

Reflections

from our multicultural workplace



*The Intercultural Awareness and
Communication programme*

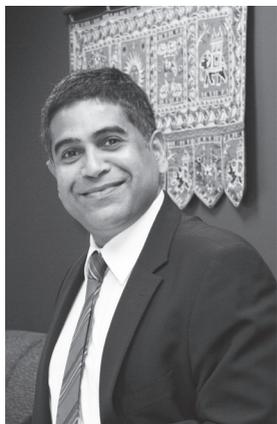


THE OFFICE OF
ethnic affairs
Te Tari Matawaka

New Zealand Government



*Kia ora and welcome to Reflections
from our Multicultural Workplace.*



The Office of Ethnic Affairs (OEA) is committed to helping New Zealand build strong, sustainable communities. Our purpose is to encourage and promote the benefits that ethnic diversity offers New Zealand, by being one of the principal sources of information and advice. We also build strong connections with government and across communities. We acknowledge the status of Māori as tangata whenua and a Treaty of Waitangi partner in this.

Ethnic communities are projected to make up nearly 20 per cent of New Zealand's population in the next decade. The New Zealand workplace is also becoming more diverse. This multicultural workplace presents both opportunities and challenges.

Since 2006 the Office of Ethnic Affairs has been delivering a programme to increase the effectiveness of people working with a diversity of colleagues and clients from a variety of ethnic, cultural and other backgrounds. This booklet shows how the programme has been implemented by organisations in a range of different sectors.

We hope that it will demonstrate the importance of raising intercultural awareness and communication skills and provide ideas on how the programme could be relevant to your organisation.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact us at the Office of Ethnic Affairs (see the back page for contact details). Together we'll help New Zealand grow into a diverse, prosperous society, well into the future.

Mervin Singham

Director of Office of Ethnic Affairs

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Context

New Zealand's changing population

New Zealand's population has become rapidly more ethnically diverse in recent years. Between 2001 and 2006, the percentage of people identifying as Asian increased from 3% to 9%, as Pacific from 5% to 7% and as Māori from 13% to 15%. The Auckland region shows even more significant change, with the Asian population increasing from 6% to 19% between 2001 and 2006.

These demographic changes combined with globalisation will continue to affect the makeup of our workforce. Statistics New Zealand projections indicate that by 2021, about 25% of New Zealand's workforce will have been born overseas, representing one of the most ethnically diverse workforce in the OECD.

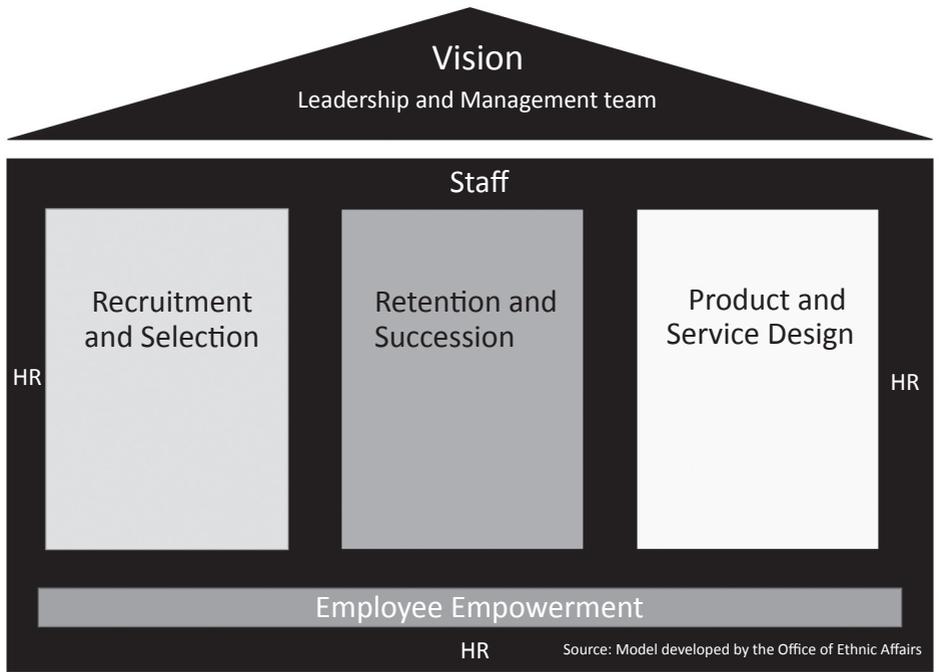
Diverse workplaces

As New Zealand society and workplaces become more diverse, the number of people interacting with people from cultures different from their own is increasing. The Office of Ethnic Affairs has been supporting the development of intercultural skills in the workplace since 2006, when the Intercultural Awareness and Communication (IAC) programme was first developed. The IAC programme seeks to enhance relationships in the workplace, between colleagues, and with customers and stakeholders. It does this by exploring how behaviour can be influenced by culture, and how we can improve our communication with people from different cultural backgrounds.

The work of the Intercultural Advisory team

The Office of Ethnic Affairs has a dedicated team of Intercultural Advisors based in Auckland and Wellington who work with employers, managers, and business leaders to maximise the benefits of diversity in their workplaces.

Ethnic Diversity Management



HR

Source: Model developed by the Office of Ethnic Affairs

The House Model – A model for ethnic diversity management

International research (Robinson and Dechant, 1997; European Commission, 2003; European Commission, 2005) provides evidence of the many potential benefits of diversity in the workplace, which includes:

- a wider pool of candidates to hire from
- responding better to a diverse client base
- maximising transnational links
- adding new skills and behaviour to the talent pool
- bringing new ideas and perspectives to the organisation.

However, to bring out these benefits, ethnic diversity must be managed effectively. This diagram shows what diversity management can look like when managed well within an organisation.

The central idea with this model is that diversity management moves from sitting solely with Human Resources to being a whole-of-organisation approach. Diversity management needs buy-in from the leadership and management team, as well as to be embraced by staff. The process needs to be supported by Human Resources.

The three central pillars reflect the ideas of hiring the best talent, keeping the best staff and utilising their potential to improve products and services. Employees need to be empowered and engaged in order for the organisation to succeed. Our publication *Riding the Wave* provides more information about our work in this area.

Intercultural Awareness and Communication (IAC) programme

The IAC programme is a one-day workshop comprised of four sessions which cover:

- building cultural awareness of ourselves and others
- analysing the communication process and what constitutes effective and ineffective communication
- learning how to communicate more effectively by monitoring our own communication efforts, diagnosing any problems and changing our communication approach as necessary
- reviewing the lessons from the day and implementing them through the intercultural scenario activity.

This workshop encourages individuals to reflect on their own cultural understanding and practices. They then apply the tools learnt back at their workplace.

After each workshop, in order to receive a Certificate of Completion, participants are to submit an 'intercultural scenario' where they apply what they have learnt to an everyday situation in their jobs. This publication brings together some of these scenarios from a range of New Zealand workplaces.

The IAC programme has been accredited with a set of six NZQA unit standards (20 units), which count towards the National Certificate in Public Sector Services or the National Certificate in Business.

Training for Trainers programme

Since 2008, the IAC programme has been delivered in a Training for Trainers format, where the Office of Ethnic Affairs trains organisations' in-house trainers to deliver the programme to their own staff.

Organisations which have formally signed up to deliver the IAC programme are from a wide variety of settings:

- central and local government
- district health boards/public health organisations
- not-for-profit organisations
- education sector
- small to medium-sized enterprises.

Organisations are encouraged to tailor sections of the programme to their own setting, to make it as relevant as possible to their own workplace and the daily work of staff.

While the IAC Training for Trainers programme upskills individuals' intercultural competence, our Riding the Wave programme enhances organisations' competence in managing the benefits that ethnic diversity bring to the workplace.



Education sector

The number of international students coming to New Zealand to study has grown rapidly in recent years. A survey conducted in 2007 showed that people from more than 180 countries were granted permits to study in New Zealand between 2002 and 2007. Figures released by Education New Zealand show 93,500 foreign students studied in the country in 2009 (International Student Blog, 2010). The estimated total value of expenditure by all international students studying in New Zealand was \$1,367 million for the year ended March 2010.

The benefits of attracting international students are not just financial, but include potential improvements in political and economic relations with the students' home countries, improved quality of education through knowledge transfer, and a bigger labour pool should students choose to stay on and work in New Zealand. A report by the University of Waikato recommended "developing intercultural responsibility by promoting greater cultural inclusiveness and intercultural interactions in the classroom, including strategies for more effective communication" (Ho, Li, Cooper and Holmes, 2007).

Kindergarten teachers also report that they are dealing with an increasing diversity of children and parents. This has given rise to various issues, including attitudes to personal space, how children play and expectations from different religious beliefs. The examples that follow are taken from the tertiary and kindergarten sectors.



Example 1 – Tertiary sector

'Cultural perspectives related to gender roles'

I was waiting for my lunch to be cooked at the cafeteria when an international student approached the counter. I watched the student try to describe what he wanted to buy. He ended up clicking his fingers, pointing and looking quite cross. The people serving appeared to be quite nervous about his general manner - which they seemed to perceive as aggressive. Initially I wondered if there was a cultural perspectives related to gender roles as the people behind the counter were all female. As I thought through what was going on I realised that the student was actually showing frustration with being unable to communicate effectively.

To clarify the process and the steps gone through:

Observation - I watched the student trying to communicate.

Postulation - I made an assumption that was not necessarily correct - I assumed the student was being 'bossy' because he was dealing with females.

Reaction - I found myself starting to 'bristle' because of the assumption I had made.

Postulation - I rethought the situation and realised I had misinterpreted the cultural signals. This misinterpretation may have been because of my own cultural upbringing in which males were often aggressive.

Reaction - I asked the student if he had been able to obtain what he wanted to buy. He responded with a smile and a nod and held up his bag to show his purchase. I was able to highlight the language barrier to the staff at the cafeteria and diffuse the potentially difficult situation.

Conclusion - Even those of us who try to be aware of cultural differences and avoid stereotypes can make an initial mistake and misinterpret the situation due to our own cultural issues.

Postulate:

To suggest or assume the existence, fact, or truth of (something) as a basis for reasoning, discussion, or belief.

Oxford Dictionaries: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/postulate>



Example 2 – Kindergarten

'How culture affects names and family structures'

A child whose family had recently migrated here, and who spoke English as a second language, started kindergarten in the afternoon. Her enrolment form was completed and only one name was entered on this. Her father's name (three words) was completed, but only one name was entered for her mother. We assumed that the child's surname was the same as the last name written for the father.

Whenever the child was dropped off or picked up, the parents signed her in and out. The child's full name (the name written on the enrolment form and the last word of the father's name) was printed on the form where they signed.

After six months this child moved to morning kindergarten. After a week the father approached us to say that this child only had one name and the other names on the form were his alone. She had only one name - no surname. He said that if we insisted on having two names just to repeat the name they had written down twice.

This was something new to me, I had assumed that all people had a first and last (i.e. family) name. But why should they? Obviously in some cultures it is acceptable to be given only one name. I reflected on the fact that this is a girl, and wondered if the same rules would apply if the child was a boy.

This situation made me think about how I view names and family structures. It reminded me once again that the way I have been brought up and live, is not the only way to do things.

It also made me consider how we set up our administration and paper trails, and how can we make it inclusive so that people with different customs are not considered unusual.

Jackie Carey, Onekawa Kindergarten, Hawke's Bay

Did you know?

Around 70,000 students of more than 150 nationalities are granted student permits in New Zealand annually.

http://www.dol.govt.nz/publications/research/life-after-study/life-after-study_05.asp

Private sector

As New Zealand society is becoming more diverse, so too are New Zealand businesses. Their customers and stakeholders are also becoming more diverse. Intercultural skills can help to improve an organisation's bottom line by improving communication between staff members and with clients.

The rest home industry for example has seen a huge increase in the diversity of both its staff and residents. By improving their level of intercultural awareness, they are seeking to provide a better level of service to their customers and counter any cultural issues amongst their staff. The examples that follow are taken from an engineering company and a rest home.

Did you know?

Immigration makes a major contribution to New Zealand's economy. New migrants add an estimated \$1.9 billion to our GDP every year, international students contribute \$2.3 billion, and inbound tourists around \$9 billion.

Immigration New Zealand

<http://www.dol.govt.nz/News/Media/2012/final-vision-2015.pdf>

Example 4 – Engineering company

'Expectations of a New Zealand workplace'

I was working in an engineering firm and we had just hired a new receptionist, Jane (not her real name), who was from overseas. She had briefly studied in New Zealand and completed a few short-term temporary reception roles predominantly within corporate environments.

The staff at the engineering firm were mostly men, a mixture of New Zealand Pakeha, Indian, Maori, Pacific Island, Irish and British. Our Senior Contract Manager usually arranged fortnightly team meetings to assess contract requirements and to address any issues that may affect us meeting our project deadlines. As receptionist one of Jane's tasks was to take minutes at the meeting and to ensure that all the managers receive a copy after the meeting.

At the first team meeting I took her along to the meeting room, introduced her to everyone and informed her that she would be required to take minutes at every fortnightly meeting.

The following fortnight the staff once again congregated in the meeting room but Jane remained at her desk even after the meeting started. After some time I approached Jane requesting that she join the meeting without delay. By the third fortnightly meeting when Jane once again remained at her desk the Contract Manager asked me to have a word with her as he was growing impatient with her tardy approach to meetings. I spoke with Jane and pointed out that it was reflecting badly on her when she did not turn up at the required time.

Following our discussion I noticed that Jane became increasingly withdrawn so I called her aside to establish what might be causing her

reluctance to integrate with other staff and attend the team meetings.

She told me that she did not think that the senior managers liked her very much. At the first meeting she said she was delighted to have been invited along and made to feel very welcome but, when that did not happen at the next meeting she assumed she was no longer welcome. She explained that the senior managers also seemed less friendly after the second meeting and this confused her. She explained that in her home country junior staff would never attend meetings with senior people unless they are specifically invited to join. It was in fact considered disrespectful to assume you could attend. It was then that I understood how she could have interpreted the unspoken behaviour of the managers incorrectly. I informed Jane that in the New Zealand business environment everyone is considered equal and when a meeting is recurrent and you are asked along on the first occasion you are expected to attend subsequent meetings without someone extending a personal invitation.

What I first postulated

I had assumed that when I informed her at the first meeting that she would be required to take minutes at all the team meetings that she understood that her presence was a requirement and that she would simply turn up without a formal invitation. I did not expect the unspoken message to be interpreted differently by someone from another culture.

What I postulated differently

Once I understood how her culture interpreted the message very differently I explained what the expectations were in the New Zealand context.

How did this help to change the reaction proactively?

Once I understood more about how she was interpreting the events and why she was responding negatively I could put myself in her shoes to allow her to understand what was intended and what she was expected to do. She was relieved to learn that the managers did not dislike her after all.

What cultural awareness did you learn about the 'self' and 'other'?

It was interesting that Jane thought it was disrespectful and arrogant to just turn up at the meeting and the senior managers in turn thought she was being disrespectful because she knew the meeting had started but instead chose to remain seated at her desk.

'Self'

I learnt that there are unspoken rules that we take for granted that someone from a different culture may interpret completely differently and it is important to check the person's understanding and not assume that they are comfortable and understand the decision that was taken.

'Other'

It is important that we are aware of how we react to someone whose behaviour does not conform with what we may be accustomed to. Whilst the team may have assumed understanding of unspoken communication another culture may not understand this and respond to visual cues instead. The recipient's response to those visual cues will be drawn from their own cultural values and belief system, particularly if they are unfamiliar with the norms of the New Zealand environment.



Example 3 – Rest home

'Loss of face in front of others'

My responsibility is to mentor the new graduate registered nurses we have employed from overseas. These nurses have to pass a very difficult English test prior to working through the process to become registered as a nurse in New Zealand. Because their English is of a high standard it is easy to think that they will respond as a Kiwi nurse responds. This is not always a correct postulation or assumption.

Every month I meet with them to discuss their progress, to debrief difficult nursing situations and talk about their future. Last month I met with a nurse. Because I have met with her and explained the purpose of the mentoring session I assumed that she would come to the session willing to discuss strengths and also things that she was finding difficult and would like help with, as well as discussing any actions she needs to take or future plans she may have.

I knew she had just worked through a difficult situation and was expecting that she would discuss this at the mentoring session. However at the session she told me that she was fine and did not have any issues that she needed to talk through. I assumed that she would be direct with me if she had any issues about the situation she had just worked through.

I used the time to discuss the possibility of her moving to a different unit at a later date to acquire more diverse experience. At the time she appeared to respond favourably and as I had assumed earlier that because her English was so good she would respond like a New Zealander.

nurse, I happily worked on the assumption that she had responded honestly and positively to the possibility.

Later in the day she phoned me in a very distressed state to say that she did not want to move from the unit she was working in. We discussed this and I told her not to worry – no decision had been made – I was just putting an idea forward. Later in the week I heard from other staff that she was very unhappy with the possibility of moving to the new unit despite our conversation. She had assumed that I was now telling her what she wanted to hear.

After talking with her again we had a chance to discuss the previous meeting and conversation. In both situations I had discussed the issues involved in a direct manner and I had the expectation that she would do the same with me.

Upon reflection I was able to re-postulate to have a better understanding of what had occurred. In the first instance, she had not wanted to lose face, and in the second instance, she had not wanted me to lose face by telling me that she really wanted to stay where she was. She also did not believe me when I tried to reassure her that we would work this situation out.

At our next meeting I was able to say that I understood she was telling me what I wanted to hear because in her culture that was the most polite way to handle the situation I was then able to go on to explain that in Kiwi culture we tend to be more direct. We both grew in our understanding of each other. We then went on to discuss the pros and cons of the suggested move and came to a decision that we were both happier with.



Government agencies

As New Zealand demographics continue to change, government needs to continue being innovative in finding new ways to serve and connect with the New Zealand public. There is growing awareness amongst New Zealand government agencies of the importance of intercultural skills in delivering good service to their customers. The examples below demonstrate how the IAC programme has been effective in assisting staff to respond to a wide range of customers.

Did you know?

The integration of equality and diversity throughout the Public Service will be a key aspect of strategic planning and performance, and chief executives will provide the lead in working towards this.

New Zealand State Services Commission

<http://www.ssc.govt.nz/public-service-eeopolicy>

Example 5 – Government agency

'Listen before forming an opinion'

I work for a government department. Part of my role includes dealing with people who come into our office to report a problem, incident or event, and also employment and immigration queries. Because of the type of work and opportunities that the region provides, many of the people I communicate with come from ethnically diverse backgrounds. I have a pleasant personality, I am very cheerful, I treat others as I wish to be treated and I respect my clients, but sometimes that manner isn't returned.

When it was my turn to attend to the front desk, I heard the bell being rung quickly three times; to me this created a sense of impatience and disrespect. As I came to the front desk I realised the client was Indian and I felt disrespected and hurried because I had assumed Indian men were very controlling when it comes to women. I prepared myself for a conversation that I thought would be very controlled by this man.

While listening to the client, I realised that he was not intending to be rude but was very concerned about an accident that had happened within his workplace and had not been reported. He felt as though his employers did not care about him or the work he did for them by not reporting the injury he had suffered. After talking to this man I realised he did not intend to disrespect me at all and in fact, we had similar personalities. We joked about the bell situation and he agreed not to ring it more than once if he visited again.

Through this experience I realised I was very quick to judge a person based on their actions and race rather than their personality and their situation. I have learnt not to go by first impressions or assume that certain characteristics go with a particular race. I have also learnt to listen to my clients before I form an opinion.

“Without culture, and the relative freedom it implies, society, even when perfect, is but a jungle. This is why any authentic creation is a gift to the future.”

Albert Camus – French writer (1913–1960)

Did you know?

99% of New Zealand's businesses employing 60% of employees are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

Chinese migrants contribute over \$100 million into the Auckland economy through business migration.

National Conversation about Work, Human Rights Commission, 2010

UK businesses that are proactive in their use of foreign languages achieve, on average, 45% more export sales.

UK Trade & Investment, 2009

Example 6 – Government agency

'Non-verbal cues and body language'

What was the situation?

A Pacific Island man came to the front counter as I was going past, so I asked if I could help him.

What did you first postulate and what did you postulate differently?

I did not get a direct answer to my question and he shuffled his feet and talked quietly, directing his gaze to the floor. As I was in a rush my first reaction was to think bother I am too busy to stay and clarify what this chap wants. I can't even hear him properly with his mumble low tones. I wish I hadn't asked if I could be of help.

However having done the workshop I stopped long enough to consider his demeanour and put the tools I had learned into action. Ok head down not looking me in the eye he is showing me respect not rudeness or being shy. Talking quietly same reason. So I put my busyness aside, relaxed, stopped and changed my own demeanour and asked again in a more relaxed way what I could do to assist him. I went on to discover that he was in the wrong building and I advised him where he needed to go.

How did this help you change your reaction pro actively?

I remembered the discussion about low and high context and moderated my communication to high context with my non-verbal approach, open friendly face, relaxed body stance, and so on. The relationship developed quickly from there and dialogue became much better with me listening more and talking less.

What cultural awareness about the 'self' and the 'other' did you discover through this experience?

I tuned into the cultural difference and saw him in a different light, that is not sullen and rude but quiet and respectful and I found common ground by talking less, rephrasing my questions and changing my body stance. I felt that my customer skills with this person were attributable to the lessons from the workshop.

High and low context

Communication can be low context or high context.

Low context: the meaning of a message is drawn literally from the words, the communicator needs to be explicit.

High context: parts of a message's meaning are implied in the setting or communicated non-verbally; many things are left unsaid, letting the culture explain.



Not-for-profit sector

The not-for-profit sector in New Zealand plays an important role in providing services to a range of stakeholders, including many recent migrants.

Did you know?

There are more than 97,000 non-profit organisations operating in New Zealand and the sector contributes \$6.95 billion to the economy when taking into account the volunteer labour contribution.

http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/EGM_Ittmig_Asia/BGpaper_ESCAP.pdf

Example 7 – Non-profit agency

'What is visible, might not reflect the entire situation'

I am a social worker for families who have young children with disabilities. A multidisciplinary team at our centre provides early intervention. One of the families of an ethnic background with whom I worked has a three-year-old boy. I met with them once a week.

My initial postulation was that his parents had a good understanding of English and that they were keen to engage in the early intervention therapy in order to help their son's development to progress. They appeared proud of him and agreed with the therapists when they demonstrated and made suggestions of how to engage with their son and further his ability to engage in tasks. They seemed to understand the importance of regular attendance at the centre in order for him to access the early intervention he needed. When it was suggested that it would be beneficial to enrol their son in a preschool in order to socialise with other children, they smiled and said that they would visit some preschools.

My second postulation was that the family was happy to engage with other families and groups of the same ethnic background, and thus I tried to link them into the appropriate local ethnic centre. I also tried to arrange a time to visit a potential preschool when I knew that another child from our early intervention centre would be in attendance.

The family visited a number of preschool and home-based care providers. I accompanied them on some of the visits. No enrolment eventuated. None of the suggestions I made, for preschools, or contact with their ethnic communities resulted in a take-up of services, and I realised that the parents would always say "yes" because they did not want to offend me. This seemed to be out of respect for me, and born out of their own cultural politeness.

After discussion with the parents and seeking cultural advice from an interpreter, I was made aware that in the family's own culture, having a child with a disability is something to be ashamed of. Therefore, they preferred to keep themselves to themselves, and their son at home, rather than taking him out or mixing with other children. Their shame also prevented them from socialising themselves, which is why they avoided joining their cultural organisation. This mother had a tremendous amount of grief to deal with around her child's disability. She also had a sense of isolation being in a new country without family around her.

Through my interaction with these parents I learned that within the 'iceberg of culture' the visible signs or presentations do not always provide a true reflection of the situation. For example, the parents' agreement with suggestions, and their apparent acquiescence at the time of the suggestions were not true indicators of what and how they thought and felt. I needed to go beyond the visible limits to explore and understand the various layers of diversity. This was essential to find out what was hindering the parents from helping their child to move forward in his development.

In conclusion, I learned that these parents were operating from an individualistic context, accountable to themselves.

I too was operating from an individualistic point of view. My achievement in working with this family involved individual goal setting and action.

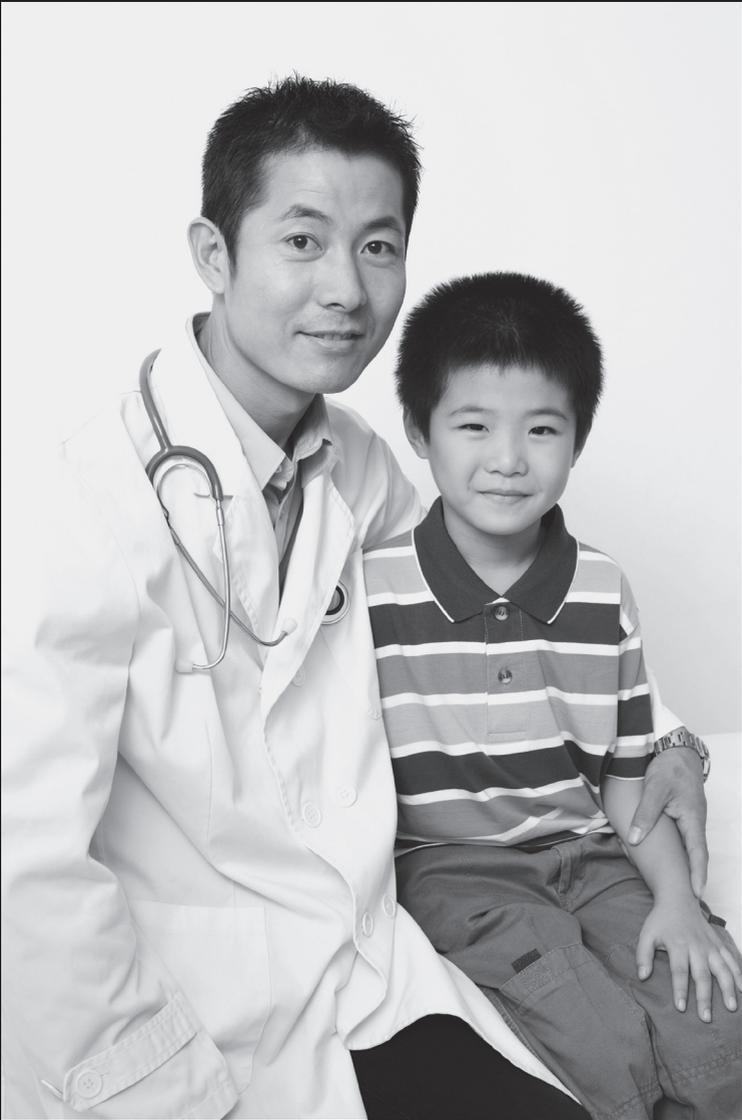
I had not considered initially that these parents could also have been working from an individualistic viewpoint and did not want to be accountable to the group. Possibly they were brought up in a collectivist society and maintaining group harmony and cohesion was important regardless of the cost to themselves.

That is why they felt they needed to remain isolated from their ethnic group, because of their son's disability, their grief, and the cultural context of where they were born.

Iceberg model of culture

Culture can be compared to an iceberg which has both visible (on the surface) and invisible (below the surface) parts. Visible aspects of culture, such as food or clothes, are represented by the upper portion of the iceberg. Less obvious aspects of culture, such as values and beliefs, are represented by the much larger portion of the iceberg under water.

Failure to understand and recognise these aspects of culture and their various layers, as well as how they influence each other, can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunication.



Example 8 – Non-profit agency

'How my culture affects my views and my actions'

I work as an employment consultant for a non-government organisation (NGO). The contract I work under is funded by a government department and my role entails assisting referred people who are receiving a benefit to achieve their employment goals.

I recently met a potential client, a young mother from Samoa, who wanted to gain employment after a three-year period out of the workforce. My first assumption was that Casey (not her real name) was motivated to obtain employment and that she intended to continue to receive the benefit until she was offered employment.

When we started to talk about work, Casey informed me that she had last week contacted Work and Income New Zealand to thank them for providing her the assistance they had and ask that they stop her benefit (because she was going to be looking for work and would soon be able to provide for her family herself).

upon hearing this, I had concerns about how Casey was managing financially and would continue to do so until she found work. I informed Casey that she was entitled to receive a benefit until she had found work and indicated that requesting to be put back on the benefit would not only enable me to work with her to obtain employment but would decrease financial pressure on herself and her brother. Casey said she would think about doing this but seemed reluctant to contact Work and Income again. I made an appointment with Casey to visit the following week and asked her to consider contacting Work and Income to request that her benefit be reinstated.

My second postulation was that Casey felt that she had spent enough time receiving financial support from the government and that she felt more comfortable receiving temporary support from family, in this case, her brother. Also, Casey clearly felt that her brother was happy to support her family for a time; just as she would happily help her brother and his family if the situation was reversed.

My proactive reaction occurred when I met with Casey the following week. I clarified my position to Casey and reiterated that I accepted that it was entirely her choice if she wanted to contact Work and Income or not and that I understood that she was comfortable with the choice she had made about stopping the benefit.

Through this experience my cultural awareness of 'self' was expanded to appreciate how I view the benefit as an entitlement that can and should be utilised when required to help alleviate family financial pressures. My awareness of the 'other' was expanded to include an understanding that my views are influenced by my own cultural background that not all people consider receiving a benefit as I do. Choosing to receive financial assistance from family (as opposed to the government) is a reasonable and acceptable choice made by some people.

In conclusion, before I ended my meeting with Casey, I asked if there was anything I could do that would assist her to achieve her employment goal. Casey said she needed a new CV and I agreed to update her old version and send several copies to her by the end of the week.

Health sector

The global mobility of health professionals combined with ageing populations in developed nations have driven a significant increase in demand for skilled health professionals. For example, as nurses from a traditional New Zealand background move out of the workforce or offshore, they are increasingly being replaced by professionals from overseas.

The ethnic and cultural diversity of New Zealand has significant implications for people who work in the health system. Yet, many health professionals report minimal training is available to help them enhance their intercultural skills. This is especially pertinent given that New Zealand has the highest proportion of foreign-trained doctors in the OECD at 41% (New Zealand Herald, 2007).

Multicultural work teams are increasingly the norm in public health services, as is a high frequency of intercultural encounters between public health workers and their colleagues, and with communities, individuals and their families.

A high number of participants in IAC training sessions are from health care settings – reflecting a critical need for intercultural training to be made accessible to all staff and linked to both an organisational, professional and individual approach to cultural competence. The following scenarios are from social workers based in hospitals.

Example 9 – Hospital patient

'Cultural perspective on roles family play in decision making'

I have been a hospital social worker for several years. The intercultural scenario that I have been reflecting on is my intervention with a Japanese family recently arrived in New Zealand. The family involved had a 75 year old parent in hospital with significant dementia, no longer able to walk and not able to speak English. His wife was his primary carer and 10 years younger. She also cared for her elderly mother and had a son at university.

After engaging with Mrs T my postulation was that she was not willing to listen to the team's suggestions and advice about caring for her husband. She appeared dismissive and defensive in her role as carer of her husband and not looking after his 'best interests'. She appeared unable to cope and to be having considerable carer stress. However after several attempts to talk with Mrs T she started to reflect on information and thoughts that we had discussed several weeks earlier.

My second delayed postulation was that maybe she was not the decision maker in the family, and my assumption that a wife would then make decisions due to her husband being unable to was incorrect. In order to facilitate the care of the patient and Mrs T I asked her about her culture and the differences with New Zealand and the New Zealand Pakeha family (which is my background). Within this she shared a lot of information regarding her cultural values and beliefs and also the family and its context. Some of the sharing, from Mrs T's point of view, was that in showing her distress and carer stress, and that sometimes she found it difficult to cope, showed disloyalty

to her family and also dishonour to them. It was not only her duty to look after her husband but also an honour that her husband had allowed her to look after her own mother within their household. She was unable to consider her husband being cared for in hospital on a permanent basis because it was culturally inappropriate for her mother to remain in her care if her husband was not there. Her mother was only there by the grace of her husband and her son's wishes. That also led to an understanding of who the actual head of the family was and that was her relatively young son. He was, in fact, the decision maker in the family and the hospital had not recognised his position and authority. Mrs T had been checking with him about each conversation and this was adding to her stress within the family as she tried to facilitate decisions between the hospital and her son.

With the above information and knowledge shared by Mrs T we were better able to facilitate joint meetings for decision making with the son and ensure appropriate consideration of the son's role in the family. I worked with them to support the family as a whole so that Mrs T's mother, and the whole family's needs, could be taken into account.

Through this experience I was able to reflect on my own journey and the assumptions I had made without checking with the family involved about their needs. My focus had been very individualistic and focused solely on the patient's needs. I had expected the couple to have the same cultural values and priorities as myself, particularly in terms of a partner making decisions for their husband or wife if they become unable to. It made me much more aware of not making assumptions and that checking cultural values and context is vital to

the care of any patient. I found that a 'high context' communication style would have significantly improved the way I worked with this family in a more holistic style. It reinforced to me that cultural variations between authority and hierarchy and respect in families is important to identify to work successfully with families.

The outcome was that the hospital team had a much greater understanding of the importance of supporting this family and ensuring that the patient could remain at home, developed better ways of communicating with the whole family in order to support the decision-making process, and helped Mrs T manage the stress of caring in a more respectful and discreet way, so as to support her and respect the family's honour and her duty in her role in the family. It refocused our role on the family unit rather than the 'low context' approach. This produced a much more positive outcome for the family as a whole.



Example 10 – Medical staff

'Cultural view on traits and mannerisms'

I am a hospital social worker and work closely with the nursing staff on my home ward. I depend on good relationships and communication with the nursing staff to help me to assess and provide support for the patients referred to me as clients.

One of the nurses comes from the Indian subcontinent. I have noticed that her conversation can sound abrupt and clipped. I have unconsciously assumed that she is impatient or angry with either the person to whom she is talking or the patient who may be the subject of the conversation. I have then further postulated that she does not care as much about patients as other staff do. The reaction on my part has been to feel less inclined to discuss patient-related matters with her.

Recently I heard the nurse above talking in her usual style which to me sounds uncaring. When she put the phone down she expressed clearly that she was troubled about this patient's situation and wanted to be able to help them. I re-postulated that her conversation style was a cultural trait and that I was making incorrect assumptions about her mood and attitudes from the sound of her voice.

This has helped me to understand that I am incorrectly thinking she is angry or cross because of the tone of her voice. I feel more confident to discuss patient-related matters with her.

For myself I realise that I make judgements, almost unconsciously at times, that are based on traits and mannerisms that vary from culture to culture. I am challenged to examine the basis for the

personal judgement I form about another person, especially when they are from another culture.

From the perspective of the “other”, I see that it must be very difficult to feel people reacting in ways that are at best confusing and quite likely very hurtful.

Whilst I would like to believe that I don't make assumptions about people, it is clearer than ever to me that indeed I do make assumptions. I accept the challenge to diagnose, adapt and change strategies, and to continue to monitor my intercultural behaviour.

“Cultural purity is an oxymoron. Belonging is made up of many strands that are constantly being woven but also unravelled. The ability of communities to understand and shape these processes may be key to achieving greater well-being in growing diverse and fluid cities in years ahead.”

Kenneth Appiah – Philosopher, 2009

Concluding thoughts

Training for Trainers Statistics		
Year	OEA-trained trainers (OTT)	Participants trained by OTT
2009	33	15
2010	19	126
2011	37	194
Total	89	335

IAC Training Statistics	
Year	Total participants
2009	30
2010	180
2011	410
Total	620

Through this programme 89 trainers and 620 participants have been trained since 2009. Given the increasing diversity of the New Zealand workforce we foresee this number continuing to grow.

Our intercultural training programme has a strong focus on communication. It explores how culture may impact on communication with colleagues and clients and provides tools for ensuring that what is being said is understood. This allows teams to work more effectively together, managers to build more effective relationships with peers and teams, and customer-facing staff to better tailor services to their clients' needs.

The ability to understand each other and communicate effectively in the workplace makes good business sense.

Where to from here?

Our IAC training programme is available to organisations across New Zealand. We can train your trainers to deliver the programme to your staff.

If you think this programme may be useful for your organisation, contact one of our offices (details on next page) and ask to speak to an Intercultural Advisor. We will discuss the needs of your organisation with you and see how our programme may be able to help.

Alternatively for more information about this and our other programmes visit our website at www.ethnicaffairs.govt.nz

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