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Our people – a leadership development programme for  
Cardrona Alpine Resort

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**Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in acknowledgments), nor materials which to be substantial extend have been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of an institution of higher learning.

Signature.....Date.....4/12/2018.....

## **Executive summary**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Originally from Scotland, I first came to New Zealand in 2009 after completing university and migrated straight to the Southern Alps. I took on a position as a ticket office assistant at Porters Ski Area in Canterbury and this was to be my first taste of work on a ski field. At Porters Ski Area I found a connection not only to the mountains, but to the likeminded people who worked there and found myself pulled back each winter. Throughout my time at Porters Ski Area I learnt about how a ski area operated, what it felt like to be part of a successful team and what guests wanted when they came to visit a ski area. In the five seasons I worked there I progressed however by the end of the 2013 winter I could not see any more scope for development. I had fallen in love with Wanaka when I visited in the summer of 2009 and met my now partner when I worked there in 2013. I decided it was time to settle in the Southern Lakes region and when I arrived I worked in hospitality as a duty manager taking on extra responsibilities. However, I knew the hospitality industry wasn't for me and I wanted to be closer to the mountains and immerse myself in the snow sports industry once more. I remember reaching a particularly low point when I was cleaning the floor and doing the dishes for a celebrity chef late one evening and so the next day sent my CV to both commercial ski fields in the Wanaka area. To my absolute surprise I was requested to come for an interview with the services manager at Cardrona Alpine Resort and in April 2014 I started my new role as the ticket office supervisor.

Since I have joined Cardrona it has developed into an all year-round tourism destination and my role has developed in parallel. In winter, Cardrona offers what could be described as some of the best skiing and snowboarding facilities in the Southern Hemisphere and in summer, a range of gravity fed activities from mountain biking to downhill carting. As it strives to become a 365 day a year operation the demands on its people have changed in such a way that they must now have the skills to embrace and adapt to change. As my role evolved, I expressed an interest in developing my own skills as a leader, and in 2016 I enrolled with Capable New Zealand and began my MProfPrac journey. After discussing the literature and my learning journey with key players in my organisation, it was agreed that my project would offer an opportunity for me to develop and motivate our leadership team. As a relatively young manager and leader within my organisation, this project also gave me the opportunity to grow my own leadership skills and enhance my ability to deal with change. The forum format of this project allowed me to spend more time with my fellow managers and discuss what leadership meant to them and learn from their experiences.

## **1.2 Purpose**

The main purpose of my MProfPrac project was to discover who I was as a leader and become the best people leader I possibly can. During this project programme I wanted to facilitate open discussions with the management team. It was hoped this would give them the space to reflect on what we do now for the wider leadership team, but also, what we do with our own leadership teams. It was hoped that the outcome would be a Cardrona capability framework and a pilot series of coaching sessions for our leadership team to be trialled during the 2018 winter season. I wanted to create a project that has the potential to bring about cultural change across my organisation and better equip our leadership and management teams to deal with change.

Personally, this was about looking inwards and discovering what my leadership practice was like and what gaps I had. I wanted to gain an understanding of how each department within our organisation leads their teams and an understanding of the development needs required to lead the various teams across Cardrona. By sharing with my peers, I wanted to develop some tools and approaches to leading my team and above all I wanted to feel more confident.

## **1.3 Personal findings and future direction**

From the literature and discussions with my peers during the management forums, I have discovered a new sense of self-awareness and the importance of role modelling the behaviours I expect from my team. I have become more emotionally aware and assess daily how I am feeling so I can give the people around me the energy they deserve. The importance of reflection and slowing down has been life changing and allowed me to stop and really listen to people. This has created connection and enabled me to pick up on the subtleties of a situation and shows the people around me that I respect what they have to contribute. However, I still encountered some issues with members of my leadership team this winter season and upon reflection think I now have the confidence to set clear expectations, however unpopular, when people start a role. Thinking back to last winter and discussions with my peers, I have found that as a manager you can't please everyone and that that's ok. Moving forward, I want to be an observer within my department and deal with anything that is at odds with my own and Cardrona's values as they happen. I want to empower the team around me to lead the department and coach them, not simply jump in and take over. My new-found appreciation for reflection is integral to this and I want to promote this within my team.

#### **1.4 Project findings and future direction**

This project can be split into three sections; 1. The management focus groups, 2. The leadership development sessions – a pilot for 2018, 3. The guest service leadership team

##### **1. The management focus groups**

A series of six focus groups were held prior to the 2018 winter season. These sessions gave interested managers the chance to connect and discuss how they lead their own teams and what their teams want in the way of development. At the end of the six sessions we agreed on an updated version of the 2017 gold standards and KPIs rather than creating a new capability framework, a series of five leadership development sessions for winter 2018, an agreement that managers would run a weekly communications meeting with their own team and that we would encourage a leader from each department to attend the 3pm operational meeting each day. At each forum I would present and facilitate the session, and this gave me a great sense of achievement and confidence. People seemed to really appreciate what I had to say and add to the subject of leadership. The work I did with the management team during this project has increased my self-confidence and given me more strength to speak up and contribute my opinions at work. I have become a valuable member of the team over the last five years and I do have ideas and experiences that are worth sharing.

##### **2. The leadership development sessions – a pilot for 2018.**

An outcome of the management focus groups was a series of five leadership development sessions during the 2018 season with a focus on getting people together and socialising. From the management forums we agreed the main aim was to promote collaboration and communication across the organisation. After each session we sought feedback from the managers and the leadership team and adjusted the format and content of each session as we progressed. To me it felt like the more informal sessions, where we updated the leadership team on new developments and what Cardrona might look like in the future, were the most successful in that more people attended. The way we sought feedback, reflected and adjusted each session so quickly is something I want to adopt in my daily professional practice. In the past I have made plans and when they have not worked been resistant to changing them. The way we adapted these sessions showed that it's ok to admit something isn't perfect and try another approach to see if it works better, reflect and then try again.

### 3. The guest service leadership team

The main aim with my own team was to increase understanding and collaboration between the leadership teams who led the front-line staff in our three locations; the Wanaka store, the Queenstown Store and the mountain ticket office. I facilitated a formal session pre-season to get the team together and get them thinking about how they contribute to the Cardrona vision as the guest services team. Throughout the season I reinforced this by holding weekly meetings where members from each team were asked to attend and share how their week had been at their location. I closed the season with an end of season debrief to reflect on how the season had gone and what we might try next winter. I found an increase in collaboration across the three locations and that the staff working at these locations felt closer to the mountain. I ran these sessions to address some of what we had talked about in the management forums. I wanted to assist collaboration, create a clear purpose and promote reflection by revisiting what had happened that season.

Moving forward to this summer I believe more reflection with the management and leadership team is required to review the development sessions we trialed and the impact these did or did not have on our leadership team. I want to ask, did the management team feel differently about how they led their teams this winter? Did they see any differences in their staff? What do the leadership team think about these sessions and what would they like in the future? Organisationally I think we have realised that we cannot address change management with a one size fits all approach. Cardrona is made up of a range of professions from teachers to groomer operators and the way our values and organisational development are communicated is never likely to be the same across these departments. We need to look at trying different approaches such as educational sessions, progress updates on big infrastructure projects and sessions where we work with interested parties from across the organisation on ways to develop our values and culture.

Facilitation was an aspect I really connected with when reading the literature and would like to develop more of these skills. I feel this would give me more confidence to dig a little deeper in any subsequent discussion sessions. From this process I have seen how we can all influence cultural change and would like to continue to influence the culture at Cardrona. One of my aims next winter is to present a session to the leadership team and in the future hope I can use these skills further afield to influence the culture of other organisations in New Zealand and beyond.

