

Garry Mason
Above and Beyond

GARRY MASON

Above and beyond

This individual has gone 'above and beyond' their stated duties to deliver added service to their community or council. This will be work for which they have not received additional remuneration and is most likely self-generated, showing genuine initiative for the benefit of the organisation and, ultimately, its customers.



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Introduction and Overview

Garry Mason is Douglas Shire Council's (DSC) Team Leader of Information Communication Technology (ICT). In 2014 DSC de-amalgamated, requiring ICT systems to be designed and implemented, which normally takes up to 2 years. Due to the urgency Garry and team achieved this in 3 months.

While IT systems were up and running in a short time, ongoing challenges included poor connectivity, frequent dropouts, different platforms, and duplicate environments. Transitioning between systems was problematic and frustrating, reducing staff productivity.

Garry's vision was to rework the ICT platform, removing the systems from the Cloud based platform, managed by an external vendor, to an 'in-house' platform, with most applications managed by the ICT Team. Garry's vision extended to constructing a cloud-based duplication of the in-house system for the Business Continuity Plan, in times of disaster or other events. Whilst on the surface, this plan seemed illogical to some, and opposite to what other Councils were doing, Garry was certain the outcome would be positive.

Extensive project planning, stakeholder consultation and testing were conducted by Garry's team to mitigate risks and obstacles, but a curve ball was thrown in 2020.

COVID-19 required staff to move offsite within days with the ICT Team working day and night to design and implement predominantly working from home arrangements and negotiating with staff access via personal equipment where possible. Even Council's Frontline customer service staff were set up to work from home with incoming lines assigned to mobile phones and cascaded. Despite the challenges around colleagues' varying levels of ICT skills, range of personal equipment, and assorted roles, the transition was swift and seamless, testament to Garry's exemplary IT management and leadership.

Now, back to the ICT platform change project! Service provider notification that the host platform would be discontinued in three months added extra pressure with the migration date now inflexible and sooner than planned. Without time to conduct all testing prior to migration Garry and the Team weighed up risks, triaging critical testing and developing strategies to mitigate risks on untested actions.

The system went live November 2020. Again, the transition was swift and seamless. All new information is stored in one, correct place, speed has dramatically improved and the business continuity plan cloud-based replica is being finalised. Garry renegotiated network provisions with drastically improved speed at a reduced price, saving money. Despite minor teething issues the project achieved the positive outcomes Garry originally envisaged!

Category Alignment

Garry exemplifies Above and Beyond, with the primary aim of always providing exemplary customer service, echoed by the ICT Team. Garry is altruistic in a very unassuming manner, always calm, professional, and pleasant to deal with.

Despite suffering a great deal of pain due to an ongoing medical condition, Garry remains calm, professional, kind, caring and helpful.

Garry is on call 24/7 however does not ask for any special payment or conditions as compensation. Garry has often been called out due to weather events, power issues, system failures, attending at all hours of the night to rectify the situation so other staff are not affected. Garry is usually last to leave at night and often found immersed in strategy work on a Sunday in the office, due to not having a spare moment to dedicate to this space during working hours.

Garry consults with the Local Disaster Coordination Centre about setting up the centre in case of activation, considers the Disaster Team in terms of new ICT and desk layouts and provides additional support to the Shelter Team in terms of ICT resources.

Garry deep cleanses the staff lunchroom from time to time and is even proficient in trouble shooting our generator issues! Nothing is too much trouble; always lending a hand where needed, even driving to staff member's homes after hours to set up their working from home environment.

During COVID-19 Garry remained in the office, despite concerns of being at risk. Garry put the needs of other staff and the business needs of Council ahead of his own personal wellbeing, to ensure exemplary customer service.

Garry and the ICT team doubled down during 2020 faced with COVID-19 pressures to urgently move all staff offsite (3 days), whilst in the middle of the major ICT system platform migration. Garry ensured support for all council members with new work from home and virtual work requirements related to MS Teams and virtual desktops.

On top of this, the major project was unable to be deferred and in fact (in a cruel twist of events) had to be fast-tracked due to the vendor announcing removal of the cloud hosting service. Despite these hurdles raising anxiety to an all-time high, the ICT team banded together, remained resilient and tackled the challenge head on. They triaged the most urgent tasks and worked day, night, and weekend to ensure all risks were mitigated.

Impact/Outcome

The project to change Council's ICT environment from its current cloud-hosting model to an "on premises" model went live 20 November 2020. This date was imposed as the cloud hosting provider unexpectedly announced the closure of the datacentre where Council's systems were hosted. This cut short the time available to refine systems configurations, scope and re-apply email security and generally test.

The day after Go-Live, all systems were available to be used and generally there was no disruption to Council's function or staff productivity. This outcome was well received by colleagues and generally exceeded expectations.

For such a large change, where every system was re-built from scratch and implemented in a "big bang" fashion, this was a great reflection of the effort the IT Team and its service partners put in to "get it right". The transition was swift, successful, and seamless. There were only very minimal issues for the team to iron out and the Council staff hit the ground running as if nothing had occurred.

There were, many positive outcomes as Garry had envisaged. All new information is now stored in the one place (the right place), speed has dramatically improved and the business continuity plan cloud-based replica is being finalised. In addition to this, Garry renegotiated our network provisions and drastically improved the speed of the network for a far cheaper price!

The three remaining deliverables; a Cloud Hosted Disaster Environment, Redesign of the remote access infrastructure (for the Post COVID / work from home world) and additional security measures, will be worked on during the next six months.

A recent mains power outage and failure of the Auto-Start Generator in the Administration building provided a test for the upgraded building UPS (uninterruptable power supply / big set of batteries). The UPS now provides ample time to perform an orderly shutdown of the computer room, including all the new server equipment and thus avoid data corruption / loss. A future enhancement is planned, which will trigger automatic shutdown of all servers, should the generator not start, and the UPS approaches low battery status.

A project to refresh Council's inter-office network (moving to newer technologies and services, at reduced cost and with great bandwidth) is currently underway. In the next period, the main operational project is a major upgrade to Council's Enterprise Software Suite (which is used by all areas within Council).

Transferability

The project involved removing the Council Administrative systems from the Cloud based platform, managed by an external vendor, to an 'in-house' platform, with most applications to be managed internally by the ICT Team. Further to this, was a plan to construct a cloud-based duplication of the in-house system for the Business Continuity Plan, in times of disaster or other events.

Whilst on the surface, this plan seemed illogical to some and was the opposite to what other Councils were doing, Garry was certain the outcome would be positive for all users. The outcome was in fact far more successful than imagined due to the care and diligence taken by the ICT Team in preparing for the change. Post transition, all staff were, for once, working on the same platform and the speed increased dramatically. There was an easy transition for all staff due to training provided in the lead up to the transition. Documentation was now easily recorded in the records maintenance system. The CEO was the first into the office to test the system and he was astounded to find he had no issues at all. In fact, he was delighted at the increase in speed and the 'look and feel' of the new platform.

Many remote Councils experience the same challenges with connectivity, systems on varying platforms and poor vendor service, these issues are prevalent with Local Council systems in general. The decision to move systems out of the cloud and managed in-house cannot be taken lightly. No longer will the cloud-based vendor be blamed for poor service and delays, the scrutiny will land squarely on the ICT Team for those applications now managed internally. If other Councils have an ICT Team of the calibre of Douglas Shire Council, willing to step up to the challenge and back themselves as superior customer service providers, I'd highly recommend proceeding down this path.

Supporting information

Extract from Douglas Shire Council FYI publication:

ICT (Information & Communications Technology) Service Update

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The day after Go-Live, all systems were available to be used and generally there was no disruption to Council's function or people's productivity. This outcome was well received by staff and generally exceeded expectations.

For such a large change, where every system was rebuilt from scratch and implemented in a "big bang" fashion, this was a great reflection of the effort the IT Team and its service partners put in to "get it right".

Reference from Douglas Shire Council Procurement Administration Council Officer:

Garry and all the Team go above and beyond. The lead times with assistance is far the best I have experienced within an organisation and I have worked for some large organisations both here and the UK.

Garry is always willing to help and does go out of his way as he did during COVID to assist with the setup of my workstation at home and promptly attended to the issues that followed.

He also pays such attention to detail.

The transition from our old system to the current went so smoothy – even for me! This would have been down to Garry's expert planning and leadership skills.

Reference from Mayor & Councillor Support Officer:

'When Erica and I did a secondment in WH&S in 2015/16 we were located in the Donga in the back carpark. Budgets were tight and spare desks were unheard of, yet Garry lent us 2 trestle tables from his private home so that we had something to put our computer on and work from for 6 months!

That gesture really fits into the "above and beyond" category 😊😊😊'

Reference from Contracts Administrator, Project Management Office:

I think that Garry's calmness and dedication in the face of "incoming fire" during the very rapid transition to the system change was exemplary. He didn't kill anyone!! it was a great effort for him and his team.

Garry leads by example in my mind, and Mark and Tristan are a credit to Garry's leadership.

Reference from Manager, Project Management Office:

I find Garry’s approach to the problem, the solution, and the justification to always be well considered, thoughtful and as a manager, this gives me confidence that the recommended approach is the best one available.

Reference from Douglas Shire Council Manager Infrastructure:

From my first day with the organisation Garry’s excellent service made me feel very welcome. He helped me so much in ensuring I was set up with all my IT needs, even the special requests. In the first couple of weeks, I was turning up at his office unplanned, almost every day, with various IT issues. No matter how busy he was when I approached, he always took the time to help me out and somehow fixed the problem! Garry’s fantastic attitude and high level of service has continued without fail!!!

Reference from Douglas Shire Council Coordinator Public Spaces:

Gary was integral when our organisation wanted to improve staff morale. During a series of workshops (focus on values) Gary displayed great leadership qualities with a strong focus on communication and continuous improvement.

Reference from Douglas Shire Council Coordinator Civil Operations:

Garry is a legend. Garry provides great customer service to the Infrastructure Dept.

Below is a classic example of a kind gesture Garry performed for all the DSC Admin staff in recent times – complete with the Greensleaves music as they went around the office:

(Free) Ice Cream Trolley doing the Admin Building

 Garry F Mason
Required Tm.Mossman Admin Building
Please respond.
This appointment conflicts with another one on your calendar.

Friday, 12 February 2021 3:00 PM-3:15 PM

When you here Greensleaves this afternoon (assuming you are in the Admin Building or Donga)...

I will be doing the rounds with the Goodies Trolley, Pls have something in return for a Smile.

- Ice Creams
- Chocolates
- Lollies

https://youtu.be/52G62_e7VKg





Social Media Release

AN IT leader working for Douglas Shire Council, located in Far North Queensland, is in the running for an LGMA award in the 'Above and Beyond' category.

Team Leader of Information Communication Technology (ICT), Garry Mason, overcame a swag of challenges during COVID-19 to completely transform the organisation's ICT systems.

Garry has shown tremendous resilience and enterprise over the years to overcome even the most challenging circumstances.

In 2014 when DSC de-amalgamated, Council required its ICT systems to be designed and implemented, which can normally take up to 2 years.

Due to the urgency, Garry and his team achieved this in 3 months.

While IT systems were up and running in a short time, ongoing challenges included poor connectivity, frequent dropouts, different platforms and duplicate environments. Transitioning between systems was problematic and frustrating, reducing staff productivity.

Fast-forward seven years, Garry's vision to rework the ICT platform, remove the systems from the Cloud-based platform, managed by an external vendor, to an 'in-house' platform, and take on most applications in his team has been realised.

Extensive project planning, stakeholder consultation and testing were conducted by Garry's team to mitigate risks and obstacles, but a curve ball was thrown in 2020.

Despite the challenges around colleagues' varying levels of ICT skills, range of personal equipment, and assorted roles, the transition to working from home and to a new in-house platform was swift and seamless, testament to Garry's exemplary IT management and leadership.

FOR ANY ENQUIRIES ON THIS NOMINATION PLEASE CONTACT:



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