

## **Indigenous and boundaryless careers: Cultural boundaries in the careers of Māori academics**

More New Zealand organisations are recognising the importance of diversity and inclusion, with many looking to improve their relationships with Māori. For Universities as public organisations, Te Tiriti o Waitangi creates expectations of establishing relationships with Māori communities, as well as enhancing Māori participation as both students and staff. While most Kiwis would express some understanding of Māori culture and values, there is a lack of knowledge regarding how culture influences Māori in the workplace. This research explored the influence of culture on the career experiences of Māori staff across New Zealand university business schools.

Recent media coverage has shown that universities continue to struggle with improving both their recruitment and treatment of Māori staff (Hurihanganui, & Dunlop, 2020; Tokalau, 2020). While research has shown the problem of underrepresentation of Māori employees (McAllister et al., 2019), this study used interviews to identify how cultural values influence the career choices of Māori academic staff. Additional interviews conducted with non-Maori managerial staff revealed key misunderstandings of Māori culture and Māori staff aspirations that can limit the career progression of Māori academic staff.

A key function of Universities is to serve as a critic and conscience of society. Therefore, the key tasks of academic staff typically include advancing knowledge to improve the world we live in (research); using research to educate future generations of global citizens (teaching); and contributing their time and expertise to a range of projects and priorities in the university and wider society (service). This study demonstrated how Māori staff could excel in teaching, research and service, but that only *some* of these areas were considered examples of 'excellence' from the viewpoint of academic managers. In this study, academic managers were concerned specifically with leading "world-class" universities that produce internationally-recognised research. On the other hand, career choices of Māori staff were driven by two key considerations, their commitment to Māori people, and/or their commitment to abiding by appropriate cultural conduct.

Some examples of commitment to Māori communities was evident through their choice of research and inclusion of Māori perspectives in teaching business. Commitment to cultural conduct meant behaving in ways considered 'tika' (ethical/correct). This could mean taking time to develop meaningful relationships with Māori and ensure the appropriate use of Māori knowledge in the university. As colonisation attempted to sever the connection between Māori and their culture, some Māori are less confident in te reo Māori (language) and tikanga Māori (cultural protocols), causing variations in how this affected their career decisions. Very few participants in this study managed to merge their own priorities with organisational expectations, which could occur through publishing Māori research in highly ranked journals. Many struggled to reconcile the two.

For academic managers, Māori staff were described as valuable to universities in a primarily local and practical sense, rather than as "world-class". For example, supporting the organisation to develop relationships with stakeholders, in particular Māori communities was seen as useful but not considered to be the core business of the university. Further, the lack of understanding of appropriate cultural conduct meant that Māori staff were often poorly resourced in their work, making them reluctant to engage with Māori or in cultural protocols when they were considered tokenistic.

Efforts to enhance diversity and inclusion for Māori in these spaces will be futile if managers continue to lack understanding of the diversity of Māori staff and how cultural protocols regarding appropriate behaviour can influence their experiences and decisions at work. The business school's commercial culture suggests that the experiences of Māori staff in this environment could be similar in many other

organisations where there is an emphasis on competition and excellence and a predominance of non-Māori in leadership roles.

### References:

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