Unleashing Pacific talent

Construction and Infrastructure Workforce Development Plan for Pacific Peoples

WAIHANGA ARA RAU
Construction and Infrastructure
Workforce Development Council

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Waihanga Ara Rau Pacific Workforce Development Plan (the Plan) outlines an approach that supports the needs and aspirations of Pacific peoples in the construction and infrastructure sector, while ensuring the sector has 'the right skills at the right time.'

The vision, "Unleashing Pacific talent to meet construction and infrastructure demands while cultivating an environment where the Pacific workforce and enterprises are valued, respected, and thriving", encapsulates the essence of the key findings from the Waihanga Ara Rau Pacific Workforce Development Plan.

The Plan highlights the importance of the industry leo (voice), emphasising the need for deeper understanding of Pacific values and culture. Additionally, it aims to better harness the existing Pacific construction and infrastructure (C&I) talent, consisting of 26,550 people[1] and 5,913 enterprises,[2] while acknowledging that the Pacific population is young and growing.

Targeted initiatives and pathways for learners, the workforce, and businesses, that align with individual, family and community aspirations will support the aspirations of Pacific people.

Four priority areas have been identified to achieve the Pacific construction and infrastructure vision:

1.0 Elevate and promote Pacific success, culture, and values across the C&I sector.

2.0 Ensure targeted training and attraction initiatives that unleash a skilled Pacific workforce.

3.0 Foster Pacific business growth to advance greater sector and economic participation.

4.0 Drive key system shifts to support greater prosperity for Pacific communities.

Recommendations have been developed to support these priorities, focusing primarily on activities within the sector's sphere of influence. The aim is to leverage, enhance, or scale up existing initiatives effectively.

A key strategy involves utilising storytelling, which is integral to Pacific culture and history, to promote values such as service, consensus, and collectivism in the workplace.

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[1]   7.1% of the total C&I workforce in 2022.

[2]   Combined total of 1,403 registered businesses and 4,501 sole traders in 2022.

This approach seeks to highlight Pacific success stories and leadership while addressing prevailing perceptions. Family and community often guide Pacific people's career choices, favouring tertiary education and white-collar careers over vocational trades and blue-collar jobs. Additionally, the recommendations address the role of Waihanga Ara Rau within the vocational ecosystem. This includes ensuring that training programmes and products meet the needs of Pacific people, emphasising practical, work-based training with culturally relevant curricula. Such training should be supported by educators and assessors who are attuned to the needs of Pacific learners.

Supporting the Plan's vision also involves enhancing the capacity, capability, and overall numbers of Pacific businesses. This requires tailored support, mentorship, and solutions to procurement challenges. Achieving these goals will necessitate intentional, strategic partnerships to improve existing support mechanisms and allow Pacific communities to create their own solutions where gaps exist.

At its core, this Plan is committed to supporting the aspirations of Pacific people and communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, as outlined in key strategic documents developed by the Ministry for Pacific Peoples.[3] Recommendations focus on system shifts within the C&I sector and the vocational education ecosystem, including increased representation at leadership forums, influencing apprenticeship policies, and supporting community-led initiatives. These efforts are essential for fostering a thriving and prosperous Pacific community.

Next steps

The Pacific Workforce Development Plan is the first step to envisioning a thriving Pacific C&I sector, that will contribute significantly to New Zealand's economic and social landscape. A more detailed Action Plan will be finalised in late 2024 which prioritise activities and ensure alignment with the broader needs and priorities of the C&I sector, including those of Māori.

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[3] Ministry for Pacific Peoples - All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was applied that was grounded in the indigenous Pacific Talanoa4 research methodology which is centred on Pacific values and principles, such as love, respect, collectivism, reciprocity, and family.[5]. This approach allowed us to explore the experiences of Pacific and non-Pacific leaders from various areas across the C&I, vocational and community sectors, in a culturally appropriate way, while adhering to ethical research practices.

In-person and virtual interviews were conducted between October 2023 and January 2024, varying in duration from 60 to 120 minutes. The Talanoa focussed on understanding workforce dynamics, training and career pathways, diversity, and inclusion, and any cultural or personal drivers to entering and/or remaining in the sector.

The thematic analysis of qualitative data gathered, used processes such as transcription, coding, and prioritisation of topics to identify prevalent themes, challenges, and opportunities. Prioritising themes given the range of C&I sectors in our coverage provided challenges.

We recognise that certain strategic sector[6] perspectives were not included during the interview process. This report primarily focused on identifying the common themes for Pacific people in the C&I sector which we felt were adequately captured from the interview pool.

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4   Talanoa is a traditional word used across the Pacific to reflect a process of inclusive, participatory, and transparent dialogue.

5   Ministry for Pacific Peoples - All-of-Government Pacific Wellbeing Strategy

6   Waihanga Ara Rau - Strategic Reference Groups

PRIORITY AREAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Unleashing Pacific talent to meet construction and infrastructure demands, while cultivating an environment where the Pacific workforce and enterprises are valued, respected, and thriving.

1.0 Elevate and promote Pacific success, culture, and values across the C&I sector.

1.1 Develop, promote and collaborate on Pacific success stories that support improved visibility and perceptions of the C&I sector.

1.2 Targeted promotion of the industry leo insights to garner understanding and support from the C&I sector.

1.3 Promote key collateral that educates the sector on Pacific culture, values, and principles, and their manifestation in workplace settings.

1.4 Collaborate with subject experts to promote and implement cultural capability strategies and initiatives within C&I organisations.

2.0 Ensure targeted training and attraction initiatives that unleash a skilled Pacific workforce.

2.1 Ensure assessors, assessment practices, and pastoral care models are flexible to the needs of Pacific learners.

2.2 Increase funding for the delivery of key micro-credentials and on-job training programmes.

2.3 Target attraction campaigns to diversify the Pacific workforce, focusing initially on young students, career changers, and adult learners.

2.4 Ensure training and qualifications meet the needs of Pacific people, informed by culturally appropriate evidence.

3.0 Foster Pacific business growth to advance greater sector and economic participation.

3.1   Support the enhancement and scaling up of existing tendering and social procurement initiatives for Pacific businesses.

3.2   Support Pacific businesses in ensuring they have access to a robust Pacific C&I business directory.

3.3   Ensure Pacific businesses have access to a platform that provides timely business and support information.

3.4   Promote and enhance initiatives that support and guide aspiring Pacific sole traders towards business ownership.

4.0 Drive key system shifts to support greater prosperity for Pacific communities.

4.1   Ensure there are opportunities for increased representation and visibility of Pacific C&I voices across the vocational, education and tertiary system.

4.2   Ensure the Pacific industry leo influences key apprenticeship policies and initiatives.

4.3   Elevate, align and embed industry leo within key procurement policy decisions, as well as wider Government and C&I sector policies and initiatives.

4.4   Support the identification, funding and acceleration of community led initiatives that support the delivery of a skilled Pacific workforce.

KEY THEMES

Pacific people, businesses, and communities have increasingly become a vital pillar of economic growth and development in Aotearoa New Zealand.

There is a massive opportunity for the C&I sector to unleash the potential of Pacific communities, a large and growing workforce, to meet sector demands.[7]

It is important to acknowledge that the journey of Pacific people into sector is often influenced by a complex interplay of cultural, familial, and systemic factors.

This journey can be made easier by cultivating an environment where the Pacific workforce and enterprises are valued, respected, and thriving.

[7] The Treasury Te Tai Ōhanga- Pacifc peoples' wellbeing

KEY THEMES

Cultural understanding and values

Cultural understanding and values are crucial for Pacific individuals, influencing their sense of belonging. There is often a deep sense of purpose linked to their identity, centred on serving and advancing the wider Pacific community.

In many instances, Pacific individuals are the sole Pacific person in management teams or professional setting. Maintaining a sense of self proves challenging in such environments, particularly in the absence of Pacific peers for support.

Cultural understanding

Cultural understanding and inclusion are vital for the overall wellbeing of Pacific individuals, especially in non-Pacific settings. This typically entails the recognition and respect of Pacific cultural values, principles, and individual contributions within the organisation.

Numerous organisations, especially those owned by Pacific individuals, acknowledge, and honour the significance of cultural and family events, which often extend beyond genealogical ties for many Pacific people. These events may be practiced differently within Pacific cultures at times.

For instance, funerals often require employees' absence for several days, even for non-immediate family members. Current bereavement leave policies frequently overlook these cultural nuances.

Interviewees cited that employers who recognise and acknowledge these cultural practices often receive enhanced loyalty, longer tenure, and additional support from Pacific staff during challenging projects or tough times for the business.

Sense of obligation

Pacific individuals, especially young ones, often feel a deep sense of duty towards their parents, families, and communities. This obligation is usually rooted in a desire to 'repay' parents for the sacrifices they've made to provide their children with opportunities for a better future.

This obligation is often seen as a barrier to pursuing careers or further vocational study. The costs of education and training is often weighed against the immediate financial needs of the family.

Pacific families maintain strong ties to their cultural and spiritual beliefs, which are closely linked to their commitment to community and collectivism.

With integration into Western society, the concept of 'service' has evolved, encompassing financial support for church, weddings, funerals, and assistance to relatives in the Pacific Islands.

" A lot of kids won't go straight to education. They'd rather help their family out first before they can think about it."

" So those are the kids that are getting into trouble because there's nothing else for them to do. They need money. Whether that is to support their family or relieve their family of their financial stress that they go and do it themselves.

But they're finding themselves in trouble and nobody wants to actually tell them to take a seat and look at them to actually set them up."

Pacific leadership qualities

"The pathway to leadership is through service" is a commonly used proverb that articulates how Pacific people, in general, view leadership. This view is typically at odds with western views of leadership.

For the vast majority of Pacific individuals, skills like relationship building, collective and empathetic leadership, adaptability, humility, and consensus decision-making are ingrained from a young age through individuals' responsibilities to their

families, churches, and wider communities. These are "soft skills" highly valued by organisations in leaders, typically gained through professional experience.

However, due to the context in which many Pacific people acquire these skills, they can be challenging to quantify, translate, and be valued in a professional context.

KEY THEMES

Perceptions and influencers

The role of parents, family, and communities is critical for Pacific peoples. They play a significant role in career and education choices, nurturing and influencing their aspirations, expectations, decision-making, and success.

Education, training, and career choices, including entry into the construction and infrastructure training or sector, are often shaped by family perceptions and needs.

"...the way schools engage is usually the school will engage with the student. In the Māori world you have to engage with our whānau; like it's no good giving a student a flyer and saying 'here talk to your parents'.

There needs to be a whole rethink of that engagement and it's the same way with Pacific, instead of dealing with a student, you actually need to deal with the parents, because that's where the decisions are made - they are made at home."

Perception of trades

Pacific business leaders across the sector spoke of the general expectation from Pacific parents, extended family, and wider community to pursue university qualifications, rather than a vocational pathway. In many Pacific cultures this is further underpinned by a view that those who undertake vocational trades are 'second class citizens.' These perceptions often become entrenched across generations.

A 2024 study on career perceptions carried out by market research firm Ipsos[8], stated that 57% of Pacific high school aged students (ages 14-17) indicated that they intended to go to a tertiary institution, 15% intended to start an apprenticeship, and 15% intending to enter the workforce (the research did not ask which specific sector they intended to enter). It's also important to note that in Pacific communities, there is a strong value entrenched from a young age that you 'respect your elders'.[9]

> " What I've found in terms of working with Pasifika, especially at a young age, is that there's this perception of getting training and getting educated.
>
> What I find is that if you worked in a scaffolding company, the training that you did was probably of less value than if you went to school and got a degree."

> " ...our Pasifika people just have no idea.
>
> We're always being told to go to university."

This attitude tends to permeate all aspects of Pacific people's lives, including school and the workplace, where teachers and managers are viewed as 'elders' or more senior figures. As a result, individuals may be hesitant to raise concerns or question authority. Perceptions of the C&I sector and vocational education should be explored in a broader context, not just within Pacific communities, as these perceptions are common across various groups. These perceptions are often deeply embedded in society, institutions, and systems. It seems that in places where vocational education is highly valued, there are typically more positive perceptions of trades.

For example, in Germany, the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system begins in high school and integrates academic studies with business and work experiences. This approach has successfully established vocational education as a mainstream career pathway internationally.[10] [11]

8   Waihanga Ara Rau - Publications: Career perceptions of the construction & infrastructure industries

9   Tāhūrangi New Zealand Curriculum - Tapasā values

10 BIBB Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training

11 BMBF Federal Ministry of Education and Research - The German Vocational Training System

Family and community connections

Family and community networks are fundamental for Pacific peoples' entry into employment. Since the early 1970s, the manufacturing sector has employed a large number of Pacific peoples. This was heavily influenced by large migrations from the Pacific islands and has led to strong intergenerational ties since.

However, as New Zealand (and the world) has shifted to more automation within manufacturing, Pacific peoples have increasingly moved into new sectors. The C&I sector, in particular, has slowly gained from this transition[12], with many using family or community connections as their entry point.

Interviews reveal that initial sector involvement often comes through family, church, or community networks. Approaches like this, which recognise Pacific communities involvement, are vital to providing vocational and sector pathways, even despite any negative perceptions of trades as a valid career choice.

> "We've got father and son now. It's generational as well. It's worked for us. For us, for me, I'm proud of it as well, because it really reflects on how much company is valued by our people.
>
> If I didn't enjoy it here, I wouldn't be telling anyone else to come along. If someone asked me, I'd tell them "Nah go find somewhere else" you know what I mean?"

Increasing community awareness

In general, Pacific communities have limited knowledge of the range of vocational pathways and careers available in the C&I sector. The sector is not typically viewed as a primary or preferred pathway for many Pacific individuals and their children. This lack of consideration has a detrimental impact on the sector, particularly in terms of a potential labour force.

Many interview participants did not enter the sector directly from high school and transitioned later in life, primarily through family and community connections. Unlike Māori, who have historical connections to the sector through initiatives like the old Ministry of Works and Māori Trades Training schemes by Māori Affairs, Pacific peoples lack strong generational ties to the sector.[13]

These embedded intergenerational links play a crucial role in fostering connections to the sector and building familiarity with related industries. Many interview participants, identifying as the first

[12] Infometrics - Insights into New Zealand's Pacific People
[13] Te Puni Kōkiri - Laying the foundations

generation of their family to enter the sector, highlighted this lack of generational connection among Pacific families. However, over time, increasing numbers of Pacific people are entering the sector, partly through recruitment drives and family and community influence.

Engineering interview participants offered a different perspective, as the profession is more widely known and typically university related, which mentioned above, is valued in Pacific communities. Family influence was a key factor in pursuing a career in engineering though those families were already familiar with tertiary professions and engineering as a pathway.

Many interviewees spoke of the need for the sector to be better marketed and socialised as a primary career pathway, including the support mechanisms to make this career a reality (e.g. providers, etc). Many in the sector admit they had limited knowledge of their field before entering.

One of the interviewees highlighted the success of targeted campaigns for Pacific peoples such as the 2016 vocational marketing campaign, 'Got a Trade? Got it Made!', in attracting more Pacific individuals to the sector.

> "That's what we've kind of based part of our culture around in the sense, that natural recruitment for a business, or for our business anyway, should flow through our employees and team now.
>
> Right throughout our business we've got siblings working here."

> "I had no idea of trades. Part of that's because the careers advisors and the guidance counsellors were tired old teachers with nothing else to do. They were close to retirement and all they knew was to go to university, go to university, go to university.
>
> I don't remember, having gone through university, people telling me about the trades, but if I knew what I know today, refrigeration/air conditioning would have been my choice."

KEY THEMES

Sector and workplace environment

As New Zealand's workforce becomes more diverse, the C&I sector faces a substantial need to expand its workforce to meet projected demand across all industries.

Attracting more Pacific peoples into the sector can help address some of this demand, but it will require intentional efforts to create inclusive workplaces that understand and accommodate Pacific culture.

Cultural competency

Relationship building was critical to cultural understanding and inclusivity, and this applied to Pacific and non-Pacific alike. Pacific people often speak of 'Teu le Va' (Samoan) or pronounced 'Tauhi Va' in the Tongan language, which is a Pacific cultural concept that emphasises the importance of maintaining and nurturing relationships to promote social harmony. The concept stresses mutual respect, reciprocity, and the active care for the relational spaces between individuals, reflecting deep cultural values of interconnectedness, communal living, and the pursuit of collective well-being and stability.

Interviewees highlighted environments where cultural misunderstandings are common. For instance, when Pacific individuals are not vocal in meetings or discussions, this is often understood as disengagement, whereas for Pacific people, it is seen as a sign of respect (as highlighted above regarding 'respect your elders'). Another common example is mistaking humility for a lack of career aspiration, as Pacific individuals may refrain from applying for promotions or self-promoting. Interviewees also noted experiencing discrimination and bias, across various levels in the sector, including learners, the workforce, and entrepreneurs.[14]

A systemic approach by the sector of having zero tolerance for this kind of behaviour would support inclusion. Interviewees emphasised that while these examples may seem obvious, they are widespread throughout the sector. They also elaborate on examples given in section 'cultural understanding and values'

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[14] Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission - Inquiry into the Pacific Pay Gap

Businesses, both Pacific and non-Pacific, use different approaches to creating an inclusive environment. One business owner spoke of proactively reviewing and providing equipment, rain jackets and health and safety gear to show their care for staff. Another business used a profit-share scheme for teams working on different projects. Business owners spoke of team days away as critical to maintaining a strong connection with the staff and building an inclusive work culture.

There are many organisations in New Zealand delivering cultural competency training and it would be easy for businesses and organisations to engage with those providers to advise and build organisational capability. There are also many businesses operating well and should be used as exemplars to the industry wanting to better engage with Pacific peoples.

Mentoring critical for education and career progression

It was often mentioned that having mentors throughout is a critical part in employees' career and progression. Mentors often helped navigate the culture of an organisation, expand networks, and provide career advice. They were often seen as role models and did not have to be Pacific. However, interviewees highlighted the impracticality of always having mentors and emphasised the importance of increasing the presence and visibility of Pacific individuals in senior leadership roles, as, "you can't be what you can't see". Pacific Leadership would be a critical enabler to recruit, retain and promote our sector and workforce.

> " The challenge is, how do we maintain that family culture without getting too corporatised?"

> " People can aspire to be something if it's more relatable. I'm not saying that it's impossible, but you have a higher chance of someone aspiring to be in a role if they see someone that they can relate to."

> " He's really interested in culture, not so much in wanting to learn the Pasifika culture or the Samoan culture or anything but he asks and just enquires because he can see how much I live by that side of things or in what I bring to the table from that. He's trying to understand that, and he appreciates it because that makes up what we are as an organisation today."

Formal recognition of skills and experience

Interviewees emphasised the importance of formally acknowledging the expertise and capabilities of employees who demonstrate technical proficiency in roles for which they may not hold formal qualifications[12]. The challenge primarily stems from difficulties with the literacy components of assessments and educational courses, which stands as a barrier to acquiring official credentials.

Although they demonstrate proven abilities, the gap between their technical skills and formal qualifications can present challenges, particularly when seeking opportunities elsewhere. The need for alternative accreditation pathways is evident, providing meaningful recognition of their expertise and bridging the gap between practical skills and formal qualifications.[15]

There are examples of Pacific individuals in leadership or technical roles and owning businesses with little or no formal qualifications, yet they are widely recognised for their competence and effectiveness in their work. This recognition often results from employers proactively identifying and rewarding their skills and experience within their organisations, prioritising practical skill sets and hands-on experience over academic achievements. These stories need to be amplified and shared.

The case of the LPG gas sector highlights this situation in that the sector has very few qualifications on the New Zealand Qualifications and Credentials Framework - typically training is done in-house.

An interviewee expressed a recent example where an experienced and technically proficient staff member left for another company but found difficulty in securing the promised salary from the new employer as human resource requirements for qualifications could not be met. This impacts the ability of the sector to attract new talent as it can limit future career progression opportunities.

[15] Ministry for Pacific Peoples - Pacific Women and Men in Business

KEY THEMES

Education and training

Approach to assessments

As mentioned previously, many Pacific in the sector feel they possess sufficient experience and technical proficiency; however, they often lack the formal qualifications required for the work they perform.

They mentioned struggling with written theory or oral assessments in the past, which has led to a reluctance to pursue formal qualifications. Simplifying assessments to use simple and commonly used industry terminology could help address this issue.

Language challenges persisted across generational and cultural lines. A notable incident involved a business owner preparing apprentices for a carpentry assessment. Despite understanding the material when explained by the owner, the apprentices failed due to the way questions were framed. This left them demoralised, with one quitting carpentry afterward.

Recognising the need for culturally relatable assessors, the business owner decided to qualify as one to bridge cultural and communication gaps for Pacific apprentices.

"...it's the assessments. They can do any physical work and assessments, but it's the writing and how do you put things into sentences that they would accept."

"...another thing that some of our students struggled with this year was the language barrier between their life at home, which was pretty fluid and traditional speaking - like Tongan or Tuvalu which are the main ones - and then they come to school and I feel like their English is a little bit behind than what they should be."

Our interviewee highlighted Wintec's use of digital applications for pre-trades courses as being successful to streamline student requirements and recording assessments, rather than paper based assessments. Students were motivated to use the app resulting in an 80 percent graduation rate. They were also exploring how they could use these assessments as a digital CV for prospective employers, to demonstrate proficiency.

❝For the qualifications. He could be a master painter, but he has to put in that theory work, but doesn't know how, or even what is the next one up from level 4? LBP [Licensed Building Practitioner]? He can even be qualified LBP, but again, it's the theory work that will stop him from getting there."

Culturally relevant curriculum

Interviewees in the education sector also spoke of the current research and examples of culturally appropriate learning methodologies already existing in New Zealand. Though in some cases this was segmented and not widely adopted to mainstream. They emphasised the importance of investigating and adopting existing methodologies that are most appropriate for industry needs, rather than necessitating new research.

Te Ako Tiketike, a model for successful Māori learners in workplace settings developed by New Zealand's Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence Ako Aotearoa, is a good example of this. Although this specifically looked at Māori learners in the sector it is relevant to Pacific learners.

❝The bit that I would use is around its project based assessments, it's what I call contextualised project based assessments.

So when you're teaching, when you're delivering those programs the big thing is about engagement, you know we see with Māori and Pasifika, with all learners but particularly Māori and Pasifika it's got to be relevant, absolutely got to be relevant and so the best way to do that is to have projects that are appropriate and contextualised to them, to their world, so be it."

Workplace training

Pacific learners were often time-poor due to family, church or sporting commitments as well as having financial responsibilities to support the family. This often impacts their ability to undertake extended periods of study. Workplace training is preferred as it allows learners to meet financial obligations and undertake practical learning and assessments at the same time.

Micro-credentials are viewed as providing flexibility for Pacific learners. This allows those who are unable to complete block courses due to absences from attending family events. This made catching up an additional time burden for learners who often had to prioritise other responsibilities over study. Micro-credentials allowed flexibility for learners who were subject to a significant life event, to be able to pick up the specific micro-credential rather than have to re-apply for the entire course.

> So, when the sector started talking about micro credentials, we were high fiving and going wow that is so mean, because that's exactly what our people need."

> For Māori and Pacific kids, this isn't the only thing that they do, they also work, they go home and do feau's [family duties] and then sometimes if there's a tangi or funeral, they're gone for a week."

> I remember saying to people just how busy a 17-, 18-year-old is, the Pasifika ones. If they're doing an apprenticeship, they actually live really busy lives because they've got to take mum to church or grandma to church, or they've got to look after their little sister or their little brother, they've got to do cook and clean, they've got sports, they've got cultural evenings they've got so much to do.

> So, I think people seem to think sometimes that doing an apprenticeship is easy and they've got plenty of time because they're just doing the job. Well, actually, there's the learning and there's also your cultural commitments and family commitments."

Education and career pathways

Interviewees highlighted that vocational pathways for high school students are not clearly identified or promoted early enough. Lower numbers of direct entrants into the sector from high school are potentially a result of this.

Regarding the construction pathway, much of the promotion looks at qualifying as a builder as the end goal, rather than the wider scope of career pathways in the sector as shown by roles held by interviewees which included Business Owners, General Managers, Business Development Managers and Construction Managers.

A clearer pathway promotion of the wider opportunities within the sector, with building as the stepping stone into this career, improves the attractiveness of the sector to a Pacific audience.

In civil engineering, the impact of not identifying and taking core subjects such as Maths and Science early in high schools (particularly Calculus, Physics and Chemistry) can restrict Pacific learners from taking up engineering at the university level. This is often a period of uncertainty for students who unintentionally limit future career options through uninformed career guidance. This is made more difficult with many Pacific students attending schools in low decile communities which often lack the resources and capacity to adequately promote and support students in these areas.[16]

> " ...I asked him for a job and he started me off.
>
> He said like 'yup, if I give you a job, you have to do something that's going to be worthwhile like an apprenticeship', and I didn't know what that was, and so he signed me up to BCITO."

These communities and schools often lack the support that struggling students receive at better-resourced schools, particularly in maths and science. Parental involvement is also typically lower, as communication barriers often hinder parents from engaging and understanding the value of education, often resulting in students leaving school early to help support their families.

An engineering fabrication business owner benefitted from a one year, pre-trade introductory course similar to the Trades Essentials micro-credential[17], which provided experience in plumbing, building, roofing and civil with transferable credits. Training like this is beneficial for students still undecided about which pathway is most suited for them to pursue in the C&I sector.

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[16] Te Tāhuhu o Mātauranga Ministry of Education - PISA 2022
[17] New Zealand Qualifications Authority - Trades Essentials (Micro-credential)

Supportive educators pastoral care

Numerous instances of improving educational outcomes for Pacific learners stem from individual educators' exceptional efforts. While many of these educators were Pacific themselves (with a few non-Pacific), their familiarity with or openness to understanding the learners' culture was crucial for success. Examples included holding additional Talanoa (informal classes) for students as bridging lessons, integrating culturally relevant examples, innovative use of technology to make assessments more accessible, and providing inclusive environments with flexibility around familial responsibilities.

Despite approaches such as these increasing the number of successful Pacific graduates, many organisations didn't always see it as being suitable or practical for ongoing adoption.

A successful example from Te Tai Tokerau (Northland) region highlighted collaboration between industry and community providers in delivering pastoral care to young people. This approach recognised the importance of cultural familiarity by involving community development partners who understood the Pacific student experience and their day-to-day challenges. They were better able engage learners, provide effective pastoral care, and prepare them for the workforce. The provider partnered with a local business to manage work readiness and health and safety requirements.

This example demonstrates that pastoral care and cultural awareness are inherently built into the fabric of Māori or Pacific-based organisations. This has a tangible impact on staff having greater retention and attractive study or work culture.

> " I've seen the influence of Pacific Tutors and Pacific students being allowed to…express themselves in what they create. It's had a really huge impact…"

> " Our Polynesian people are always servants to the community, and I guess that's how we've been brought up, to look after each other."

KEY THEMES

Building on Pacific businesses

Intentional support of Pacific businesses can foster diverse and inclusive growth for the sector.

As highlighted previously, they also support the acceleration of an underutilised talent pipeline, promotes social inclusion and empowerment, and can serve as positive role models.

Pacific business community

Business owners highlighted the importance of Pacific business community and relationships with other Pacific businesses for sustaining and growing their enterprises through collaboration opportunities. However, the absence of an easily accessible Pacific C & I business directory posed a challenge.

Small business owners lacked the resources and time to attend networking events and proposed the creation of a readily available Pacific business directory as a feasible solution.

Navigating the business world

Most Pacific business owners interviewed consider themselves small to medium-sized enterprises.

Newer entrepreneurs faced challenges accessing sufficient business management or government support, primarily due to a lack of accessible and understandable information. This makes starting, sustaining, and growing a business challenging, particularly in the first few years of a business.

Interviewees highlighted that despite limited awareness and access to services, business mentorship played a crucial role in their transition into business, often provided by their former employers.

They mentioned that during the initial stages of setting up their businesses, they typically began by sub-contracting to their ex-employer, via becoming a sole trader.

Challenges generally arose when the business owner wanted to expand the business and struggled due to the lack of business management experience. There was a need for tailored business management resources or qualifications for small Pacific businesses. They were particularly interested in the procurement process and on making the tendering processes more accessible.

Business procurement

Pacific business owners face several challenges with the procurement and contracting process despite the efforts of organisations like Amotai[18] and Pacific Business Trust.[19]

Limited experience with tendering and procurement processes makes it challenging for Pacific businesses to navigate technical requirements and secure contracts. Resource constraints exacerbate the issue, as small-scale businesses often lack dedicated staff for tendering, leaving the burden on the owner after a full day's work.This inconsistency in securing contracts hampers expansion and capability development.

Implicit bias against Pacific businesses can also impede contract success, often requiring years of relationship building to overcome.

Interviewees identified opportunities amidst the challenges. Capability building through training and mentorship programmes, like those offered by Te Puni Kōkiri for Māori business owners, are working well. Noting the tailored support and resources on professional communication and technical language, as being vital to supporting them through their first major tendering process.

[18] Amotai - Supplier diversity Aotearoa
[19] Pacific Business Trust

Broader outcomes and social procurement

Interviewees spoke of the effectiveness of broader outcomes and social procurement conditions (also commonly referred to as non-price attributes) within contracts in supporting and sustaining Pacific businesses.The progressive procurement policy for Māori businesses illustrates an advancement in social procurement.[20]

This has had positive flow-on impacts to Pacific businesses, allowing for inclusion in larger economic activities.

It has also help reduce institutional barriers by creating pathways for Pacific businesses to enter and succeed in the market. One interviewee noted that, as a Pacific business, they felt the need to demonstrate additional value beyond their competitors.

To achieve this, they consciously added 'non-price attributes,' such as becoming a Living Wage Employer[21] and obtaining Sitewise Green certification.[22]

Although these factors are not typically included in tender documents, they highlighted their unique value to purchasers. There is a desire to have such attributes included in procurement considerations.

These approaches allows contracting organisations to generate social value with their 'purchases' and consider factors beyond just the cost of services or products, such as the business's community and environmental impact.

Investment in community

Despite some of the challenges faced by Pacific business owners, they still have an overwhelming pull to continue 'serving the village and community' – an important cultural principle. At a community level, this is displayed in many forms through sponsorship, donations, and sacrificing the little spare time that they have.

At a business level, there's a proactive effort to hire Pacific people from the community and promote upskilling, despite financial constraints. This is often driven by an awareness of the generational impacts it will have on the employee's family and their community.

[20] Te Puni Kōkiri - Progressive procurement
[21] Living Wage - About
[22] Sitewise Green - Health and Safety Assessment

KEY THEMES

Systems-wide leadership and partnerships

Systemic barriers

Systemic experiences and circumstances, alongside family and cultural values have significant influence on the educational and career journey Pacific individuals take.

Interviewees recognised systemic barriers as a reality and stressed the importance of acknowledging this issue. Future solutions to sector challenges must address this reality to achieve meaningful change. These barriers are often deeply rooted in systems and can affect young people even before they enter the education system.

Many Pacific communities, particularly those in lower decile schools, face systemic education issues such as funding, resource shortages, and inadequate infrastructure, which can impact their learning experiences. Additionally, broader social determinants may also affect Pacific communities beyond the education system.

"In 2010. The guys there were telling me that it's an ageing stormwater workforce and stating there's not enough people coming through and if we don't start training people then in ten years from then we'll have major problems. We're not going to be able to handle the stuff that's coming.

And they said there'll be flooding, there will be rubbish all over the place and somebody's going to have to clean up and they'll be too old and retired to clean it up.

Well, look what's happening now."

Rigid structures and systems

A 'business-as-usual' approach does not provide the solutions that the sector, government and community require. Interviewees spoke of the prevalent challenges, not new to the sector, such as the 'aging workforce' or 'Pacific peoples mainly filling unskilled jobs in the sector.'

The persistence of these issues over a decade highlights that the 'business-as-usual' approach is ineffective.

Support and funding mechanisms

Pacific businesses and community support groups were keen to pursue more collaborative relationships with government. A key priority for Pacific businesses is establishing connections with entities that directly influence support and funding mechanisms for procurement and apprenticeships.

High education costs and upfront employment expenses, such as tools for apprenticeships, commonly deter individuals from entering or upskilling in the sector, unlike fields with minimal upfront costs or qualification requirements.

Financial constraints faced by many businesses make it challenging to take on apprentices, especially in the short term. Despite this, numerous business owners expressed a desire to increase apprentice intake, viewing it as a social responsibility.

There are suggestions that apprenticeship funding could be directed to businesses, to save on administrational costs and time. This could incentivise, through contractual obligations, smaller to medium sized businesses to take on more apprentices, focus on training and develop more skilled tradespeople into the sector.

Government and industry leadership

Interviewees highlight the potential for improvement in the C&) sector to better meet future needs. Interventions should aim to enhance coordination among training, businesses, and government entities to deliver outcomes aligned with the needs of the government, sector, and Pacific communities.

Existing examples indicate progress in this direction. For instance, the Government via Te Whatu Ora collaborates with the Pacific community, including businesses, providers, community groups, and schools, in preparation for the Whangārei Hospital Build. This partnership aims to facilitate pathways for Pacific communities and businesses into opportunities associated with the hospital build, which will largely involve C&I work. This collective approach seeks to build long-term capability and capacity in the Northland region and Pacific community.

> " I know the government's goal is to increase participation by Māori and Pasifika - then they have to invest in the correct way which will provide the most opportunity for success."

During the consultation phase, the significance of "community-led responses" emerged, emphasising the community's ability to contribute to aspects of training and pastoral care. The establishment of the first local Pacific Education Provider was identified as crucial for the long-term future of a young, yet rapidly expanding Pacific community in Northland.

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