

Leadership grounded in purpose

Pat Snedden's speech

Inaugural Governance for Social Impact course

In partnership with the Centre for Social Impact (Australia)

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Introduction

In April 2026, JBWere NZ's Philanthropic Services brought acclaimed **Governance for Social Impact** course to New Zealand for the first time.

Developed by The Centre for Social Impact in Australia, and accredited by AGSM, the course supports directors and trustees to govern with a purpose-first mindset, using applied frameworks and tools to help navigate complex social impact ecosystems, shape strategy, and measure what matters for long-term community impact.

To ensure relevancy for governors here, the course was reframed through a Te Ao Māori and Te Tiriti lens, to build capability and confidence in impact governance in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Grounded in academic research and delivered by experienced practitioners, the course was co-presented by Shamal Dass, Head of Family Advisory and Philanthropic Services at JBWere Australia and Te Pūoho Kātene (Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Whātua, Ngāti Tama). The programme brings in guest speakers to deepen the learning through other for-purpose practitioner perspectives. One guest speaker was Pat Snedden who shared his personal reflections of leadership in challenging times over dinner.

John Morrow, Head of JBWere NZ Philanthropic Services & Family Advisory introduced Pat Snedden

Pat is one of New Zealand's most deeply respected, purpose-driven leaders whose work over more than four decades has consistently sat at the intersection of governance, capital, justice, and public accountability.

Pat's career spans some of our most complex and consequential domains, including Te Tiriti o Waitangi, health, housing, education, and philanthropy. His experience is not theoretical. It has been forged in practice, and often in moments of real significance, where leadership decisions carry enduring social and moral weight.

He has held numerous government-appointed chairing roles, including at the centre of New Zealand's health system during the COVID-19 pandemic. He has served as a Chief Crown negotiator in Treaty settlement processes, contributed to the founding of Mai FM, and continues to shape long-term educational outcomes as founding Chair of the Manaia Kalani Education Trust.

Across this breadth of experience, a consistent thread emerges: Pat's approach to governance has never been confined to the organisation alone. Instead, he has focussed on the wider system, notably on the people affected by decisions, and on the long-term outcomes those decisions shape.

Pat Snedden's perspectives reflect a form of leadership grounded less in authority and more in responsibility, values that hold under pressure, and a visible demonstration of respect for the people it impacts.

This paper is about his leadership experience and reflections, as he conveyed to course attendees. With his permission, it is shared openly to encourage and support learning across the wider for-purpose sector.

We invite readers to consider what leadership experience can look like in practice – particularly in times of crisis, ambiguity, and in advancing new social impact opportunities.

Pat Snedden's speech – Generating social progress for good

Tēnā koutou katoa. Good evening, everyone, and thank you for the opportunity to be with you. I want to begin by acknowledging the quality of the kōrero you've been having today – particularly the emphasis on systems thinking and how boards can make clear decisions under pressure. That is exactly where we need to be as governors.

But systems thinking is not only an intellectual exercise. Systems shift when people shift – when trust is built, when courage is shown, and when leadership chooses truth over comfort. So tonight I want to offer three reflections, or rather stories, from my own governance journey that, together, point to the same lesson: If we want better outcomes, we must invest in people, tell the truth, and lead with decency – especially across difference.

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To illustrate this, I want to share three stories from my own life and career. They are not stories about easy circumstances. They are stories about pressure, grief, conflict, uncertainty, and communities being asked to carry more than they should. But they are also stories about what becomes possible when people are treated with dignity, when leaders stay close to the human reality of decisions, and when hope is made practical through disciplined action. Even in hard times, good and positive things can happen when leadership creates the conditions for trust, courage, and possibility.

Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei

This is a New Zealand story of moral clarity and national capability.

Over my fifty years in governance, one of my most formative "training grounds" has been the story of Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei – a profoundly important Aotearoa story, not only for Māori, but for all of us who care about what this country can become.

To understand its significance, I need to ask you to recall the arc of events:

- 1975: the Land March led by Dame Whina Cooper, carrying the simple moral insistence: "Not one more acre!" to Parliament.
- 1977–78: the occupation at Takaparawhau / Bastion Point, and the eventual eviction which is one of the most significant uses of police force against civilians in modern New Zealand history.

- 1991: formal Crown recognition that land had been wrongfully taken, and processes set in motion to restore whenua and provide redress.

What struck me then, and what still strikes me now, is how clearly the moral right was articulated by people who were suffering. They were not asking for privilege; they were demanding recognition of what should never have been denied: justice, identity, and belonging

And here is the governance lesson I learned from this: we do not often see moral clarity so cleanly expressed, and when we do, it calls the rest of us to account. It also reveals something about our national tendency to underestimate ourselves.

From the early 1980s I saw a community that had been pushed to the margins, fighting tenaciously to hold onto its whenua against the full weight of the Crown. And yet, over time, through persistence, strategy, and leadership, Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei has become an economic and cultural powerhouse. The revival of te reo, the rebuilding of institutions, and the strengthening of capability is a story of resilience and excellence.

And still, to my frustration, we don't tell that story well enough in New Zealand. Not with the pride it deserves. Not with the honesty it requires. And not with the confidence we, as New Zealanders, are to understand what is really possible here.

Instead, we spend too much time reacting to external pressures, and not enough time investing in the brilliance already within our communities. We become fearful of difference, of each other, of who gets ahead, of what it means if Māori succeed as Māori. That fear diminishes us locally and internationally.

Here is the message, from my own learnings, that I want governors to take from this:

- Rangatiratanga is not a threat. It is a capability engine.
- Biculturalism, properly understood and practiced, makes the whole country stronger.
- When we invest in identity, place, and people, we unlock performance.

As governors of for-purpose organisations, we should be asking ourselves: Where are we still running on half a tank because we are unwilling to back our own people – especially those who have been systematically under-resourced?

And yes, on a personal note, I have joked for years that being arrested at Bastion Point was one of the best business decisions I ever made! I am not advocating that anyone should seek arrest, but being arrested connected me to lifelong relationships and to a reality I needed to understand. It also taught me something about leadership, which is that, sometimes, you can't analyse an issue from a distance – you must stand close enough to an issue to feel its consequences.

Chairing the Auckland District Health Board during COVID-19 and what crisis governance requires

My second story is from chairing Auckland District Health Board during the early stage of COVID-19.

On 23 March 2020, New Zealand entered a national lockdown. On that day, nobody truly knew what would happen next. There was palpable uncertainty about transmission, fear among staff, and high

stakes for patients and whānau. We were ahead of many countries in some respects, but we were also exposed and vulnerable with our supply constraints.

From a governance perspective, we had to make rapid decisions with incomplete information, and we all know that this is a very uncomfortable position. The first thing we did was to immediately adapt our board rhythm:

- A small group met daily to enable speed and focus.
- The full board met weekly to preserve oversight and accountability.
- The board provided clear delegation so management could act decisively without governance drift.

But cadence and structure alone is not what carried us. The key lesson I learned from this was: In a crisis, the first duty of leadership is truth. Don't soften reality. Don't spin. Don't offer false reassurance. People can handle hard news, but what breaks trust is when leaders pretend things are different from what they are.

"In a crisis, the first duty of leadership is truth."

So, we spoke plainly to staff and told them that the risk was real, the constraints were real, and the expectations were high. And we emphasised the ethic of service: service to one another, service to the public, service to the vulnerable.

I also learned something about the chair's role in those moments: the most important contribution I could make was not to provide operational direction but to take up the mantle, in essence, of being the "thinker-in-chief" and the connector. My job was to encourage sense-making, reinforce purpose, and acknowledge effort. I spent time thanking people, recognising what they were carrying, and reminding them that their work mattered.

And sometimes leadership requires humanity that goes beyond the rulebook.

One night early in lockdown I was called about a situation involving a deceased patient and his distressed community seeking to fulfil their cultural and religious obligations. The human emotions were raw and immediate: grief, fear, confusion, and a deep need to honour someone properly. But the lockdown rules were also clear, strict, and not easily adapted in the moment. That was the tension: human need on one side, national constraints on the other. The issue was not simply compliance; it was dignity.

The path through this turned out to be one of respectful engagement, which was to bring people together, to authentically acknowledge their grief, to commit to meeting their cultural needs as far as possible, and to ask for reciprocity which was to ask the community to respect that we were operating under national constraints. The situation de-escalated, and the family was supported.

The lesson I learned, and share here with governors, is not the details of that incident. It is that

- Rules matter, but dignity matters too.
- In complex environments, the human condition will always show up. Plan for it.
- Connection is not "soft;" it is operationally decisive.

People will do extraordinary things under pressure when they feel seen, told the truth, and treated with respect.

Manaiakalani and how a community-led approach can mobilise extraordinary investment

The third story is about Manaiakalani, and this has been one of the most meaningful governance commitments of my later life.

I was drawn into it accidentally. At the time I was chairing Housing New Zealand, and I was asked to visit a school in Point England that was “in strife.” I assumed it would be a housing-related conversation. It wasn’t. It was a conversation about education – and this story is about possibility.

I was taken by the hand by a young student and shown what their class could do with digital tools and learning design. It was impressive – not because of technology for its own sake, but because of what it signaled in this child: agency, confidence, and aspiration in youth who were all too often underestimated.

This is when I saw something that changed my view of what communities can do.

It was the students themselves that helped recruit their teacher by creating a video, putting it online, and attracting international interest. This was bold, unconventional, and deeply instructive which showed me that, when you design learning environments that presume capability, children behave like capable people.

The question was: why wasn’t this happening everywhere?

The answer was the need for resourcing and infrastructure.

So, we built a model that was practical and community-anchored. Where families with limited resources and that were already paying standard school costs could contribute a regular small amount to enable their child access to learning devices and connectivity. To make the model affordable, it needed to be supported by partnerships.

The system wasn’t magic. It was disciplined, scalable, and grounded in the belief that low-decile communities deserve the same tools and opportunities as anyone else.

Over 15 years, Manaiakalani has mobilised approximately \$80 million to support learning outcomes. That level of investment doesn’t happen because of one charismatic pitch. It happens because of trust compounds.

And trust is built the same way in every sector:

- Tell the truth – especially when things are hard.
- Use data and evidence to show what is working and what is not.
- Hold your kaupapa steady.
- Treat people with decency.
- Be transparent about tradeoffs and mistakes.

People will back you when they believe you are competent and honest – and when they can see outcomes.

“People will back you when they believe you are honest and competent – and when they can see outcomes”

Most recently, my view has been that we must create an enduring funding base – a perpetuity or foundation fund – so that children in low-income communities are not dependent on unpredictable cycles of goodwill or changing government priorities. If we are serious about intergenerational equity, then long-term mechanisms matter.

And we need to name the national opportunity plainly. If we educate Māori and Pacific learners effectively and at scale, we change New Zealand's future. We reduce pressure across health, justice, welfare, and productivity. This is not charity. It is nation-building.

Across these three stories – Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, pandemic leadership, and Manaiakalani, there is a common theme of bicultural confidence, truth and decency.

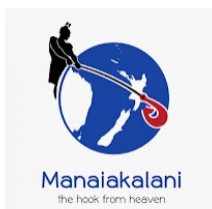
When we accept and practice biculturalism with integrity, we become more capable. When we tell the truth and lead with decency, people will walk a long way with us. When we invest in our own people – especially those most excluded – we lift the country.

And one final point for governors: We cannot say “we can’t.” We have to say, “we will,” and then do the work. Not recklessly. Not naïvely. But with courage, design discipline, and humility to learn.

Kua mutu aku kōrero. I've taken enough of your time.

Pat Snedden

Executive Chair – Manaiakalani Education Trust



www.manaiakalani.org/home



Acknowledgement

The Governance for Social Impact course was designed by **Centre for Social Impact** Australia and hosted by the JBWere New Zealand Philanthropic Services team in Auckland.



About JBWere Philanthropic Services

JBWere provides investment advisory, research, and wealth management services to a broad and diverse client base across Aotearoa New Zealand. This includes private wealth holders, charities, tangata whenua, local government, family offices, financial institutions, and other for-purpose clients.

We are the leading provider of philanthropic, governance, strategy, and investment advice to the for-purpose sector. These organisations have entrusted us with more than \$7 billion of their financial assets.

Our Philanthropic Services New Zealand team brings more than 85 years of combined for purpose experience. This includes leading charities, conducting sector research, serving as trustees, and working and volunteering in communities across the country. We also share a long-standing strategic partnership with JBWere Australia and its acclaimed Philanthropic Services team.

Last year, JBWere released The JBWere NZ Bequest Report 2025. This follows The JBWere NZ Corporate Support Report 2022 and earlier reports in the JBWere NZ Cause and Support series. Together, these reports provide practical sector data to support decision making by our clients and the wider for purpose community.

We support private clients to move from reactive giving to a more deliberate approach. This means building a clear portfolio of philanthropic commitments while retaining space to respond to new opportunities when it matters.

We also work alongside charities and other for purpose organisations as they steward capital to sustain operations and advance their kaupapa. We recognise the responsibility that comes with intergenerational resources and long-term mission delivery. Our investment solutions focus on income stability, capital protection, and alignment with beliefs and values. Each portfolio is shaped around the purpose it serves.

Being a trusted partner to the sector goes beyond investment management. We provide strategic advice, governance support, and fundraising capability building. This includes initiatives such as our recent Gift-in-Wills masterclasses for fundraising charities and the Harvard supported Social Leadership Programme. We also use our networks to make introductions that can help our for-purpose clients unlock progress on their challenges and priorities.

If you would like to discuss our Philanthropic Services expertise and how we can work with you, please contact your JBWere Adviser or a member of our Philanthropic Services team.

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