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Park, H. & Hughes, E.

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# Can Pacific Peoples be labelled as talent in New Zealand? The prejudicial effects of societal stereotypes

Hyun Mi Park<sup>1</sup> ad0042@coventry.ac.uk Lecturer at Business Management Coventry University, School of Strategy and Leadership, William Morris Building, Gosford Street, Coventry, UK. CV1 5DL

Ella Marie Hughes Hughese8@uni.coventry.ac.uk MBA International Business Coventry University, School of Strategy and Leadership, William Morris Building, Gosford Street, Coventry, UK. CV1 5DL

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Corresponding author

#### Abstract

There is an assumed prototype for talent, yet the stereotype of one's ethnicities influences the prototype. Stereotypes are therefore a discriminating factor limiting people's ability within the workforce. For Pacific Peoples in New Zealand, since the early migratory outset, they continue to feature heavily in deprivation statistics. Pacific People are New Zealand's lowest median income earner, at the benefit of New Zealand's society and economy. Although it is critical to examine the stereotypes of the various ethnicities in the high skilled workforce, stereotyping and the resultant discrimination are under-researched in the Talent Management field. Therefore, this research explores the effects of stereotypes negatively influence the decision-making process to identify talented employees. It contributes to establish diversity-oriented policies for policy makers and expand our knowledge on the prejudicial effects of societal stereotypes in the workforce.

**Keywords**: Pacific Peoples, Stereotype, Discrimination, New Zealand, Talent Management, Prejudicial effects.

# Introduction

There were only an estimated 2,200 Pacific Peoples living in New Zealand in 1945 but this has rapidly evolved with Pacific Peoples accounting for 7.4% of the population in 2013 and predicted to rise to 10% in 2038, making Pacific Peoples New Zealand's fourth largest ethnic group (Pasifika Futures, 2017). Although six out of ten Pacific Peoples are New Zealand born, many Pacific Peoples continue their culture and beliefs as that practiced in the Islands (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2018). New Zealand's pan-Pacific landscape started after World War II where a shortage in labour resulted in the arrival of Pacific people to fill the gap of the departed soldiers (Challis, 1973).

However, during the seventies Pacific People were subjected to 'Dawn Raids' which saw many people subjected to violent home searches by immigration and police with the intention to remove over-stayers (NZ Herald, 2015). The Pacific influx in the seventies also came at a time whereby New Zealand was in an economic recession, with high employment and poor social circumstances (Andrew, 2019; NZ Herald, 2015). Many felt the government used the Pacific Peoples as a point of blame for the conditions New Zealanders were facing (Andrew, 2019; NZ Herald, 2015).

This resulted in Pacific Peoples being subject to prejudice and being termed as part of the 'brown' problem (NZ Herald, 2002; Ross, 1994). This was also fuelled by negative connotations from the media which were adding to the racialisations of Pacific Peoples which is considered originating from colonialisms (Ross, 1994). They were portrayed as 'inferior' and associated with 'social problems ranging from drunkenness and violence to overcrowding' (Ross, 1994, p. 22). New Zealand has attempted to improve the outcomes for Pacific Peoples with the formation of the Ministry of Pacific Peoples in 1990, formerly known as the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, whom act as the principle advisor for policies and interventions (Ministry of Pacific People, 2019).

Evidently, in order for Pacific Peoples to advance from this detriment, it has been repeatedly acknowledged that Pacific Peoples choose qualifications and employment in higher demand industries and shift from low to high skilled jobs within high growth industry sectors, but this is yet to come to fruition. Reasons for the continued under achievement within these high growth and high skilled industries have been overly discussed. However, few acknowledge how the perceived stereotype of Pacific Peoples in the New Zealand society is a discriminatory limitation to their advancement. There is an apparent knock on affect from the perception which can result in prejudicial outcomes and for Pacific Peoples and this should be considered as a factor towards attainment of higher skilled roles, therefore higher paid roles.

Yet, the economic position of Pacific Peoples has had only slight improvements since the formation of the Ministry. Pacific Peoples still remain the lowest median income earner and are more likely than the rest of the population to state they do not have enough money to meet their everyday needs (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2018; Statistics New Zealand, 2016). These concerning results coincide with the statistics that reveal Pacific Peoples are overrepresented in low skilled and low paid jobs (e.g., trade workers, manufacturing, construction, carers etc.) and conversely underrepresented in high paid and high growth jobs such as managerial and professional roles (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2018).

Inequality is a limiting factor for people to contribute to society and the economy, and for the future of Pacific Peoples, it is not equitable to continue this path of over-representation within detrimental areas (Daldy, Poot & Roskruge, 2013; Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs 2010). For the Pacific migrants, New Zealand born or not, how they are perceived as talent is a critical factor for them obtaining work and income within the New Zealand private and public workforce. Misjudging talent could lead to the underutilization of talent in economies which have become increasingly global and knowledge based such as that like New Zealand (Esses et al., 2014).

Although the underachievement has been discussed (Equal Opportunities Trust, 2011; Harr, 2019; Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010; Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2018; Nash, 2000; Sim & Marriott, 2014; Theodore et al., 2018), few acknowledge how the perception of Pacific Peoples the New Zealand society, which was possibly shaped during the 'dawn raid' era and the misconceptions about cultural norms, is a continuing limitation to their advancement. There are multiple aspects which contribute to the under achievement within the high skilled role area, this research only considers whether the stereotype researched by Sibley et al., (2011) has had implications for Pacific People obtaining high skilled roles. It leads to the following two research questions:

**RQ 1.** What is the effect of the New Zealand stereotype of Pacific Peoples with the workforce in Talent Management? **RQ 2.** How is the stereotype a limitation for Pacific People obtaining high skilled occupations?

The article is structured as follows: the next section discusses how the established literature views the current stereotype of Pacific People and its impact on talent identification

process. Secondary data collection and analysis are explored which followed by a discussion and conclusion. A series of implications for policy makers, study limitations, and possible direction for further researches are presented.

## **Literature Review**

#### Current Stereotype of Pacific People

The stereotype of Pacific Peoples in New Zealand has been analysed by Sibley et al., (2011) who applied the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002) to examine the societal stereotypes of New Zealand's four main ethnic groups: New Zealand European, Maori, Asian and Pacific Peoples. It was revealed by Sibley et al., (2011) that Pacific Peoples are stereotyped as *highly warm but low in competence* (p. 32), they also *elicit pity and be actively facilitated by other groups in society but also are passively harmed* (p. 34).

Competence regarded by Fiske, Cuddy, Glick and Xu (2002) has the traits of 'ambitious, confident, intelligent and practical', which are all critical within any sort of talent advancement but also scholarly achievement (Pringle, Lyons & Booker, 2010). Therefore, it could be argued that Pacific Peoples are regraded the reverse of these traits; incapable, useless, unintelligent.

From the study, it could be considered that Pacific Peoples are positioned within the mixed stereotype content of Paternalistic, and this stereotype can allow for more traditional types of prejudice such as ambivalent racism (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002). Ambivalent racism carries the perceptions of incompetence, laziness and violating work ethic and has notions of a disliking and predispositions towards the outer groups (*ibid*, 2002). The results of the Sibley et al., (2011) research also concluded that New Zealand Europeans were considered that highly warm and highly competent, and that they are regarded as a high status group.

The demeaning perception for Pacific Peoples is further acknowledged in research by Sibley and Ward (2013) which highlighted that other ethnic groups (New Zealand Europeans, Asians and Maori) considered Pacific Peoples as low risk in regards to perceived resource threat and competitiveness for jobs.

There has been no follow up research since the 2011 study to examine current stereotype of Pacific Peoples.

#### Stereotype within Talent Identification Process

The stereotype which Pacific People have been labelled as can be having a direct affect in how they are perceived a talent. The perception of talent is critical when obtaining high skilled roles within the workplace. Studies have revealed that certain ethnicities are perceived as superior talent than others for certain roles such as managerial roles (leadership) within the workplace (Gundemir, Homan, de Dreu, & van Vugt, 2014; Leonardelli, Phillips & Rosette, 2008; Lowe, 2013).

Although there has been some change, Caucasian males still continue to dominate managerial positions within companies and government organizations (Lowe, 2013; Leonardelli, Phillips & Rosette, 2008). This perception of talent (and argued as predetermined talent) is supported by Gundemir, Homan, de Dreu and van Vugt (2014) who state that ethnic minorities (within the Western world) *do not fit the predominant image or prototype of a leader* (p.1).

Lowe (2013) adds that certain ethnicities do not match the conscious and unconscious leadership prototype (p.153). Further research indicates that the more prototypical an individual is, the more they are perceived as an effective leader (Hogg, 2001). Traits for this leadership are usually associated with more masculine connotations of taking charge, problem solving, influencing upward and delegating with entrepreneurial and commercial thinking (Ergle, 2015). The role of professionals (e.g., doctors, accountants, lawyers etc.) can also be regarded as having a set perception about its talent requirements as they are often regarded as also relating to the masculine traits (Kee & Wilbourn, 2010; Himmelstein & Sanchez, 2016).

On comparing these traits of a prototypical leader, Pacific Peoples and their associated cultural norms, could be regarded as identifying with more feminine traits which resemble those traits displaying low competence such as low status, non-competitive and sympathy (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002). Common Pacific cultural practices are described through the work by Fijian Unaisi Nabobo in her work title *Cultural values and some implications for classroom learning in the Pacific* (1998), she describes the Pacific culture as adopting a shared vision where there is an emphasis on the whole unit, interrelated, or communal good rather than that of an individual aspiration or individual achievements, this includes caring after children both by males and females. Humility is expressed through one's generosity and sharing, and in the sense to make oneself unremarkable rather than noteworthy. She continues to describe how maintaining good relationships are a fundamental part of Pacific culture, even to the extent that competition with other individuals reflects improper socialisation. Generally,

in Pacific cultures learning occurs by participation communally, imitation and observation, traits which do not fit the considered prototype for managerial roles. Furthermore, the Pacific prides itself on respect, humility, through sharing, the consensus and reciprocity of all contributing to the maintaining of relationships (Nabobo, 1998).

Understanding Pacific Peoples culture and paradigms is essential for understanding the decisions they make to participate in society (Arditi, 1994). McLeod (2008) discusses culture as being learned, it is a social construct and that it is complex to which there are various elements and ever changing, however McLeod explains in the Pacific it is deemed as being static, that it is to be protected and that custom and tradition are linked. The stereotype of Pacific Peoples 'low competence but highly warm' could also have been influenced by the misunderstanding of these cultural norms.

#### Talent Discrimination

People who are not regarded as talent could be considered as being discriminated against. Discrimination, a behaviour by-product from the resulting stereotype (Fiske & Lee, 2008), can be defined as an individual feeling that they have been treated unfairly because of their membership of a particular social category (Banerjee, 2008, p. 384). These social categories can include that of ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation (Daldy, Poot & Roskruge, 2013). Ethnic origin as classed by the European Union; Eurobarometer Discrimination Survey is ranked as the number one reason for discrimination in 2012 and 2015 (European Union Open Data, 2012; European Union Open Data, 2015). Discrimination occurs in all facets of the workplace through avoidable and unfair differences in the recruitment, selection and interviewing, allocation of jobs, role ambiguity, performance reviews, training, promotions, remuneration, dismissals, resignations and seniority (Trenerry, Franklin & Paradies, 2012).

Discrimination in these areas of talent management has a negative impact on the subject, which has shown to result in lower wages and higher unemployment and is common in both the private and public sectors (Daldy, Poot & Roskruge, 2013; Land & Lehmann, 2012). Discrimination, although most common in recruitment (which is possibly the result of better reporting), happens throughout the workforce and in day to day interactions with employees (Daldy, Poot & Roskruge, 2013). Although formal policies are intended to combat these issues, knowing about biases may not automatically change behaviour and the perspectives of others (Kulik & Roberson, 2008; Noon, 2018). Therefore, this research investigates whether Pacific People are discriminated in talent identification process.

# Methods

The process of theory development can arise from two different approaches; inductively or deductively, this research adopts an inductive approach. Inductive is used to develop a theory from the case studies and data collected, this helps to develop an understanding of the social world (Best, 2013; Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2016). An inductive approach allows a closer understanding of the research context, helps with the gathering of qualitative data and provides flexibility to the research as it progresses (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2016). This approach desires to detect new phenomena and new patterns in the data that may not have been acknowledge before (Woo, O'Boyle & Spector, 2017).

Additionally, the research uses a qualitative technique to examine if the stereotype of Pacific People is a limitation for them to be perceived as talent and is therefore discriminating them in advancing into higher skilled roles.

#### Source of data

The secondary data used is in the form of past research documents that covers an eighteen year period. These researches were conducted by a combination of Government Authorities and New Zealand based case studies.

A process of Thematic Analysis is applied to analyse the qualitative data as it is deemed that its greatest strength is that it uses a pragmatic approach and this flexibility allows the researcher to explore themes that can be used for further research and interpret various aspects of the research topic (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012; Braun, 2006). Thematic analysis has been described as a widely used but there appears to be no set way about doing it, moreover can be seen as data being described as data which is subjected to qualitative analysis for commonly recurring themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun, 2006; Tucket, 2005). The process thematic coding analyses the case study to link common ideas and endeavours to establish a framework of thematic ideas (Denscombe, 2015; Gibbs, 2007). The inductive approach codes the data without trying to make it fit into the pre-existing coding frames and the analytical preconceptions of the intended report of research.

As the data is secondary, the themes identified may bear little relationship to the questions that are asked of the participants, as the questions initially asked are not driven by this research area and topic (Patton, 1990). However, as the topic can be sensitive for participants and as this topic has not explored well in the talent management field, analysing secondary data is appropriate.

### Analysis

Coding is the analysis of the qualitative data identifying a feature in the data that appears to be relevant to the research question and is organized into meaningful groups but differs from the themes which are broader (Braun, 2006; Tuckett, 2005). An example of the coding conducted in this research can be shown in Table 1.

The coding followed a generalized framework which was assessed manually and synthesised into central themes (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, the theme was not needed to be relative to frequency and quantifiable within the data but rather determined by the researcher as capturing the importance of the theme in the overall crux of the data (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). The themes identified in the case studies is therefore important to providing essential contextual evidence from the data.

CASE STUDY	AUTHOR	YEAR	CODE	DESCRIPTION	THEME
Ethnic Group Stereotypes in New Zealand	Sibley and colleagues	2011	[T1-S] Stereotype	"highly warm but low in competence"	[T1] Inapt Talent
Measuring the preconditions for a successful multicultural society: A Barometer test of New Zealand	Sibley and Ward	2013	[T2-L] Limitation	"in my opinion more good jobs for Pacific Islanders (Pacific Peoples) means fewer good jobs for members of other groups"	[T2] Discrimination
Pacific Peoples Workforce Challenge	Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment; The Southern Initiative; The Auckland Co- Design Lab	2018	[T1-S] Stereotype	"distance themselves from their real selves, in order to be respected by other colleagues"	[T1] Inapt Talent
Exploring the Ethnic Pay Gap in the Public Services: Voices from the Rito	Haar; Ministry of Pacific Peoples	2019	[T2-L] Limitation	"In my department, Maori and Pacific Islanders are rare in the management level. The Pakeha managers can't understand the cultural differences. It is hard to get higher in the Public Sector"	[T2] Discrimination

Exploring the				"My perception of my	
Ethnic Pay Gap in	Haar; Ministry of Pacific Peoples	2019	[T1-S]	Department is that 'people of	[T1]
the Public			Stereotype	colour' are put into 'softer'	Inapt Talent
Services: Voices	1		<i></i>	areas"	1
from the Rito				areas	

# **Findings and Discussion**

# The perception of Pacific Peoples in New Zealand's workplace and the resulting limitation

As the literature analysed, a viewed stereotype of Pacific Peoples in New Zealand was that of being 'highly warm but low in competence' (Sibley et al., 2011). Although Sibley et al., (2011) research was of the general public with no set context, the data collected for this research expressed similar dimensions and supports stereotyped view of Pacific People. However, more importantly, the limitation resultant from the stereotype was *discrimination*, and it is recognised in the following findings.

The EEO Trust (2011) research title "*Career Futures for Pacific Peoples*" acknowledged there are limiting discriminating factors for Pacific People in the workplace to advance due to 'lack of recognition of Pacific Peoples values and culture' and 'appreciation for the value of diversity'. Additionally, young Pacific workers felt they are alienated, they do not fit into workplaces and often feel their ideas are ignored and undervalued.

The Equal Opportunities Trust (2011) report which was prompted by the commitment of concerned parties to enhance the engagement of young Pacific workers, revealed that Pacific Peoples felt the stereotype of their culture was a large factor limiting their desire to participate within the workplace. The Pacific youth felt high levels of discrimination on the basis of ethnic and cultural background in their workplace, a level of 42% compared to New Zealand Europeans of 16% (p. 15). Their stereotype making them feel less engaged within the workplace and therefore inapt for the talent required.

The stereotype and resulting behaviour of discrimination within the workforce were also evident within the **Southern Initiative** report *Pacific Peoples Workforce Challenge* (2019). It aimed to accelerate the advancements of Pacific People in the workforce had identified that many Pacific People feel as if they are facing a bias and reflects how talent is perceived in the workplace (refer to Stereotype within Talent):

"I feel like I am up against an unconscious bias and have to work even harder to prove myself. But when I feel accepted as a Pacific Islander, I can achieve anything" (p. 14)

"As a Pacific person they had to work harder to prove themselves" (p. 14)

"Distance themselves from their real selves, in order to be respected by other colleagues" (p. 14)

The first statement appears that although they are obviously a proud Pacific person, but because of the perception and resulting stereotype, it appears their competence is questioned within the workplace. The second and third statements reveal aspects of how talent is perceived within their workplace, that they do not fit the prototype of what is expected and feel they have to change their Pacific identity to suit the status quo. It also supports the notion of a paternalistic stereotype, whereby this Pacific person has identified that their workplace supports favouritism towards the in-group and a dislike for the negative trait outer groups, therefore one's self must change in order to succeed (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002).

The stereotype was even felt at the outset of getting a job:

"One person found it difficult to get a job interview due to an island name. They changed to their maiden name and instantly got interviews" (p. 14)

"When they (HR recruiters) look at the last name and they can't pronounce it they just think that they probably can't speak English" (p. 14)

A recent report by **Haar (2019)** *Voices from the Rito* which focused on the ethnic **pay gap** within the public sector also supports the stereotype and is expressed by the following excerpts from the interviews undertaken for the research. Discrimination is clear when progressing in their careers.

"For us Pacific people in particular, we like to Manakitanga (look after, give support, give generously) and give hospitality to guest, it comes naturally. But we are thus the ones to do the dishes, look after guests and others 'step back' because others (Pakeha-

New Zealand European) expect it of you. This can harm one's career, we don't look like senior leaders, do we" (p. 26)

This highlights the stereotype within the workplace that Pacific People are perceived as warm, but in a sense submissive or only capable of feminine qualities (Ergle, 2015; Hackman et al, 1992). However, these qualities are a fundamental part of the Pacific culture and could be considered rather transactional traits (Ergle, 2015; Hackman et al, 1992; Unaisi Nabobo, 1998).

This statement also emphasises the misconception of cultural differences, and how this can add to a negative stereotype of Pacific Peoples, rather than attributing it to the positive aspects of Pacific Peoples customs of humility and respect (Unaisi Nabobo, 1998).

It can be further acknowledged by the literature which supports the idea that Pacific People are still being treated with the traces of 'colonial racialisations' and that they are not competent for higher professions or roles. Belittling an outer-group with mundane tasks does not fit with the predetermined masculine leadership traits of taking charge or delegating. Furthermore, also does not appear that this statement is a workplace to be facilitating and supporting or improving a diverse workplace culture which is congruent with literature review in this paper.

The following excerpt from *Voices from the Rito* is concerning, considering the statement was taken from a public servant whereby one assumes formal policies and diversity training would be heavily implemented. Additionally, the report was only commissioned last year. This strengthens the claim that although knowing about biases may not automatically change behaviour and perspectives (Kulik & Roberson, 2008; Noon, 2018).

"Through different times of my career people make assumptions. Often Pacific people are headed off into 'people' dominant areas i.e., relationships etc. My perception of my Department is that 'people of colour' are putting into 'softer' areas. These are softer areas and not important and actually harm the career [paid much less]!" (p. 26)

These *soft* areas could be acknowledged as lower competence areas or areas that warmer people are needed, further supported by the leader and professional literature that minorities do not fit the prototype, and do not display the more masculine traits (Unaisi Nabobo, 1998).

The soft areas could also be referenced to Czopp and Walzer (2011) research, in that competence is measured differently according to race. Competence for Pacific People is possibly judged through different elements which has led to the determination they are suited for softer areas within the workplace, however again this is a stereotype referring to every Pacific Peoples as the same, rather than of individuals.

Ambivalent *racism* could be considered in the following statements which carried the perception of incompetence, laziness and violating work ethic and also carriers the notions of a disliking and predispositions towards this *outer* group (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002). Discrimination can be read in the below abstracts whereby this is a limiting factor to advancement for Pacific Peoples (continuation from *Voices from the Rito*).

"So, I think there is an inherent bias. Pacific peoples are smiling and like jokes etc. but the substance to them is often missed. I don't know if we value these different traits enough." (p. 35)

#### Furthermore;

"My experience is that there are different expectations for those at the top. There are lower expectations towards Pacific and Maori employees, and Asians. I see power as being (largely) held by white male leaders and this is detrimental to the extent of bias and discrimination" (p. 26)

"In my department, Maori and Pacific Islanders are rare in the management level. The Pakeha managers can't understand the cultural differences. It is hard to get higher in the Public Sector. Maori and Pacific Islanders in the Tier 2 roles – they are a very small percentage compared to the mainstream roles" (p. 26)

These quotations also support how social status assumes competence and that is held by the Caucasian male leaders who are in a position of wealth or power (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002). This also can be considered that when the Pacific People do succeed in their career, the stereotype may change with social pressures from *pity* to *envious* and then are seen as a competitive threat.

# Conclusion

This research contained various interlinking factors which attempted to understand whether the stereotype of Pacific People is a factor that perceives them to be inapt as talent. It further attempted to analyse whether Pacific People are limited by the resulting behaviour towards their stereotype, that being discrimination.

The stereotype content model was discussed and applied to the New Zealand context. It was explored that the current stereotype of Pacific People; low competence and high warmth, could have developed from the subjective history which saw Pacific Peoples face the effects from racialisation and colonialisms. The Dawn raids were possibly the catalysts for such thoughts and opinions of Pacific Peoples which has led to the paternalistic response.

The stereotype could also have been influenced by Pacific peoples having a culture which is representative of more feminine qualities, that possibly their resulting actions or how they operate within the workplace are not considered the *prototype* or the *fit* that companies believe that is of talent. The high skilled occupations were deemed to have masculine traits and that there is a certain prototype towards the talent required for this level. However, the feminine qualities that Pacific People display should be viewed as a leadership asset, and essential for managerial positions that requires a transactional leadership.

The response to the stereotype allows for the more traditional form of prejudice such as ambivalent racism which carries the perception of incompetence, laziness and violating work ethic. These traits do not fit with the regarded view of talent which the research explored how there is a formed belief that there is a fixed prototype for higher skilled roles. It was concluded that the traits required to be regarded as talent for a manager or professional occupation appears to be similar to the *competence* traits discussed in the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002).

The research findings highlighted that there appeared to be a *negative* perception of Pacific Peoples within the workforce. People felt they were treated differently due to their ethnicity, or they even attempted to hide their culture to be accepted within the workplace. It was clear that there was experiences where Pacific People feel like they were not meeting the status quo or prototype. Even in the public sector, where it would be expected it would be leading agency for formal policies and training, it appears to still have problems dealing with diversity as it is mentioned in several quotations from the data.

This research contributes to make sound political decisions. To effectively facilitate an effective stereotype change of Pacific Peoples, the Government will have to be more supportive

of migrants by educating the public about diversity. Diversity in New Zealand should also be looked at the view from the case of morality rather than from abiding a policy, law or business case. Organisations need to start viewing talent as both innate and learned, that potential does not exist of what someone does or does not do but how another person can view their motivations and enhance it into performance and success (Dominick and Gabriel, 2009).

The under achievement for Pacific People is ongoing and even with implementation of the Ministry and policies, it does not explain why this continues within New Zealand 'equalitarian' society. Therefore, a qualitative research to explore the reasons why this continues within New Zealand society firmly expands the real knowledge.

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