

Inclusive workplaces for kaimahi Māori

Summary report

Te Mahere Whai Mahi Māori:
the Māori Employment Action Plan



Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE)

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The research

This section outlines the context for the research and the approach that was undertaken.

This research was commissioned under te Mahere Whai Mahi Māori – the Māori Employment Action Plan. The vision for the Action Plan is that Māori exercise rangatiratanga to create intergenerational wellbeing through work¹. One of the immediate actions of Te Mahere Whai Mahi Māori is researching how workplaces can be more inclusive for kaimahi Māori².

This summary report is based on the research funded by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and undertaken by Professor Jarrod Haar (Ngāti Maniapoto and Ngāti Mahuta), Associate Professor David Brougham and Professor Maree Roche (Raukawa).

The research focused on answering the following questions:

- What does inclusion mean for kaimahi Māori?
- How can workplaces be more inclusive for kaimahi Māori?
- What operational tools or policies can support a more inclusive workplace for kaimahi Māori?

The research followed a kaupapa Māori approach with two phases:

- In-depth interviews with 32 kaimahi Māori focussing on their experiences around inclusion.
- 15 case studies of Aotearoa/New Zealand businesses with 47 interviews including business owners, executives, managers and employees.

This summary focuses on key findings from the research. The full report detailing the research and findings can be found here <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/28035-inclusive-workplaces-for-kaimahi-maori-pdf>.

Te reo Māori words and their meanings as used in this report are as follows:

aronga takirua – the cultural double shift where kaimahi Māori act as cultural guides and navigators in the workplace along with their usual workload
hapū – kinship group, subtribe
iwi – extended kinship group, tribe
kaimahi – worker, employee
kaimahi Māori – a Māori worker or employee
kaitiakitanga – guardianship, stewardship
karakia – blessing, prayer, chant
rangatiratanga – self-determination, sovereignty, self-government, self-determination
tangi – rites for the dead, funeral
te reo Māori – Māori language
Te Tiriti (o Waitangi) – The Treaty (of Waitangi)
tikanga Māori – Māori customs, protocols
whānau – extended family, family group
whanaungatanga – relationship, kinship, sense of family connection

¹ Te Mahere Whai Mahi Māori: The Māori Employment Action Plan, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment; February 2022 page 28.

² Ibid page 3.

The key findings

This section presents five themes identified by the researchers through analysis of the interview and case study findings. The following section in this summary presents implications for businesses wanting to create inclusive workplaces for kaimahi Māori.

THERE ARE BENEFITS TO BEING INCLUSIVE

Kaimahi Māori said that working in an inclusive workplace helps them to feel they belong and are respected for their uniqueness (ethnicity, and for some, gender, sexuality and disability). They feel their business is the 'right place to be' as they feel accepted and valued. Inclusion involves both feeling supported and supporting others.

For some, inclusion aligns with tikanga Māori values, though there is general acceptance among the research participants that inclusion is by its very nature broad and all-encompassing. The use of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori in the workplace increases feelings of inclusion for kaimahi Māori.

Inclusion is seen as a win-win for employers and kaimahi Māori as it can help retain workers and lead to greater productivity. Many kaimahi Māori described past workplaces as not inclusive so those who do find an inclusive workplace value it and can have a greater commitment to that business.

INCLUSION IS FOR ALL

Inclusion is seen as focusing on belonging and the uniqueness of each person and is not restricted to supporting Māori culture or any other specific culture. It involves supporting all differences across cultures, genders, sexualities, disabilities, mental health challenges and so on. Having a strong inclusion culture that provides support for everyone creates a workplace climate that attracts a diverse workforce.

Many successful businesses with high levels of inclusion have a strong interest in, and engagement with, their community including marae, iwi, and business networks. This aligns with Māori cultural values around whānau and whanaungatanga.

As well as creating better and more inclusive work climates, engaging in activities beyond their business means gaining more support from the community, creating a mutually beneficial relationship.

LEADERSHIP IS KEY

When business leaders and managers role model, support, and apply inclusion in the workplace, then inclusion becomes a workplace reality. In larger businesses a formal inclusion policy can be helpful in encouraging inclusion in the workplace as policies signal intent and can encourage accountability. In New Zealand many businesses have relatively small numbers of employees, and for these businesses, inclusion is likely to be driven from leaders rather than from policy. For all business sizes, policy without leadership can be seen as tokenism by kaimahi Māori.

Kaimahi Māori identified the importance of Māori being represented in leadership positions within the business. Without Māori leaders, kaimahi Māori can doubt whether there is a genuine commitment to Māori and Māori culture, even in businesses that initially feel inclusive. Without seeing a Māori leader, kaimahi Māori may not see how they can fully fit into the business.

THERE ARE MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO INCLUSION

The research identified several pathways that businesses can take to achieve stronger inclusion in the workplace.

- One pathway is for businesses to create inclusion for kaimahi Māori through a dedicated strategy including developing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for leaders relating to inclusion in the workplace.
- Another pathway is a firm commitment around time allowed for cultural requirements including tangi, and also supporting cultural activities in work time.
- Businesses though need to be aware of aronga takirua, the cultural double shift, when kaimahi Māori act as cultural guides and navigators in the workplace along with their usual workload. This can sometimes be at the expense of kaimahi Māori wellbeing.

Genuine engagement, good relationships with staff throughout the business and processes that support inclusion are seen as key to having good inclusion in the workplace. A way to build and enhance inclusion is to encourage open dialogue between management and kaimahi, encourage employees to talk about issues of inclusion in the workplace and allow employee input on inclusion activities.

The research shows that kaimahi Māori are critical of approaches towards inclusion they see as tokenistic. If inclusion is not seen to be genuine, the very people that workplaces are trying to attract and retain are instead likely to leave the business.

Several businesses, not all of them Māori businesses, used Māori cultural values to build a strong inclusion climate. This included having a strong whānau focus but also using tikanga Māori to cement the goals, strategy, and vision of the business (eg being guided by the principles of Te Tiriti). Many acknowledged the natural fit between Māori cultural values and inclusion by having a focus on te reo Māori, tikanga Māori and Māori cultural values representing the importance of kaitiakitanga, networking and whanaungatanga.

THERE CAN BE INCLUSIVENESS CHALLENGES

Challenges identified in this research include:

- high workloads created in part by aronga takirua. This reflects the additional work roles that kaimahi Māori typically undertake in the workplace when acting as cultural guides and navigators.
- discrimination in the workplace. Many kaimahi Māori said they experienced discrimination in past jobs which contributed to the moving to another workplace. While a strong inclusive climate appears to reduce workplace discrimination for kaimahi Māori, businesses need to support staff against discrimination from both co-workers and customers.
- the level of bureaucracy and excessive red tape when accessing workplace support.
- workplace experiences around bullying which has a negative impact on workers' wellbeing.

Some of the above challenges are likely to affect all workers, although cultural experiences around high workloads are more likely to impact kaimahi Māori.

Implications for businesses

This section draws on the findings from the research and presents implications that may assist businesses in creating inclusive workplaces for kaimahi Māori.

THERE IS A JOURNEY TO BECOMING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

- There are many ways for businesses to be more inclusive, but the research found that approaches need to be genuine and that kaimahi Māori should be able to see there is a commitment to both build and maintain an inclusive workplace.
- One-off actions are likely to be viewed as tokenistic and potentially detrimental to the aim of building an inclusive business. The importance of continuous improvement was highlighted by the research.
- The research emphasised that businesses should engage with their kaimahi Māori and seek their insight and feedback on how to develop an inclusive workplace. A start could be to assess their workforces' perceptions of inclusion such as whether staff feel safe and supported. This engagement should be ongoing.
- Understanding different groups of employees within a business, and their perceptions of how inclusive the workplace is might help businesses identify groups that need more support.
- Businesses should be aware of the culturally-specific workplace challenges kaimahi Māori may face and this requires culturally nuanced leadership to address. When businesses expect Māori to organise hui, conduct karakia and act as an iwi liaison, this needs to be factored into workloads.
- The research suggested that businesses could consider adding factors relating to workplace inclusion to managers' KPIs to enhance the spread and support of inclusion.
- Businesses should support kaimahi Māori who experience discrimination, both from co-workers and customers. The research found that such support shows that businesses value inclusive workplaces and builds respect from all kaimahi.
- Achieving inclusion in the workplace might take time to develop.
- The research noted that an inclusive workplace has the potential to lead to greater retention of staff and performance of the workforce. It can also attract kaimahi Māori to businesses that don't currently have Māori staff.

LEADERSHIP IS IMPORTANT

- The research found that leadership is key for building inclusion within a business. Larger-sized businesses may have formal inclusion policies, but attention and support from business leaders is still required. Smaller-sized businesses may not need a formal policy but can manage instead through good leadership and a more informal approach to inclusion.
- Good inclusion leadership requires training and development. Business leaders can lead by example, but leader training can aid its genuine spread across a business.
- Representation within leadership roles within a business is seen as important. Not having diversity in leadership may suggest a lack of an inclusive culture to kaimahi in the business.
- Representation of kaimahi Māori in leadership roles may require recruitment and / or training to develop people into these roles.

ENGAGING OUTSIDE THE BUSINESS IS IMPORTANT

- The research observed that strong engagement with stakeholders and connections beyond the business can be part of having an inclusive business. This can include sharing business

resources with community groups (eg tools, products, time, expertise) as examples of low cost ways of engaging with the community.

- Businesses who engage with hapū, iwi and community groups can enhance the cultural identity and wellbeing of their kaimahi Māori. Doing this can show that the business cares about the communities they live and work in and is another way to build inclusion for kaimahi Māori.
- Engaging and supporting the community can lead to reciprocation and benefits for the business.

Conclusion

In conclusion, for kaimahi Māori, inclusion means a sense of belonging and feeling accepted and valued in the workplace. The research notes that it can be important in attracting and retaining kaimahi Māori.

Views of inclusion are broadly similar across different kaimahi Māori groups: genders, age-groups, abilities and sexualities. Overall, the concept of inclusion is also similar for non-Māori kaimahi.

There are a number of ways that workplaces can become more inclusive as detailed in this report. The research found that what is important is that any actions taken by the business are genuine and authentic and part of a continuous, rather than a one-off process.

While having inclusive policies can help businesses to become more inclusive, it is the role of leaders within the business that is critical. Leaders need to be genuine in their commitment to an inclusive workplace for it to truly occur.