

Queenstown Lakes Key Talent Retention and Community Leadership Programme

Summary Report: Phase 1 - Engagement and Co-Design (Nov 2020)

Introduction

Retention of key talent in the District is at risk, due to Covid-19 economic impact. Leadership Lab has been contracted by the Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) to identify key leadership talent and develop **strategies for retention**, while also **upskilling current and emerging leaders**, to assist and lead others through business and community recovery.

This report summarises **findings of Phase One** of the project (focused on “Engagement and Co-design”) (pg 1-3) and **the plan for Phase 2 and beyond** – the work to be done (pg 4-5).

Part 1: Findings from Engagement and Co-Design Phase One

Engagement Summary

To date the engagement process has connected us with approximately 50 leaders from the District and has provided data on key leaders in the area and the support approach that might be the most useful. The conversations were guided by three broad questions.

1. Who are the leaders you would be “*gutted to lose*” from the District?
2. What would be the most effective ways of supporting them?
3. How might Leadership Lab partner with local organisations to provide this support?

Everyone has been enthusiastic to share their experiences and we have received a large number of follow up communications with many indicating positive engagement and initial and tentative optimism about the project.

Named challenges

There are historical challenges facing the Queenstown Lakes Region that have been, in effect, amplified or otherwise surfaced by COVID-19.

Relationship with Tourism

The Queenstown Lakes region has enjoyed a long period of high visitor numbers and growing revenue per capita. The focus on overseas tourism has created strong growth but has also been a contributor to a range of challenges including high cost of living, infrastructure pressures, environmental degradation, challenges to community cohesion, and lack of high value employment opportunities for younger (local) people.

Job Market

The focus on what some have described as “commodity tourism,” has inclined the job market towards lower wage jobs. Staff reductions post-COVID have particularly impacted migrant workers and there has been a disproportionate impact on women in general, who feature more strongly in the hospitality and tourism sectors and in Covid-related job losses. As domestic tourism has restarted some employers are already finding it difficult to recruit key staff.

Stretched people

There are obvious direct impacts in terms of financial pressures and related evidence of “overwhelm”, uncertainty, pessimism and loss of confidence that both precede and have resulted from Covid. Many local people have become used to a continuous “growth cycle” and the downturn is something they have not experienced previously and are not well adapted to cope with it. There is a significant “shame” barrier that can take people right to the edge before they ask for help.

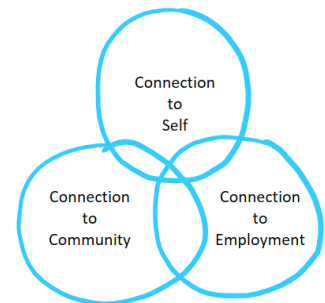
Diverse region

While recognising that the Queenstown Lakes District encompasses a range of geographical, social, business and cultural communities, there is an obvious distinction between the orientations of Queenstown and Wanaka. There are differing opinions, perceptions and ideas about the strengths and weaknesses of each area and about the future possibilities of the region as a whole.

Framing the general challenge for this work

In broad brush terms there are three broad common challenges being faced by individuals, which provide **themes** to the types of support that are needed:

1. Work and the relationship with **employer**, organisational practice and capability.
2. Sense of belonging and connection to **community (relationships)**.
3. Sense of purpose, meaning, and connection to **self**.



Characteristics of target individuals

In our conversations we asked people to identify (generally and specifically) the people that they would be really sorry to see leaving the District who are/may be at risk of leaving. People responded by describing the qualities or characteristics of the people they felt it would be important to retain in the District and occasionally with specific names and examples.

Broadly speaking the people that are making the most difference in the District were described as, “*Community minded business leaders or business minded community leaders*” and as “*people who value people, the community, and the environment*”.

The general characteristics of the types of people being targeted are summarised below, noting that some individuals may fit in one or more of these groups.

Experienced Senior manager, Business Owner/Operator

“Some of the higher echelons of management have been through redundancies, layoffs, reforecasting of budgets, etc. They’ve had enough or they just can’t survive here. They need support to stay.”

“The actual tourism infrastructure is the tourism operators and distributors. Having them still alive and kicking or at least in hibernation, so that they can reactivate when the borders reopen.”

Tourism Sector Migrant Workforce

“They are well qualified and super self-reliant. They have children at school and get really involved in the community. They add way more value than is ever recognised.”

“We need regionalised immigration settings to ensure our businesses survive. Kiwis are not coming forward for these roles. So where does that leave the businesses and the migrant community?”

Leader in a Community, Education, or Health Organisation

The Education and Health sectors are important sources of support for the region. They are under increased stress as the sense of overwhelm in the community manifests itself in schools and in mental health, more generally. Burnout is a potential issue here.

“We use Office 365 at work and I remember at one point it popped up and told me I hadn’t had a day off for 60 days.”

Active in the Māori community

Local whānau Māori have done extraordinary work in providing food packages and general support to whānau in the District. The lack of a local marae strongly impacts the ability of the community to learn, grow, contribute, connect and sustain their culture, tikanga and their people. This is a challenge unique to the Māori community in this region.

“I get a bit worried about some of our people. They do so much and it’s all voluntary. We don’t want to burn them out.”

Young “Returnees” and School Leavers

“We’ve had a big increase in the number of twenty-somethings coming back. They’ve started to do lots of volunteer work, in a way that we haven’t seen before. There are lots of talented young people, but there just aren’t the jobs for them.”

Income-Disrupted Couples

“[She] is an absolute dynamo and has been a real asset to [the company] but [her partner] has struggled for maybe 3 years. He was at [one employer] for a while then went to [another] and then they had to let him go and now he’s called it - so they’re going back to the UK. That’s one of probably a dozen couples I could tell you about right now who have already decided to go.”

“I 100% know people who have left or are leaving because he’s got a great job and loves it but she’s isolated and hating life and can’t find her feet here.”

Part 2: Action Plan

Approach and People

Our approach is to work with existing networks, organisations and communities to deliver supports that foster better connections to self, to community, and to employment. There is a clear challenge inherent to supporting people 'at risk of leaving', in that it's not often widely known or public knowledge that someone is considering leaving until the decision is already made. For this reason, our approach is to work with existing 'Cohorts' - communities where people with the described characteristics are likely to already be gathering. We have identified 6 cohorts/communities each with some potential collaborators:

Work Cohorts	Potential Collaborators
Māori community	Mana Tahuna, Aukaha, Te Ao Marama rōpū
Experienced Senior managers and Business Owners/Operators - Large and small	Queenstown Chamber, Ignite Wanaka
Women	Queenstown Lakes Women's Network
Wānaka Community	Link Wanaka, Tim Barke, Mandy Bell
Queenstown community, education and health sectors	Bill Nichol, Marie Day, and Social Services providers
Human Resource / People and Capability Managers	HR Managers in the Region

There is a temptation to deliver work streams based on the characteristics described earlier e.g. *a programme for people whose partner has lost their job*. Instead, with each cohort outlined we will be actively seeking to support people who have any or several of the target characteristics - recognising that many people already identified have many of the characteristics. Some of these cohorts map directly to the described characteristics and some are more cross-cutting. In this sense, it's best to think of each of the cohorts above as being parallel, related work streams that are each trying to find and support people with any of the target characteristics.

The supports

The approach with each of these groups will vary depending on the exact needs of the people involved, but will involve one or more of these components:

1 on 1 supports e.g.

- Business mentoring supervision
- Executive coaching - transition, meaning, goal setting
- Strengths Finder Coaching (low commitment and high impact)

Small groups processes e.g.

- Strategic facilitation sessions with organisations
- Action learning groups/peer support groups
- Special interest communities of practice (e.g. Human Resources practices)
- Targeted technical interventions (e.g. mediation)

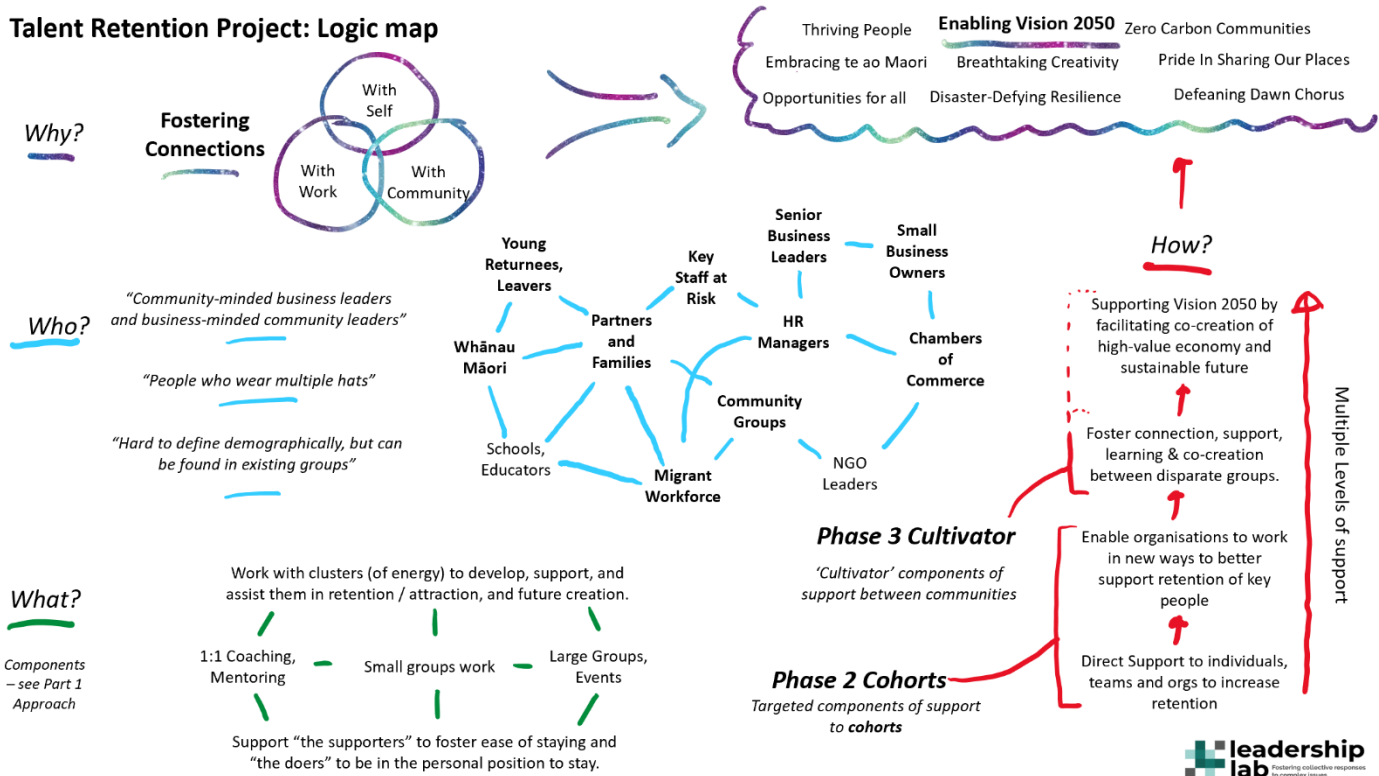
Large groups/events e.g.

- Workshops on particular content areas - wellbeing, collaborative leadership toolkit etc
- Open public events

Timelines and next steps

The following diagram gives an overview of the project.

Talent Retention Project: Logic map



The Leadership Lab team have continued conversations with potential collaborators, and it is our intent that local collaborators take more and more of a primary role in the work alongside the Leadership Lab team throughout 2021.

Phase 2: Cohort supports will start as early as practicable (December 2020 and early 2021) and we anticipate that this cohort support will continue throughout 2021. We also anticipate a Phase 3: Cultivator which will be a range of initiatives aimed at fostering connection, learning and co-creation between diverse groups, communities and organisations. This could include Action learning groups, public hui, supporting partners in delivery of events.

There is clear value that could be gained by work delivered through this project having a name or brand that 'co-delivers' public events with local partners. This could add value to the objectives of this work by e.g. opening the conversation up for people to 'opt in' in some way. This is best positioned within QLDC, under the direction of the Recovery Team with input from Leadership Lab.

If you or any of your contacts fit the criteria for support please reach out so as to benefit from the available supports. Please contact Sharon Fifield Sharon.Fifield@qldc.govt.nz or the Leadership Lab team at info@leadershiplab.co.nz