

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR RISKNZ MEMBERS

MARK BREWER

Without question, 2020 was challenging across both the private and public sectors. The year's unique trials were often frame-breaking, and emphasised the growing complexity and unpredictability of the modern globalised World. Changes which also mirror the increased speed of transformation across many societies, driven in large part by rapid technological advancement and increased access to information.

Such turbulence has by necessity hastened changes in the practice of risk management, as well as our expectations of those operating as risk professionals. We are forced to accelerate our capabilities and speed of adaptation, to keep pace with the growing opportunities and threats of our evolving business environment.

For risk professionals this constant churn means it is no longer possible to maintain professional mastery for a long period as was previously the case. Societal and technical changes are occurring so fast, that it would be naïve to think it possible to learn everything you need at the beginning of a professional career, and remain competent throughout.

Practices for identifying and managing risk do not remain static, and as a profession we must drive constantly for improvement and advancement. The same is true for individual risk professionals, who must keep up to date with modern professional expertise. While technological advances will help with this transformation, the 'human in the system' will remain the most important element across our professional risk community.

'Learnability' is consequently becoming the most important skill for modern professionals. Constant focused development can ensure individuals continually have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to operate effectively and ethically under conditions of increasing uncertainty and complexity. Also, because it is no longer possible to know everything, learning must be constant and occur at the 'speed of need', not infrequently and at the speed of personal comfort.

Central to this concept of 'life-long learning' is the importance of personal ownership, self-awareness and continual critical self-reflection. These practices mirror those methods used by professional athletes to attain peak performance, and are now used extensively throughout the public and private business sectors. Risk professionals need to adopt a similar approach, to ensure they are adequately prepared for what lies ahead.

Professional development in this manner requires intellectual humility. The moral courage to ask ourselves the uncomfortable questions and challenge our own thinking. To advance both individually and as a group, we need to constantly try to find out what we don't know, and identify any assumptions which may no longer hold true. Openness to challenge and diverse thinking must therefore be sought out, encouraged and rewarded.

Continued on next page...

While specific expertise remains crucial, it is frequently the breakthroughs made from honest introspection and focused adaptation which provide the biggest gains in professional competence and leadership ability. Self-awareness and intellectual humility have now become critical job requirements. Although less tangible, these 'soft skills' are increasingly becoming more important than traditional 'hard skills', especially for managers.

With these challenges in mind, RiskNZ has organised a new suite of development opportunities commencing in 2021, specifically designed to boost the learning and leadership capabilities of risk professionals. These activities are hands-on, immersive learning opportunities which complement our traditional development offerings, so as to improve an individual's interpersonal skills, in addition to their technical proficiency and managerial competence.

Membership education and professional development is one of the five key focus areas critical to the success of RiskNZ. It is clear that the introduction of these unique workshops, will significantly enhance the value RiskNZ provides its members, and ensure they are better positioned for the challenges of the future.

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Mark Brewer has extensive experience as a learning facilitator and leadership coach, having served as the Commander of Leadership Development for the Royal New Zealand Air Force and Research Officer for the New Zealand Defence Force's Institute for Leader Development. Mark now focuses on building leadership capacity in the public sector and improving the performance of not-for-profit organisations. He most recently worked as a principal advisor, designing and delivering leadership development programmes for the United Nations and New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in South East Asia and the Pacific Islands. Combining a post-graduate academic research background in human resource development, with deep expertise as a public sector manager, programme manager and organisational excellence advisor, Mark is well positioned to help leaders improve their leadership practice.

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