



**EQUITY IN AOTEAROA NEW  
ZEALAND'S PUBLIC SERVICE.**

**THE ROLE OF PASIFIKA  
EMPLOYEE NETWORKS**

**PACIFIC @ MASSEY CONFERENCE**

**1-3 DECEMBER 2021**

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PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES
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# • 1 PACIFIC PEOPLE IN NEW ZEALAND AND THE LABOUR FORCE

- Pacific labour arrives in Aotearoa in 1870
- 1970s economic downturn and Dawn Raids
- changes to New Zealand's immigration policy
- growth in Pacific population of 29% from 2013-2018, compared with 10% for the overall population
  - 46% born overseas and in New Zealand for 20 years +
  - majority of New Zealand-born Pasifika are under 15 years old
- Pacific employment rate is 61% (NZ average is 67.5%)
  - Pacific working-age population is growing fast
  - manufacturing, healthcare and social assistance services, wholesale and retail and other business services





- **2 PACIFIC PEOPLE IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE**

- New Zealand's increasingly diverse workforce
- Pacific people formed 6.1% of the overall labour force in 2018, compared with Europeans who formed 69.2%
- Pacific people formed 9.1% of public service workers in 2018
  - under-represented in the top three tiers of public service management
  - over-represented in lower level, lower income roles
  - often overlooked for upskilling opportunities and promotions
  - Pacific workers often fear retribution for raising their employment concerns
  - situation is amplified for Pacific women workers
  - Pacific women have the largest pay gap when compared to NZ European men




- 3 PACIFIC PEOPLE AND GENDER EQUITY IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

- situation is amplified for Pacific women workers
  - pay gap is highest between Pacific women and NZ European men and has hardly changed over the last decade
  - women are assuming more senior positions but this is not the case with Pacific women
  - this inequity impacts on Pacific communities and families (e.g. in terms of housing affordability, access to quality health care)
- recently: supportive context for equity development (e.g. *Public Service Act 2020*, new Ministry for Ethnic Minorities)



- **4 PACIFIC EMPLOYEE NETWORKS**

- family-friendly workplace valued by many employers in New Zealand but many employees know little about their organisations' formal policies and management activities around equity and diversity (Parker et al., 2017)
  - can impact particularly on the application of Pacific employees' communal values in the workplace
  - employee-led networks form around common interests, and can be formal or informal in nature
    - many public service agencies have networks that reflect diversity
    - sector-level, union, and public agency-level networks
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- **4 PACIFIC EMPLOYEE NETWORKS (CONT'D)**

- most office-holders in formal Pacific employee networks are women
- network roles concern:
  - bringing Pacific staff together to connect and support one another
  - talanoa, create a community atmosphere among members
  - creating a sense of belonging and relationship building
  - providing a safe space
  - providing a social space
  - platform for mentoring young Pacific employees
  - unions networks also:
    - pursuing collective interests (via unions) to support Pacific members
    - encouraging involvement of Pacific people in union activities and decision making



- **4 PACIFIC EMPLOYEE NETWORKS (CONT'D)**

- relative lack of formality of Pacific networks in organisations
  - may reflect number of Pacific workers and their geographical locations
  - makes it challenging to get them together virtually or face-to-face though the latter is vital in Pacific culture
- mostly administered by Pacific employees for social purposes
- even in informal settings, talanoa can still occur and, with support, matters can be channelled upwards
- gap in the literature on Pacific networks and gender



## • 5 STUDY METHODOLOGY

- Massey Strategic Innovation Research Fund project
- overall study aim: understanding managers' role in progressing equity in the New Zealand public service
- specific to this part of the study: the role of employee networks as a tool for managers and others' equity efforts
  - Pacific employee networks
  - these networks' concern with the intersection between Pacific and gender interests
- transdisciplinary study – Jan 2020 to Nov 2021
  - 71 semi-structured interviews and talanoa with sector experts, and staff and managers from three anonymised public service agencies
  - qualitative thematic content analysis of interview transcripts
  - co-created coding schema





- **6 FINDINGS -**

- different Pacific network development across agencies:
  - Pacific employee networks identified in two public service agencies
  - in the other agency, a number of Pacific staff were reported to gravitate to other agency networks including its LGBT network
- relative to other networks, Pacific networks often more recent, smaller, less structured, and least 'developed' though one agency's informants spoke most on their Pacific network, reflecting higher numbers of Pacific staff and network activity
- emergence of networks due to staff agency and HR's diversity and inclusion strategy, latter driven by PSC's 5 priority areas, including setting up employee-led networks in agencies

- **6 FINDINGS (CONT'D)**

- roles of Pacific employee networks:

- social hub
- safe space for raising concerns and Pacific viewpoints to agency leaders and mainstream
- space within agency for Pacific input, ideas generation and activity
- repository for managers and teams to access advice and information about Pacific views and interests
- provide opportunities for empowerment of individual Pasifika
- create a sense of belonging to the agency for Pacific workers

- similar to, but also go beyond, network roles cited in the literature





- 6 FINDINGS (CONT'D)

- key challenges

- current (lack of) network organisation
- internal gender equity concerns
- inadequate resourcing and support
- time needed to have an impact
- geographical location of employees
- constraints on staff time to engage in network
- need for active management support
- inadequate profiling
- need for ongoing and greater leadership support
- protection of existing network initiatives
- Covid-triggered organisational changes

- (plain font – challenges for two agencies with Pacific networks; underlined - challenges for all three agencies including one agency without a network)

## • 6 FINDINGS (CONT'D)

- potential goals/interests for the Pacific networks:
  - intersectionality (particularly around gender), and diversity
  - enabling more Pacific voices on organisational matters
  - encouraging (Pacific cultural) inclusion
- achieving an intersectional approach – ways forward?
  - in non-network agency:
    - Pacific staff engage with other staff networks
    - recalibrate emphasis on technical and cultural/soft skills at work
  - in the 2 agencies with Pacific networks:
    - Pacific network's engagement with other staff networks
    - Pacific network's engagement with external networks
    - mainstream Pacific interests (e.g. Pacific gender pay gaps)
    - recalibrate emphasis on technical and cultural/soft skills at work
    - individual Pacific network women promote Pasifika
    - garner senior leadership support for Pacific women and networks





- **FINDINGS (CONT'D) - VOICES ON AND FROM PACIFIC EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES**

Network development stage

Our women's network ... they've implemented a structure and how they operate ... Their focus is about running events for women and connecting women. The Pasifika group ... - very much led by the group themselves and they'll come up with who they are.

Pākehā woman senior advisor, A2

You've got a group of people [in the Pacific network] ... you might have a better chance of getting issues across the line.

- Pākehā woman support officer, A2

Perceived power of the collective



## ● FINDINGS (CONT'D) - VOICES ON AND FROM PACIFIC EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES

[Senior leaders] can listen and understand that, from a Pasifika perspective, they feel it's disrespectful to voice their ... dissatisfaction. So, there needs to be some kind of medium where we can open up those gates.

- Pacific women senior manager, A3

We're also looking at doing some workshops about coaching and mentoring ... People in our network have so much potential to add value to their teams but perhaps, to others, not having the skills or ... information about how they could be using not only their experience but their own natural skillset

- Pacific woman advisor, A2

Recognising culturally-informed ways of working





- **FINDINGS (CONT'D) - VOICES ON AND FROM PACIFIC EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES**

Utility of networks for managers' equity and wider efforts

[Managers] can probably get a lot more out of working more closely with the [Pacific] network ... They've done the hard yards and pulling their people together, and giving them an identity and voice ... It gives us a great platform.

- Pākehā woman principal advisor,  
A2

Unless you are in those groupings you don't really know how people are feeling.

- Pākehā woman ER manager,  
A1

Utility of networks for staff





- **FINDINGS (CONT'D) - VOICES ON AND FROM PACIFIC EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES**

It's not a perfect model and we're still finding our way through it.

Pacific woman senior manager, A2

Ongoing network development

Through the Pasifika network, I've had an opportunity to shadow one of the Deputy Director Generals who's a woman ... That was a really empowering experience to be able to see a woman in a very senior position.

- Pacific woman advisor, A2

Empowerment through network membership





- **FINDINGS (CONT'D) - VOICES ON AND FROM PACIFIC EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES**

Equity within the networks

To a certain extent, the Māori and Pasifika network retain that traditional male, hierarchical system that you see in [their] communities. Within that, women are quite active which is what you see socially in [their] communities.

- Pākehā woman principal advisor,  
A2

The Pasifika network ... Say the tokenism is still felt ... We're hearing reports from managers that just don't want to release their people to do anything.

- Pākehā woman manager, A2

Key challenges for networks



## ● FINDINGS (CONT'D) - VOICES ON AND FROM PACIFIC EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES

- Covid has certainly taught us ... how we can branch out a bit more ... and it is something that our networks are continuously thinking about.

- - Man Pacific advisor, A2

There is a PI network and we do have a Pasifika Islander Advisor ... We used to have bi-monthly meetings with the PI network that would draw people in from the whole region ... Our PI advisor would come and talk to us about specific pieces of work ... at those higher levels and engage and get more support.

- Pasifika woman service manager, A3

The nuanced impacts of Covid-19





- **FINDINGS (CONT'D) - VOICES ON AND FROM PACIFIC EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES**

We have Pasifika networks about Pasifika staff ... but I don't actually know that voice of Pasifika is looked to as a default position ... Pasifika gets grouped alongside a lot of our more specific cohorts.

- Senior advisor, A3

The next thing that they're looking to do is ... address diversity issues and [the Pacific network] wants to be in that conversation because we think we've value to add. We're hesitant until we feel like we're informed enough.

- Pacific woman advisor, A2

Future network concerns





- **7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

- little known about Pacific employee networks in NZ's public service, particularly in relation to gender
- findings: even at their nascent stage, networks show differing (equity) starting points, and tailored arrangements → share best principles
- multiple network roles, from social through to increasingly strategic
- looking to engage more with Pacific intersectionality and diversity; gather more info to inform Pacific perspectives; and ensure greater inclusion of Pacific diversity in networks and agencies
- internal and external challenges to networks' evolution but strategies are developing to overcome this - reaching out to develop strength within
- wider sector directives, a new Ministry and regulation → may help pave the way for Pasifika's empowerment in the workplace

**THANK YOU FOR LISTENING**

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**QUESTIONS?**

