coaching which were compiled into SCIRT-wide completion summary reports; quarterly coaching reports providing a collective view of activities across teams; two extensive external reviews of the PPP and its impact (one in 2012, the other in 2014); and workshop feedback mechanisms (tick sheets and survey monkey).

In their August 2016 review of learnings, the coaches all mentioned that they felt quantifying their value was extremely important. It was helpful to have value reported at multiple levels and to multiple groups within the organisation, particularly at governance level.

Having a “champion” voice in the leadership team enabled this. The team acknowledged that the level of impact could have been measured more deeply and linked to business outcomes (for example SCIRT Key



Peak performance coaches Moira Mallon, left, and Kathryn Jackson reflecting on their SCIRT experience.

Result Area impacts).

### Conclusion

With a focus on demonstrating value and impact, the peak performance coaches collaborated at SCIRT to deliver better outcomes than if only one organisation had been engaged. Through an aligned approach, sharing ways of coaching and with a continual focus on responding to the shifting challenges, the peak performance coaches had a significant impact on both the individuals within and the organisation-wide development of SCIRT. New Zealand has been left with a legacy of a number of coaches who are now intimately aware of alliancing, especially in a disaster recovery context.

### Lessons Learnt

- Obtain programme-level sponsorship and ownership of peak performance coaching, driven by the leadership team and endorsed by the board;
- Facilitate the alignment of coaches, and induct coaches into dual-role challenges (working for a wider organisation as well as an individual team);
- When selecting coaches, look for collaborative mind-sets, complementary skills and qualified credentials, as well as experience;
- Create structures for reporting and team building. Ensure time is allowed for sharing and learning

from each other;

- Have an agreed framework and goal (e.g. high performance and resilience in an environment of uncertainty) which is responsive to the organisation’s situational context;
- Spend quality time upfront engaging leaders in “what’s in it for them” when it comes to peak performance planning. Re-engage with each new leader;
- Report back regularly via operational meetings to “normalise” peak performance activity as part of the way of doing business (e.g. through operational leadership joint meetings);
- Use coaches across the programme teams earlier in the programme (e.g. champions of different peak performance aspects);
- Provide coaching for all teams from the beginning of the programme;
- Measure against business objectives from the start;
- Link coaching to big outcomes and anecdotal evidence;
- Be ambitious! You’ll be amazed and what you can collaboratively deliver, even in a limited time.



Peak performance coach Leah Kininmonth with a summary of her time working with SCIRT.