

I am hungry for a vision for our country

Think Piece 34: April 2020



'While our immediate future might seem confined to the comforts of our own living rooms, you might like to spend some time looking forward.'
Illustration by Becky Jenkins – McGuinness Institute.

Phil Royal

Phil Royal MBA is a former managing partner and board member of PwC in New Zealand. Phil led a strategy and innovation group within PwC, as well as the reinvention of the PwC consulting division after the 2008 global financial crisis until 2018.

He has also led a number of major transformations in New Zealand and offshore, including the New Zealand wholesale electricity market reforms and a global financial services knowledge management transformation across eight countries. He currently sits on a number of boards in the technology services, health, and creative industries.

The time has come New Zealand. Let's embrace our future and reposition our place in the world, led by a set of well thought out principles, not politics or vested interests.

It is April 2020 and a different world is dawning. Rod Drury's think piece 'What we do now will shape New Zealand's future', is well worth a read, and prompted me to consider why in New Zealand we struggle to have the important conversations as a country around strategy and direction.¹

A new generation of successful New Zealanders such as Drury, Adrian Orr, Donna Purdue, Sam Morgan and others have stepped up and shared their dreams about where our country could head. They sense that for the first time in a couple of generations it is their opportunity to examine, select or least influence, our future path.

A myriad of fresh new ideas are emerging from this generation of entrepreneurs and some forward-thinking public sector leaders, about how they can facilitate kick starting the economy and our societies' response to 'the new normal'.

The principal challenge lies in the fact that we currently have no way of embracing or organising these ideas under any framework in order to progress them. This paper suggests a potential approach to considering a principles-based framework for repositioning ourselves globally and using these principles to guide us, in assessing the most appropriate set of initiatives and ideas to progress.

As an example, imagine if we as New Zealanders agreed on a set of principles like these:

- People-centred
- Trusted, open and caring
- Leading environmentally

- Growing food for the world
- Resilient and independent
- Technologically advanced
- Forward thinking, creative and curious

Imagine this framework shaping our thinking about and debating and assessing the new initiatives being currently promoted and including driving our capital investment programme over the next ten years.

Imagine how these principles would position us in the eyes of the world and how differently we would be regarded, if we focused on initiatives that supported these principles.

Imagine how uniting these principles could be if we could come to a shared view on them.

I am by no means suggesting that these are the principles that we should agree to or adopt. What I am suggesting though is that we use a principle-based approach to drive New Zealand's future direction – for example that we agree upon a key organising idea and agree 4-5 key principles which set the criteria for our future investment of time and capital.

In transformation speak, 'form follows function.'

Living in a small country at the edge of the world, I acknowledge that we often have little control or influence over global events, or our place in them. However, now is the time that we could position ourselves more effectively and influence the agenda for our own recovery.

Former White House Chief of Staff and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel once said 'never let a good crisis go to waste.'² While New Zealand is still deep in this crisis, there is a chance for us to think differently, come together as a nation, and agree a key organising idea and a set of core guiding principles to drive our rethink.

It is time to think about what we want as a country first, what matters to us and then work through how we exit this downturn and position ourselves in a changed world with an eye to the long term.

In 2009, New Zealand made a bold attempt to set that agenda through various hui including the job summit, with some limited success. But New Zealand is now a different place to what it was in 2009. We are more mature and have suffered, as a nation, deep

adversity through multiple crises. This has perhaps taught us to step back and examine what is important to us as a people.

The critical question, as Drury asks in his think piece, is this: ‘What can we do now that changes New Zealand for the better, for the next generation?’³

This is a chance for this Government to shine and lead.

We have few overarching sustainable strategic frameworks or principles other than a wellbeing framework. That is a good start, and will surely become a core element of any future principles based model will require building out to incorporate our additional aspirations .

It is in times of adversity like these that we need to encourage the ability and willingness to dream about the future of our country and what we can do now that prepares New Zealand better for the future.

Ironically we are not encumbered by existing strategies and approaches. However, we may have a much more aligned view of our common principles with regard to the future of New Zealand and what matters to us as individuals, than we think.

We can continue on the path of incrementalism or we can agree a framework and principles that allows us to construct a way forward which opens up opportunities for New Zealand and helps us better deal with the challenges that no doubt lie ahead. If it is the latter, count me in. We are hungry for a vision for our country and one that can be communicated effectively.

With her response to the attack on Christchurch mosques, our prime minister showed how setting an agenda of inclusion and leadership based on a set of core principles can capture the world’s attention and, more importantly in a limited sense, our place in the world.

In a trip to Morocco after the attack, I was reluctant to reveal my country of origin. However, almost universally, when people, of all walks of life discovered we were from New Zealand, the response was one of admiration for the timely and considered response of our prime minister.

There has not been a time that I have been prouder of our country and prime minister as we were hugged by 80-year-old men with tears in their eyes, thanking us for our recognition and their inclusion in a world that in recent times has seen division promoted above inclusion.

This experience demonstrated the power of the organising principle, in this case one based around being people-centred and the ability of our country to reposition our national persona in the eyes of the world.

The challenge now for our prime minister is to consider whether to utilise some of the political capital she has built up. This could facilitate the progression of a principle-based framework for the future, potentially embedding a wider wellbeing framework as a lasting sustainable principles-based model. This framework would be driven less down political lines and instead more fundamentally based on building the next wave of ambitious change being promoted by some intelligent, talented and experienced individuals.

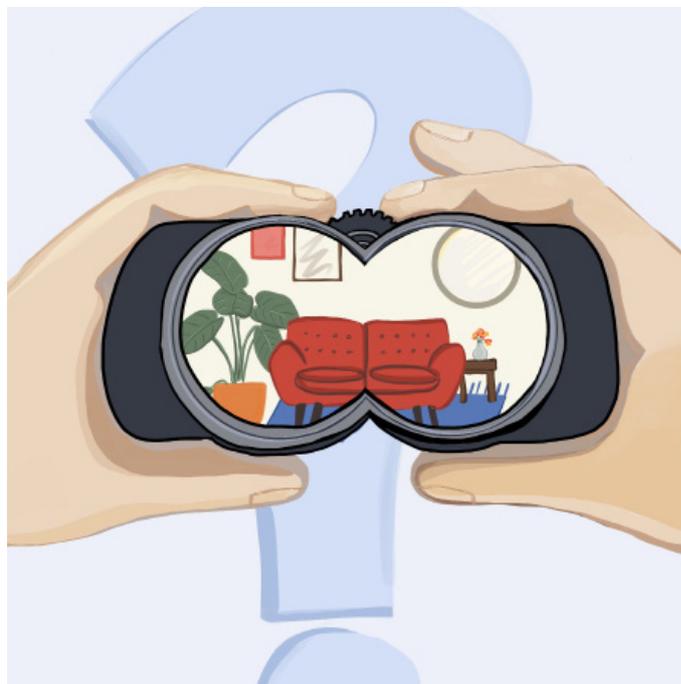
Such an approach can also provide more certainty and guidance for our business owners (certainty and guidance being a common denominator in our low business confidence scores) and public sector leaders in their decision making.

Despite being a small country, New Zealand can do this.

How we approach our re-entry to the world will set the tone for the next generation of leaders. As Rugby World Cup-winning captain Sean Fitzpatrick says, ‘we should fight as one’.⁴

We have the chance to reposition New Zealand’s future within a world context. We can differentiate ourselves through a principle-based approach by uniting our talent across our unique, inclusive small country to embrace a set of initiatives.

Are we up for it, New Zealand?



Endnotes

- 1 See Drury, R. (2020, 17 April). ‘What we do now will shape New Zealand’s future’. Newsroom. Retrieved 24 April 2020 from <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/2020/04/13/1125849/what-we-do-now-will-shape-new-zealands-future>.
- 2 See Emanuel, R. (2020, 26 March). ‘Let’s make sure this crisis doesn’t go to waste’. The Washington Post. Retrieved 24 April 2020 from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/03/25/lets-make-sure-this-crisis-doesnt-go-waste>.
- 3 See endnote 1.
- 4 See Henley, B. (2020, 20 April). ‘Fitzy: We need to fight as one’. Newsroom. Retrieved 24 April 2020 from <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/2020/04/20/1135844/where-to-now-sean-fitzpatrick-we-need-to-fight-as-one>.



The McGuinness Institute is a non-partisan think tank working towards a sustainable future, contributing strategic foresight through evidence-based research and policy analysis.
McGuinness Institute, Level 2, 5 Cable Street, PO Box 24-222, Wellington 6142
Phone: +64 4 499 8888 Email: wmcg@mcguinnessinstitute.org Website: www.mcguinnessinstitute.org