

***How do you see our organisation currently,  
and are we moving in the right direction?***

An essay written as part of grading  
requirements from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Dan.

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## Introduction

I find the question asked to be quite philosophical, and what I mean by this is that it's not really a question that can be answered with a black and white answer. After reflecting on the question, I believe that nobody really knows if they are heading in the right direction.

I feel that the best we can do is to look at the past and see what has happened, consider the decisions made and see what impact they have had on our current situation, and then try to decide on where we think we want to go and plan as best as we can for the future.

*"You Can't Really Know Where You Are Going Until You Know Where You Have Been" - Maya Angelou (ref 1)*

## How do you see our organisation currently

When I first started Taekwon-Do as a teenager some 36 years ago, my instructor was a relatively new black belt himself, but it wasn't the rank that intrigued me, it was his inspiring enthusiasm and friendliness that made me want to join the club. I remember the energy we had for training, camaraderie and being involved in demonstrations and other events. Our club would often get together after a class or event and discuss with great excitement and in detail all the aspects of what we had learnt and done. These gatherings appeared quite often to be spur of the moment events, most likely because I wasn't aware of all the work done behind the scenes.

When I look back it feels that a lot of what made the organisation strong was the energy and dedication of a few key people who promoted Taekwon-Do to New Zealand mainly as instructors and as organisers of demonstrations in public arenas. To the best of my knowledge there was only one professional instructor in NZ when I started, so I feel all the organisation's main driving force was a lot of like-minded passionate students who volunteered their time for the love of Taekwon-Do. The impression I got was that many of the decisions made weren't at meetings but rather instructors and organisers sitting around a coffee table and coming up with ideas.

As we have progressed over the years, there has been much work done to put structure in the organisation. Committees were created with various key people and with the Board structure in place there is a focus on the future of Taekwon-Do in New Zealand. I feel we have also responded quite well to the technological and societal changes in the last 30 + years

The following are a few areas in which I believe the organisation is quite strong:

**Communication:** In the early years a physical newsletter with details of upcoming events, prepared by the instructor, would be handed out at class. Over the years as emailing and social media has become more readily available to all students, communication has become a lot better. We have the benefit of things like Facebook and Websites to send out information, gather event registrations and even share documents and videos. We are also able to hold meetings online which can be timed to be more convenient for most attendees and recorded if required for future reference. With the recent changes prompted by Covid-19 and being unable to be in the classroom, there is more and more quality material available online.

**Documents:** Although I'm not aware of any of the earlier documents the ones that have been produced and are available today cover many of the aspects that should be covered by all sports organisations (or

any organisation). There is also a good selection of other documents available on the website such as Technical and Rules documents with a vast amount of knowledge and experience in them.

Since 1990, those grading to black belt have been asked to write essays and thesis. I have to admit that I have always found this to be one of the hardest parts of the grading requirements, I often ask myself “Why would anyone be interested in my opinion?”, but I have also read a few of the essays and enjoy the thoughts and opinions of others that have submitted documents. Publishing these documents to the website to allow sharing of knowledge is a huge benefit to the organisation and its students .... in my opinion.

**Events, National or Regional:** From 2008 to 2023 I took on the opportunity of being the main organiser at the five national camps. I believe that camps promote the two best elements of the organisation, the love of Taekwon-Do and friendships, old and new.

With a national membership of approximately 3000 it was surprising that we only had an average of 140 students at each camp. By comparison, the Wellington Region Camp in 2013 had 75 people, not bad for only one region. It is easy to say that people travelled less distance and incurred less costs but I wonder if students actually prefer more intimate events.

Likewise with seminars, are we better to have more of the larger seminars in one venue such as the International Instructor Course (IIC) or many throughout the country such as the Instructor Update Course (IUC). I always found that the smaller seminars offer more interaction, opportunities for questions and chances for corrective feedback.

Regardless of which style of event is best I feel that the organisation does a tremendous job of offering a huge variety for all students.

**Hard work and Rewards:** Taekwon-Do is very physical and that aspect alone would benefit any student, however the organisation in New Zealand offers much more than just access to a sport. One of the elements that I encountered when I first started Taekwon-Do and is still evident today is that students all have trying to be a better person on their mind. *In Taekwon-Do a heavy emphasis is placed on moral culture, for it not only promotes a healthy body and keen mind but good sportsmanship and the perfection of moral behavior.*(ref 2)

After years the moral culture is something that I have seen develop in many of the growing students. I have no idea how many times I have seen shy and timid students walk into a do jang only to become some months later a confident strong fighter, not only in their physical aspects but in the personal lives as well. It has always been amazing to see fellow students that I have trained with go forward and become happy healthy adults, some travelling, some getting married and many having successful careers.

## Are we moving in the right direction

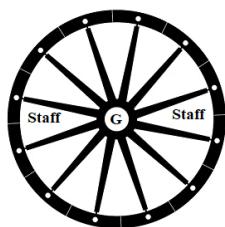
As mentioned in the introduction, if we don't know where we are going its hard to know if we are heading in the right direction. I am not aware of all the goals that the Organisation has set other than those that have been described in the Strategic plan 2022-2025 (ref 3) and this plan appears to be very much in its infancy albeit a great starting point.

To try and address this part of the question I will recall an example from my work career.

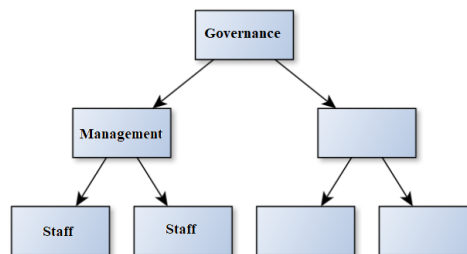
In 2009 I started working for Gareth Morgan Investments, it comprised of 3 main components one of which was Gareth Morgan KiwiSaver, which started in 2007. The company had about 30 staff and was mainly run by a group that had been in the company soon after its inception in 2000.

As I got to know the company, I realised how young it was and found that the business had been started and driven from a kitchen table, with staff working at Gareth's home. Once it had grown a bit, office's were secured and the company began to grow (this was when I arrived). One of the first things I noticed when I started was a quote that was written in large letters along the top of one of the office walls "Don't lose the bloody stuff". As simple and as raw as it was, it was a reflection of what was trying to be achieved, invest the customers money, and " don't lose it", we knew what the goal was.

Unknown to many, behind the scenes around late 2010, Gareth had decided to step back and sell the Company. One of the main reason's that was cited for this was that he had realised that the company was being managed in a Bicycle wheel style where he was the hub or the centre of the wheel and all staff and departments who were the spokes of the wheel went to him for answers, also he had input into all aspects of the business. This essentially meant he WAS the business, it was time consuming for Gareth and becoming detrimental to the success of the company, a more traditional top down approach was required.



Wheel structure



Top down structure

Gareth also he wanted his name back and decided that in the end selling the company to Kiwibank (a fully owned NZ company ) would be better for the business and for the members. Of course it wasn't long until Gareth Morgan KiwiSaver was rebranded to Kiwi Wealth, and in 2012 Gareth Morgans name was removed from the company.

As a software developer and staff member of the newly acquired company I had concerns that staff from the parent company would come in and take over, there had after all been a lot of dedication, passion and energy invested by staff into the company, and for some time I was happy to see that it remained business as usual.

Eventually as would be expected things started to change, first new staff were hired to start new initiatives and soon after we started replacing legacy software. The company grew not only in staff (up to about 200)

but in member size. Projects were started, initiatives created and the business disrupted. Often we would get in contractors to do fast development and when they left so did all the knowledge that they had.

Despite all the changes in the business process and developed software, the KiwiSaver Members really didn't notice much, for them Kiwi Wealth continued to be a solid option for their KiwiSaver.

Around 2019, software was being put into the Cloud at what appeared to be a large cost in time and money to the company, this was often outsourced which took a lot of the work from the long-time staff that had been invested in the business for many years. This was also the year (after 10 years working at Kiwi Wealth) that I left to start a new job.

In 2022 Kiwi Wealth was again sold, this time to Fisher Funds. I had the opportunity to catch up with some staff who had remained after I left and the rumour was that the first thing Fisher Funds was going to do was rebuild the software and remove much of it from the Cloud, I also heard that 90% of the original staff had left the business. It seemed that what was once a much-loved family business had become a cog in a corporate wheel.

So how does this relate to the essay question asked?

The International Taekwon-Do organisation and its success in growth, is very similar as I see it, to the start-up kitchen table business where a small group of dedicated and passionate people would have put in a lot of work. It also seems that at some stage these people decided that a formal structure was required and in 1981 International Taekwon-Do Foundation (NZ) inc was formed, essentially the first recognised branding.

What also seems similar, is as the organisation has grown and Instructors and students have progressed, it was no longer viable for a handful of people to do everything and various committees were created to have a better structure within the organisation. In more recent years, we have appointed boards members and strategic plans. This is about where the similarities cease because this is where I see that Kiwi Wealth has surpassed the organisation in its journey.

There are probably a few lessons we can learn from the Kiwi Wealth example; the following are the two that come to mind ones:

**Fail Fast Fix Fast:** When the Kiwibank projects team got more involved with the software development they adopted a philosophy of fail fast. The main idea of fail fast is to take the stigma away from making mistakes, the more mistakes that are made the faster lessons are learned. Small incremental changes are made and if something doesn't work out it is reversed and something else tried. This means that there is a faster approach to success. I feel that as an organisation we could progress a lot faster if we try different approach to things a lot more frequently. An example of this could be changing the format of each tournament to see which one is more efficient. A change that has been was when the organisation looked at the beep test and changed it back to the 2.4 km run, the reason that I was given is that the beep test was a lot harder on ankles when changing direction than the run.

**Take care of the people:** It is common in business that staff feel valued if they understand their personal contribution to the business and one of the quickest ways to inhibit a software developers contribution is to hire a contractor in to do their work. Contractors are also notoriously well known for leaving at the end of the contract with all the IP (Intellectual Property), leaving the full-time staff unsure of how to support the change or what value they have in the business. In the Kiwibank scenario the people aspect was more evident in the sale to Fisher Funds as approximately 90% of the staff lost their jobs. I believe that we need to be careful as an organisation that further change in the structure doesn't cause the people that

have dedicated so much volunteer time to feel undervalued. Fortunately, I see no evidence of this happening at this stage in the organisation.

I see the organisation on a precipice, and whether that is a good thing depends on how we go forward, full of change, opportunity and growth driven by keen people with a love of Taekwon-Do or destructive, slowly decaying, having a great organisation turned into a money making machine, where those that make decisions only focus on the growth of the organisation and not the people within it.

I have been privileged to be a part of an organisation that thus far has helped so many people develop and grow and become better people and I am hoping that it will continue to do so in the future.

## References

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