

## Growth: The Case for and against

*"Jobs and growth". "If you are not growing, then you are going backwards". "We need to grow and move forward".*

One may often hear rhetoric like this in the national media. This month's Chair Chat will focus on the case for and against organisational growth within the disability services sector.

### **The case for:**

There is a need for some growth to meet the normal cost of living increases. The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) uses a parameter of an inflation range of between two to three percent before they act, by either increasing or decreasing the official interest rate. The RBA Board's decision, announced on the first Tuesday of each month, acts as a general guide to stimulate either an expansion or contraction within the Australian economy.

This methodology has proved successful, as Australia has recorded the longest period of continuous economic growth of any nation in recorded history. Many Australians may not appreciate this fact, other than those who travel overseas and observe the ongoing implications of the Global Financial Crisis that commenced in late 2007. Therefore, some growth is required to match the general cost of living increases.

So it is for an organisation like Nulsen Disability Services. Nulsen considers some growth will always be essential, at least to match the general increases in cost of living so that we can maintain the same quality and quantity of services as is currently provided.

Nulsen Disability Services also needs to consider the expansion of mission and purpose. It is estimated that an additional 10,000 people living with disabilities in WA will seek services over the next three to four years. In an environment where disability services are growing rapidly, some growth in Nulsen will be necessary to meet some of this pent-up customer demand. People living with disabilities will continue to require high quality services, while remembering there will be no organisational mission without a margin.

### **The case against:**

If one accepts that there is the need for some growth, how much growth is too much? This is in reality the crucial question.

In order to grow services in quantity and quality at a reasonable cost there are a number of infrastructure issues to address. Namely, the recruitment and selection of good quality staff, the training of all staff, their ongoing supervision, the provision of sufficient high quality housing combined with the required equipment and assistive technology. All of these issues, along with many others need to grow efficiently, in balance and in synchrony with the growth of the required services.

Finally, what will be the impact on the culture of the organisation? If a medium size organisation doubles in size, will it remain the same organisation? What are the information, technology and

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communication issues that will need to be continuously addressed? How will the mission, purpose and positive aspects of organisational culture be maintained and enhanced?

The Board and the senior management of Nulsen Disability Services are currently grappling with these very issues. Your input and support will be sought to ensure we are able to make the best well informed decisions to guide the organisation into a stimulating and somewhat turbulent future.

Finally, I will leave you with the words of the most recent Noble Laureate in Literature, Bob Dylan: *"If you are not busy being born, you are busy dying"*. To meet the many and varied challenges of our current and future situation, it may require a complete rebirth.



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Professor David Gilchrist is a chartered accountant and a historian. He holds a PhD in economics from the University of Notre Dame Australia and is currently a professor of accounting at the University of Western Australia. Over his 25-year career, David has held many senior roles in the not-for-profit, commercial and public sectors. He has taught at several universities across the globe, sits as Chairman on multiple boards and has published several key national reports. A few of his achievements include; working as the Assistant Auditor General for Western Australia, and the Associate Dean of the School of Business, University of Notre Dame Australia. As a Chairman to Nulsen Disability Services, and the Kimberley Individual and Family Support Association. Also producing the "Australian Charities 2013" and the "Australian National Costing and Pricing Framework" issued jointly with National Disability Services. He is widely published as an academic and a journalist. [See David's full profile here.](#)