

A place where talent wants to live

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Sir Paul Callaghan speaking at StrategyNZ, March 2011

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'A dynamic, creative and thriving Aotearoa New Zealand is one where vision and foresight play a leading role in nurturing and supporting future generations of locally grown or incoming talent from overseas.' - Darren Zhang

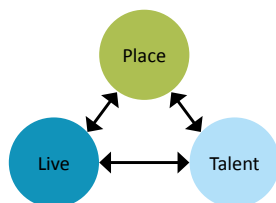
'We know our country can produce talent. What we need to do now is explore what to do with it and how to ensure we attract and retain that talent in order to create an economic and social landscape that provides all New Zealanders with the opportunity to take full advantage of their potential.' - Charlotte Greenfield

Charlotte Greenfield and Darren Zhang are the joint winners of the inaugural Sir Paul Callaghan Science Meets Humanities Scholarship. These two young New Zealanders will soon be out and about interviewing other New Zealanders on how we might implement Sir Paul's vision of our country as *'a place where talent wants to live'*.

It is now two years since Sir Paul spoke at *StrategyNZ*, where he challenged New Zealanders to think about a vision for our country¹. It is also now a year since he left us to carry on without him. While for many that has been hard, Sir Paul would have wanted us not to mourn but to pick up his vision and take it forward.

Over the last 24 months I have often looked back and wondered why those seven words, *'a place where talent wants to live'*, resonated so strongly with the *StrategyNZ* participants. I also find myself questioning why Sir Paul's vision has continued to reverberate around New Zealand: was it the messenger, the message, the people who heard it, or perhaps a mix of all three? What drives the Institute today is not what this vision promises, but what this vision requires in practical terms; what we need to do today to deliver this vision tomorrow, what levers we need to pull, and who needs to pull them.

Seven words narrate the vision, but three concepts shape the dialogue around putting the dream into practice. Together, these concepts demand action – moving from one way of being to a better way of being.

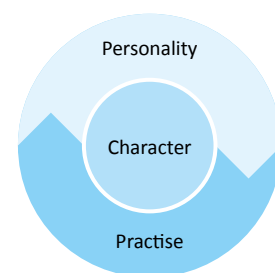


We understand the concept of *place* in terms of the home, the workplace and the marketplace, the places where we are inquiring, engaged, productive, and working either together or separately, but in the same direction. In terms of workplace, a good example is Fisher & Paykel Healthcare, which designs, manufactures and markets medical products and systems that are sold to over 120 countries. The company spends a much higher proportion of its sales revenue on research and development than average, as well as dominating a niche market^{2,3}. Businesses based in large countries generally don't compete in niche markets, but because of New Zealand's small size, Kiwi companies excelling in niche markets can significantly affect our economy. Sir Paul calculated that we would need approximately 100 great businesses like Fisher & Paykel Healthcare to achieve his vision. He stressed that getting to that point can be fun, commenting that he wished he had started his business Magritek earlier as he gained huge enjoyment from getting to work each morning to find himself working with good people and making great things happen⁴. The working culture is changing in New Zealand to reflect this; work environments are fun places to hang out – table tennis, pool tables, foosball and the occasional ladder and slide (à la Trade Me), encourage a culture of working hard while doing fun things.

We understand the concept of *talent* in terms of people and, more specifically, good people who are full of character – honest, hardworking, dependable, creative and committed individuals who want to make a difference. Character, personality and a commitment to practising skills are vital and interlinked in creating the outcome of talent^{5,6}.

Character is the key, personality the lock, and a commitment to practising skills the hand that opens the door. However, character remains the most critical component because personality without character cannot be trusted, and skills without character cannot deliver. This requires us to know the difference between good and bad character, and that means we need role models. Sir Paul is clearly one, however we need to expose our young people to many more role models, and lots of talent that they can emulate.

Susan Cain's recent book *Quiet* provides a useful insight into developing talent. Cain explains that in the culture of character

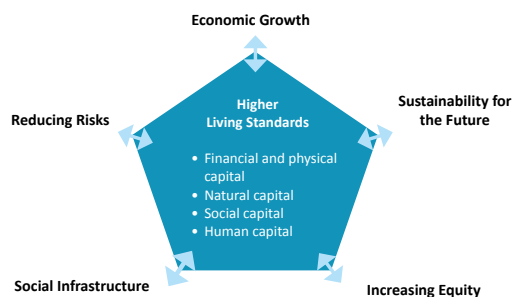




At the Strategy/NZ workshop in March 2011 participants suggested appropriate covers for the New Zealand Listener in 2058, indicating the level of support for Sir Paul's vision.

in the 1920s, the ideal self was serious, disciplined and honourable; what mattered was how you behaved in private and under pressure. The rise of the culture of personality moved the focus onto how others perceived you; people became captivated by the bold and entertaining. It is only relatively recently that the extrovert, the confident communicator, has been seen as the most talented person in the room. However, as Cain notes, many introverts have proven to be extraordinary examples of talent. The introverts are the thinkers, observers and often the conscientious workers⁷. Without them, we lose the ability to listen, learn and create; we therefore need to ensure we have a sufficient number of introverts around any table that explores New Zealand's long-term future. Talent takes many forms and comes from many locations, as Darren Zhang suggests when he refers to locally grown or incoming talent. In spite of these different origins, wherever talent comes from, it's about good people doing good things, well.

When it comes to the term *live* this, in our view, represents lifestyle. Therefore, *wants to live* refers to a desire to live a better lifestyle. This is not about wealth per se, but about living a good life. This was reflected in 2011 when the Treasury released a working paper on a Living Standards Framework, which outlined exactly what it meant by its vision of working for higher living standards for New Zealanders⁸. The Framework identifies five key focus areas: economic growth, reducing macroeconomic vulnerability, sustainability for the future, growing social capital, and increasing equity. In choosing these five focus areas, the Treasury is moving the discussion from wealth in terms of dollars to wealth in terms of lifestyle. This is a great platform from which to build on Sir Paul's vision of creating 'a place where talent wants to live'. In effect, the Treasury is seeking a deeper conversation on how New Zealanders want to live.



Treasury's Living Standards Framework is used to assess the impact of policy across key living standards and dimensions

It is important to keep in mind the multidirectional relationship between *place*, *talent* and *live*. For example, a talented scientist

requires a place of work that suits his or her strengths and lifestyle, while businesses also require talented employees who suit their mission and culture. Sir Paul's vision links these three concepts and aligns each concept with the other two. For the Institute, when Sir Paul spoke of his vision it was one of those rare times when we heard a new idea, agreed with it wholeheartedly, and were impressed by just how powerful yet achievable it seemed. Many YouTube viewers of Sir Paul's address evidently felt the same. The simple act of saying Sir Paul's words aloud is uplifting and energises us to work toward their actualisation.

In adopting Sir Paul's mantra, we first had to accept that New Zealand is not yet living up to its potential as 'a place where talent wants to live', but that it is capable of progressing toward this, and has many factors in its favour. As Sir Paul noted:

'We are rich in water and energy resources, we have a great education system, world-class science and engineering, a vibrant artistic and creative sector, quality urban environments and a civil society. When we combine all this with our unique landscapes, and our pristine mountains and seas, we have the chance to be 'The place where talent wants to live' ... What is needed is a national strategy and the resolve to move consciously towards its vision.'⁹

Talent Survey

Gillian McCarthy, the Institute's Head of Research, will be conducting a talent survey to explore the future of work. The survey will focus on organisations that have recently changed their business model, are an emerging business, or have introduced an entirely new type of product or service to the market. We want to understand what talent these businesses are seeking today and tomorrow, and what obstacles they believe currently exist or might exist in the near future, in terms of both locally grown talent and incoming talent from overseas. We also want to know whether an emerging talent gap might exist and, if so, what that gap might look like in terms of character, skills and personality. We hope to share this information through a report, so that New Zealand works hard to ensure the talent we want is ready and waiting for our dynamic business leaders when they need it.

Implementing the Vision

The Sir Paul Callaghan Science Meets Humanities Scholarship will enable Charlotte Greenfield (a participant in *EmpowerNZ*) and Darren Zhang (a participant in *LongTermNZ*) to travel around New Zealand asking about practical ways in which New Zealanders might implement Sir Paul's vision of creating 'a place where talent wants to live'. They will then prepare a working paper based on their findings. We hope their work will stimulate discussion around Sir Paul's vision and give it momentum. We are fortunate in having Sam Morgan, the founder of Trade Me, sponsor these students and John Trail, a friend and colleague of Sir Paul's from Magritek, guide their research and help them to collate their results into a useful form.

The Institute has made 'a place where talent wants to live' the core focus of its work programme. We are not alone in appreciating Sir Paul's clear thinking and wisdom. The challenge is to bring his vision to fruition, a big idea that requires everyone to be involved. As a small country, we have the opportunity to significantly affect our economy by strengthening our capabilities in the knowledge economy. Sir Paul has shown us the way forward. It is now time to start the journey and create space for the young to run on ahead.

For complete references and to find out more, visit our website: www.mcguinnessinstitute.org



The McGuinness Institute is a non-partisan think tank working towards a sustainable future, contributing strategic foresight through evidence-based research and policy analysis.
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