

A Successful Christchurch Recovery

Articulating the vision and identifying tipping points.

In May 2011, the Resilient Organisations research programme held a two day Resilience Retreat high in the hills of Banks Peninsula to bring together a group of thought-leaders to share and debate resilience issues and strategies related to the Christchurch recovery.

One of our sessions set the participants the challenge of articulating the vision for two key elements of the overall recovery:

- The Christchurch rebuild
- The economic recovery

To ensure that the vision articulated was sufficiently focused and punchy, we tasked the groups with keeping to an “elevator speech” format, of no more than 5 or 6 sentences.

We then asked people to visualise that they were 5-10 years in the future, once their vision for recovery had been successfully achieved, and to use a process of pre-emptive reflection to look back on what were the critical tipping points that ensured recovery success was achieved.

The final stage was for people to visualise they were in a future where their recovery vision had failed dismally, and to reflect back on the tipping points that turned the recovery process into a failure.

The following sections provide the outcomes of the lively debate generated.

The Christchurch Rebuild

Our Vision:

“Building New Zealand’s best loved city” founded on the following principles:

- **Enduring Quality:** buildings and infrastructure that are valuable assets for future generations.
- **Inspiring Showcase:** a place with sufficient ‘wow’ factor to draw people to it.
- **Safe:** a city that plans intelligently not just for today’s hazards but also for tomorrow’s emerging challenges.
- **Affordable Quality:** use of clever design to identify quality solutions that the community can afford in both the short and long term.
- **Equitable:** a place that ‘cares for every corner’ and where people from all backgrounds are accommodated.

Imagining we are in 2021 and the above vision for the Christchurch rebuild has been achieved, some pre-emptive reflection on the tipping points to achieving this success:

1. **A shared vision with clear end goals:** That early in the process we made a conscious effort to involve the community in articulating a vision of what it is that we wanted to achieve through this recovery.
2. **Timely decisions were made on key suburbs:** That we didn't leave communities hanging for too long with uncertainty about the viability of rebuilding in-situ. We involved both experts and communities in making these decisions, recognising both the social and technical dimensions of the issue to be resolved.
3. **Conscious celebration of milestones and achievements:** That we recognised the need to provide the community with a sense of progress and made sure to establish timelines and targets for key stages in the recovery. This was reinforced with a programme of events for the community to really celebrate the achievement of key milestones.
4. **Community driven, participative process:** That we actually 'walked the talk' on community engagement which enabled the community to get excited about and behind the recovery effort.
5. **Christchurch adopted its own building code and standard:** That we didn't settle for the bare minimum or be restricted in our thinking by what is acceptable elsewhere in the country, but that Christchurch set its own standards for the quality and performance of its rebuild.
6. **Transparency and accountability:** Right from the start there was an ethos created throughout the recovery process that there would be few 'black-box decisions' and people could easily see what decisions were being made by whom and how they were being made.

Imagining we are in 2021 and the above vision for the Christchurch rebuild has failed dismally, some pre-emptive reflection on the tipping points that lead to this failure:

1. **Shortcuts were taken in the interests of speed over quality:** We were so focused on building back quickly that we allowed shoddy design and practices that looked good to start with but eventually left us with even bigger problems several years down the track.
2. **We rebuilt for today's world but not tomorrows:** We lacked sufficient imagination and built a contemporary city but not one with future generations in mind. We failed to grasp the opportunities to address emerging strategic issues such as climate change, fuel shortages, potential food crises, population growth and changing demographics.
3. **Factions developed:** We never achieved the shared dream for what recovery would look like for our city and over time, as we just charged on as if this wasn't a problem, the views of the divergent groups hardened.
4. **The super-alliance didn't deliver:** We just assumed that the super-alliance forming within the construction sector would deliver the rebuild, failing to recognise that this novel form of procurement has its own risks and pitfalls that were inadequately managed.
5. **NZ ran into financial troubles:** We were no longer in the news headlines and people around NZ started to forget that we still needed their help to rebuild. Then the financial crisis came and the rest of NZ had their own problems to deal with. The help and support just dried up...
6. **Our showcase vision was wrong:** We developed and articulated a vision for recovery but a few years into it we realised that it wasn't quite such an inspiring vision as we first thought it would be...

7. **The people were forgotten:** We 'rebuilt' but we didn't 'recover'. Somehow we got so caught up in rebuilding the infrastructure and the buildings that we missed the human part of the equation and who we were rebuilding for.

The Economic Recovery

Our Vision:

Re-inventing New Zealand's most dynamic economy based on the following principles:

- **Celebrating its roots in the agricultural sector:** as the South Island hub for market, transport and engineering support for agriculture and other traditional sectors.
- **Innovating its future in high growth, high value, sectors:** including a 'green' and ICT emphasis in both the infrastructure and industry of Christchurch.
- **A life style enabled work environment that is the envy of the world:** that attracts the best and brightest to live, work and invest in our thriving city.
- **A transport network marrying global connectivity with local sustainability:** that future proofs our life style while reaching the world's markets with our creativity
- **A people-centric economy:** where the rights and responsibilities of all are rewarded.

Imagining we are in 2021 and the above vision for economic recovery has been achieved, some pre-emptive reflection on the tipping points to achieving this success:

1. **Couragous leadership**, working with world class project managers, that continually communicates fresh hope and mobilises the leadership capacity of individuals, companies and sectors to build the most 'change ready' city in the world.
2. **ICT enabled recovery** with a high access 'cloud' infrastructure built in collaboration with the world's top ICT companies.
3. **A 'green' focus** that addresses future energy and transport needs while attracting high growth, high innovation organisations and capital.
4. **A CBD and village-hub network** that is a product of business-community collaboration producing a living-working environment that attracts the most innovative Gen Y and Kiwi-expats and their companies.
5. **An enabling Regulatory environment** with re-engineered/co-created processes supporting a rapid, high-tech, high-quality rebuild and recovery based on principles of fast-turnaround, low error rates with added value at marginal cost.
6. **A cohesive 'Build back better' strategy** that maximises the benefits of a resilient structural rebuild while producing skills, sectors and life style for the dynamic economy of the future.

Imagining we are in 2021 and the above vision for economic recovery has failed dismally, some pre-emptive reflection on the tipping points that lead to this failure

1. **Ineffective autocratic leadership** that communicated too little, too late and allowed a negative media to mobilise despair and hopelessness.
2. **Innovation is stifled by 'consensus' thinking** resulting in 'lowest common denominator' solutions addressing the past rather than the future.

3. **Insufficient 'sense of urgency' and lack of incentives**, resulted in a drifting, mediocre rebuild and recovery with lack of momentum and lacking the 'buzz' necessary to sustain the recovery.
4. **Haphazard approach to rebuild and recovery** resulted in a fragmented and lacklustre economy, poor synergy and disaffection of significant sectors of business and the community.
5. **Not managing expectations** resulted in increasing negativity within business and general community, leadership being blamed for inevitable delays in some arenas and leadership default to avoid reputational loss.