

# What Does it Mean to be a Culturally Competent I/O Psychologist in New Zealand?

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Cultural competence represents an important, but neglected, area of research and practice in I/O psychology. This article establishes the relevance of our concern with cultural competence for I/O psychologists, then analyses its' meaning at the level of the individual practitioner and at the level of the business and organisational systems in which practitioners operate. The influence on cultural competence of the New Zealand context is examined including: the legislative environment; professional ethics, the Treaty of Waitangi and psychology. It concludes with a discussion of the implications of cultural competence for I/O psychologists in New Zealand.

**T**his article explores the concept and practice of cultural competence for I/O psychologists in New Zealand. There is a professional requirement for all psychologists to be culturally competent (New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002a). However, although cultural competence is a relatively well-explored area for clinical psychologists, it is a largely neglected area of discussion by I/O psychologists (Chrobot-Mason & Ferdman, 2001; Love & Whittaker, 2000; Thomas, 1993). Given New Zealand's increasingly culturally diverse workforce it is timely to initiate a closer examination of this issue.

## The relevance of cultural competence for I/O psychologists

Few would deny the relevance of cultural competence to one-on-one therapeutic relationships, assessments and interventions. But I/O psychologists practice in a very different environment to that of their clinical colleagues; indeed different enough to be recognised

academically as different bodies of literature, and professionally as separate areas of practice. Clinical psychologists (and similarly other health and social service related professionals) may be employed by an organisation but the client relationship and therapeutic relationship is most usually one-to-one. Although they may advocate for social change as a result of issues they see with individual clients, the professional role and relationship is a clear one. For the I/O psychologist, although many interactions will be one-to-one and professional judgements will be made about individuals, most often the client is an organisation or employer. Alternatively, if the I/O psychologist is an employee then their role is usually as an agent of that organisation or employer. Whether consultant to, or agent of, the organisation the I/O psychologist is working not only at the level of the individual, but also at the level of the work group, and the organisation, and always in the broader context of the demands of the business system as well as the public

policy environment. These demands may include employer pressure to act in ways that are not compatible with culturally competent behaviour. This makes the issue of cultural competence more complex for I/O psychologists but no less relevant.

There are a range of both business and professional drivers which mean that I/O psychologists should be serious about cultural competence in their practice. These include for example, increasing cultural diversity and its impact on business and the public policy agenda, and professional obligations particularly with respect to the Treaty of Waitangi.

New Zealand is a culturally and ethnically diverse nation. In 2001, 23.5% of New Zealand's potential workforce were Maori, Pacific people, or Asian (Department of Labour, 2003). Hence from a business perspective cultural competence is important in order to access the total labour market and maintain a full, productive workforce. A number of private sector business workforces are now made up of primarily non-European New Zealanders and new immigrants. Thus businesses are interested in reducing labour turnover, improving productivity, improving health & safety, and reducing absenteeism, across a diverse workforce (Department of Labour, 2004). A culturally competent advisor on how best to work with those from different cultures and assimilate them into the organisation through work design, workplace practices, workforce recruitment, is

essential to the ongoing prosperity of many businesses. In addition cultural competence is important in managing legal liabilities for organisations. The Employment Court in recent cases has taken account of cultural factors in considering employee dismissals (e.g., *Te Whanau a Takiwira Te Kohanga Reo v Tito and Zammit* [1996] 2 ERNZ 565; *Good Health Wanganui v Burbery* [2001] 1 ERNZ 668). Similarly the complaints procedures under the Human Rights Act can expose employers to further liability.

This is not a passing phase as workforce diversity is predicted to increase. In twenty years the proportion of Maori, Pacific people and Asian will have increased to around 33% (Department of Labour, 2003). This changing ethnic base of the New Zealand workforce and society is also reflected in the increasing diversity of employers, businesses and customers. Fuelling this change are advancing communication, transport and product technologies that have led to increased globalisation of business and community activities. In short, the nature of the workforce, organisations, and society that I/O psychologists serve (and from whom they derive their livelihood) is changing and cultural competence is increasingly important.

There are other societal and professional imperatives for culturally competent I/O psychologists. Issues of diversity and equity in the workplace also feature in the ongoing public policy agenda in New Zealand. Recent government taskforces and policy initiatives focused on pay equity, work/life balance, workplace productivity, adult literacy, vocational education, Maori economic development, are all part of the drive for a prosperous economy based on successful businesses and a skilled workforce. Given our increasing cultural diversity it could be argued that cultural competence is a core element in making that happen - in understanding how to improve educational outcomes, access labour market opportunities, business capabilities and organisation development in a global market.

Contemporary New Zealand society, and particularly public policy, is also strongly influenced by the principles embodied in the Treaty of Waitangi

(1840) between the tangata whenua (Maori) and the British Crown. In terms of practice this creates an obligation for New Zealand professionals to be sensitive to and have at least a basic competence in the bi-cultural aspects of New Zealand society. This is especially so for those who are formally registered in professions constituted by statute. The New Zealand Psychological Society firmly states it is committed to biculturalism and cultural diversity. This is reflected in their establishment of the National Standing Committee on Bicultural Issues, in the rules of the Society, and in the Code of Ethics for Psychologists working in Aotearoa/New Zealand (New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002b) which applies to all members of the Society, the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists and all other registered psychologists. Similar demonstrations of commitment can be found in a range of other health, education and social service professions, for instance Medicine (Medical Council of New Zealand, 2004; St George, 2004), Occupational Therapy (NZAOT Council, 2002), Nursing (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2004) and Social Work (Social Workers Registration Act, 2003) all have significant requirements for cultural competence. Clearly cultural competence is an issue that is gaining prominence in New Zealand professional circles.

The key question for I/O psychologists to determine is how we should work with our employers and clients in a culturally competent way. This question becomes more problematic if those clients are not interested in, or are actively opposed to, culturally competent practice. Arguably, because much of the work of I/O psychology occurs in organisations, that is, in group settings or with individuals in relation to the group or organisation, there is greater exposure to the impact of poor cultural competence in the workplace. More so than clinical colleagues, I/O psychologists are in a position to influence organisations and their impact on individuals. What are the professional values that a registered I/O psychologist, or a person trained in I/O psychology, should display in relation to cultural competence? Should those professional values rank ahead of the

imperatives or values of our employers or clients? How we perceive our role is important to resolving these dilemmas. As scientist practitioners, or registered psychologists, or as people employed for our knowledge of I/O psychology, is our role as advocates for cultural competence or are we reactive advisors to our clients and employers? Do we make our first priority ethical duties or commercial goals? And are these mutually exclusive? These are important questions and the answers potentially discern between the I/O psychology professional and the 'organisation man/woman' with an I/O psychology background. In order to explore these issues we review current notions of cultural competence internationally and in New Zealand, and discuss what these might mean for I/O psychology.

### What is cultural competence?

A review of the literature shows that cultural competence is not the easiest concept to define. Health sector and education agencies and professions in the United States, particularly those concerned with mental health and child health, have explored the meaning and practice of cultural competence in some depth (e.g., National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University; Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education). These agencies, and the sectors they represent, focus conceptual agreement on a definition which envisages cultural competence as a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Cross, Bazron, Dennis & Isaacs, 1989). Hence there is the possibility of a culturally competent system, organisation, profession and person.

The notions of cultural knowledge, cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity are all seen as important facets of cultural competence both for individuals and systems. However, the competence concept emphasises the idea of skills in 'effectively operating' in different cultural contexts, not just knowing, understanding or being sensitive to them. Related to this,

Cross et al (1989) suggest a cultural competence continuum that extends from cultural destructiveness through incapacity, blindness, pre-competence, competence and finally cultural proficiency. Knowledge, awareness and sensitivity become important elements in developing the skills of cultural competence.

In psychology the most active attempts at development of cultural competence have been in clinical psychology. These have tended to centre on the cultural appropriateness of the therapeutic relationship and achieving health outcomes for individual clients (Abbott & Durie, 1987; Herbert, 1998). In the United States, Sue (2001) supports that the components of cultural competence are beliefs/attitudes, knowledge, and skill, but that these have tended to focus the education and training of psychologists on the micro level of individual-to-individual cultural competence. He argues that cultural competence needs to focus on many layers to be effective, namely, individual, professional, organisational and societal. He also asserts "if psychologists are to effect major improvements in the psychological well-being of people, they must be able to influence political decisions and policies regarding our institutions and society" (p.811). Thus he suggests a multiple dimension cultural competence model combining the components of competence (awareness, knowledge, skills), the level of analysis (individual through to societal), and racial/cultural group attributes.

However, the profession is yet to articulate fully what it does, and does not, mean by cultural competence for I/O psychologists. In a recent discussion of cultural competencies for I/O psychologists in the United States, Ferdman argues that cultural competence can be seen as an attribute of both individuals and of the organisational and institutional contexts in which they are embedded (Chrobot-Mason & Ferdman, 2001). He suggests that culturally competent I/O psychologists are aware of the potential biases of assessment materials, measures, and instruments as a function of culture and other differences. Also that consideration

needs to be given to the extent to which psychological constructs and research findings generalise across cultures (Chrobot-Mason & Ferdman, 2001).

At the level of the individual I/O psychologist, cultural competence could be defined as the knowledge and proficiency that allows a person to work effectively with others (individuals, groups, organisations and business systems) from a culture different to their own. Hence, for an I/O psychologist to be culturally competent they need to have an understanding of their own culture, and of cultures different to their own. This requires an appreciation of what values, standards and motivations influence the attitudes and behaviour of people in these cultures. The American Psychological Association have emphasised these points in their guidelines on multicultural education, training, research, practice and organizational change for psychologists (2002). They observe, in line with social categorisation theory (Allport, 1954), that psychologists like all people make sense of their social world by creating categories of the individuals around them, which includes segmenting them into in-groups and out-groups. They encourage psychologists to recognise their own biases towards cultures and practices with which they are not familiar.

It is also important to consider whether the specific theories, tools and methodologies that I/O psychologists use are culturally safe. What are the implicit cultural assumptions that underpin the theories and tools of I/O psychology? In a recent paper Smith, Fischer and Sale (2001) argue that many I/O psychology tools are culture specific. In particular they note psychometric tests, work motivation, performance management, fairness, communication, recruitment and selection procedures are not uniformly applicable to different national cultures. They cite the example that until recently selection interviews were rarely used in China, but are heavily relied upon in western cultures. In another vein, they report that psychometric tests of analytical ability which are widely used to screen out job candidates in western cultures, need to be used carefully when screening out candidates in

China as they all tend to perform well due to an analytically focused education system. Other research has noted that in organisation development and change interventions it may be important to have an understanding of institutional racism, how to assess it and what interventions can be put in place to effectively address it. For example psychologists' should be able to identify when an institutions policies and practices are racist through assessing whether the dominant group is defined as 'normal' and 'standard' against which minority groups are perceived as abnormal or inferior (Australian Psychological Society, 1997). Similarly, in the design and delivery of training cultural competence may require an appreciation that learning styles are developed from people's reaction to their innate abilities combined with influences from their school, family and culture. For example it has been suggested that Maori may prefer to learn from a whole concept, focusing on the whole of a situation and then breaking it down to examine the details involved. In contrast Europeans may prefer to learn in a more linear and sequential fashion, learning about the individual parts before building towards the whole (Walters, Phillips, Oliver & Gilliland, 1993).

Many of the issues with I/O psychology tools and interventions noted by Smith et al (2001) are related to applying essentially western (mainly Euro-American) theories to collectivist cultures. They conclude "predictions as to behaviour in cross-cultural settings that are derived from mono-cultural studies are likely to be flawed. If we wish to understand cross-cultural organisational behaviour, we must study cross-cultural organisational settings" (p.183). Similarly, Sue (2001) suggests that calls for cultural competence in psychology have been hindered by a belief in the universality of psychological laws and theories and the invisibility of monocultural policies and practices. He warns "Euro-American psychology may become culturally obsolete unless revised to reflect a multicultural perspective" (p.791).

Thus cultural competence is portrayed at the individual level as a

mix of attitudes, knowledge and skills to work effectively with people of different cultural backgrounds. At an organisational and systemic level it entails ensuring that the tools, models, structures, the embedded assumptions of that system, are not unfairly treating other cultures. So, what does this mean for the I/O psychologist who perceives a tension between business system drivers versus professional values? Is there a middle ground? This tension could be expressed as a view that some western business models may not be compatible with alternative cultural values. This is seen as problematic because these business models are focused on performance, profit, and certain accepted practices of selection, performance management, etc which an I/O psychologist is thus obliged to subscribe to in order to fulfil their duties to the client or employer who is paying them to operate within this model.

However, we suggest that there are flaws in this perceived obstacle to cultural competence. First and foremost cultural competence does not necessarily require abandoning current business models and adopting a model or practices from an alternative culture, but it does require some accommodation of those from different cultural backgrounds. This accommodation may take the form of a) not excluding them; b) investing in helping them to be productive within current business models. In fact this happens regularly, in both major and incremental ways, within business systems. For example, it is not so many decades ago that women were not the norm in the paid workforce. At that time one heard objections to accommodating women in the workforce, such as, that it would be too costly and would make businesses less productive and less competitive. In fact, accommodating women in the workforce did not destroy the business model, it reinforced it by allowing businesses to remain competitive because they could attract, develop and retain the staff with the skills they needed and at an affordable cost. Businesses have continued to adapt, sometimes driven by regulation like anti discrimination, parental leave, and equal pay legislation; and sometimes

driven by the desire to attract and retain staff through organisational practices like family friendly and flexible work policies.

At base, while serving the business goals of the organisations we work with, cultural competence means we ensure that those of different cultural background are not unfairly treated. In an organisation development sense cultural competence is about organisations facilitating the realisation of human potential for the benefit of the individual and the organisation.

### **NZ specific influences on the meaning of cultural competence**

While shaped by these general factors any specific concept of cultural competence in New Zealand must also take into account factors particular to New Zealand's own cultural context. Prominent amongst these is the legislative environment, and the relationship between psychologists and the Treaty of Waitangi mediated through the Code of Ethics.

The legislative environment partly defines the parameters of cultural competence, not just for I/O psychologists but for society generally. In particular the Human Rights Act (1993) outlines the basic rights for freedom from direct and indirect discrimination, much of it culture related, including sex, marital status, religious belief, ethical belief, colour, race, ethnic or national origins, disability, age, political opinion, employment status, family status, sexual orientation. For example unlawful discrimination is prohibited within the recruitment and selection process, which is a key activity of I/O psychology. At all stages of the employment relationship, I/O psychologists need to be aware of cultural differences that may exist between themselves and workers to ensure that they do not unlawfully discriminate on the cultural differences. However, legislation alone is not enough to deter culture-biased behaviour. Recent New Zealand research shows there is a high incidence of people being discriminated against on the basis of cultural difference, particularly in selection processes by recruitment consultants and employers

(Basnayake, 1999). This puts greater onus on professional I/O psychologists to ensure they and their clients comply with the law and are not unfairly discriminatory.

This is another example of an area in which the I/O psychologist may experience tension between their professional desire to be culturally competent and the employer or clients desire for decisions to be driven by a particular notion of organisational fit. An employer may insist that 'fit' equates to only employing people of perceived similar cultural background, or even more blatantly same skin colour or gender. Clearly this is in breach of the Human Rights Act but, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, it does happen and can be hard to deter or detect. We argue that one of the professional psychologists duties is to advise and educate their client or employer on lawful behaviour. Additionally the psychologist should be sensitive to the prejudices of the employer and should work with them to uncover whether or not these beliefs have fair justification.

In recent years businesses which have become reliant on semi skilled workforces of mixed cultural backgrounds and education levels, have found that investment in literacy training for workers has increased productivity and thus competitive advantage. Businesses dealing with different international markets or different cultural groups within New Zealand have reported real advantages in employing staff from a variety of cultures (Department of Labour, 2004). Cultural competence rather than producing tension can make good business sense, providing opportunities for growth and change.

Within the State Sector Act (1988), Section 56 provisions require public sector employers to recognise equal employment opportunity (EEO) target groups, in particular Maori, Women, Pacific peoples, and people with disabilities. Within public sector organisations it has been important to identify and eliminate barriers that may prevent employees from having a fair chance to perform to their full potential. Thus cultural competence (attitudes, knowledge and skills) has supported

adherence to the EEO programmes within these organisations. Recent research shows that as a result the public service consistently employs nearly double the numbers of people from EEO target groups than the general labour force (Edgar, 2001). This again highlights the importance of cultural competence for I/O psychologists working within the public sector, to enable public sector organisations to achieve legislative requirements.

Thus at a societal level New Zealand legislation attempts to engender cultural competence in all organisations, and individual interactions. However, the way psychologists behave, interact and the assumptions they make are also based on what is learned through formal and informal education. Professional education in the majority of New Zealand health and social service sector areas includes an exploration of cultural competence and the importance of this knowledge for effective functioning. For instance university qualifications and professional development in clinical psychology attend to issues of working with clients of different cultures, and issues of cultural justice (Herbert, 1998). Similarly nursing education in recent years has developed the concept of cultural safety for patients (Ramsden, 2002). However, it is unclear what emphasis there is on the importance of cultural competence for I/O psychologists. This suggests that as individuals, in our work as I/O psychologists we are not necessarily explicitly trained to be culturally competent and aware.

For the first time in New Zealand legislation the scopes of practice for general, clinical, and educational psychologists have been defined under the Health Practitioners Competency Assurance Act (2003). Currently I/O psychologists are within the general classification but in the future scopes of I/O practice could be defined. These could be similar to the specific psychological activities outlined by the I/O Psychology Division of the New Zealand Psychological Society identified as: human-machine interaction and workplace design; job analysis; personnel selection and assessment; counselling, personal and career development; training;

employee relations and motivation; organisational development and change ([www.psychology.org.nz/industrial](http://www.psychology.org.nz/industrial)). While there are expectations that these activities will be completed in a professional and ethical manner, it is not identified that these activities should include an application of cultural competence to ensure that they are culturally safe and not discriminatory against specific groups of people. One could argue that the expectation of cultural competence is implicit for those who are registered psychologists or members of the Psychological Society. In 2004 there were seventy-seven New Zealand registered psychologists practising primarily in the field of I/O psychology (Ministry of Health, 2004). It can be claimed with confidence, but no quantification, that there are many practitioners trained and qualified in I/O psychology who for various reasons are not registered psychologists. After mid September 2004 only those registered to practice psychology under the Health Practitioners Competency Assurance Act 2003, could call themselves psychologists. However, there are also those trained in I/O psychology that travel under other titles (consultant, advisor or manager of HR or OD) who use I/O psychology tools and whose skills impact on individuals and organisations. Thus registered professional or not, I/O psychology trained and qualified practitioners have a professional or disciplinary duty to be culturally competent.

All psychologists seeking registration in New Zealand are expected to possess the competencies of 'culturally safe practice', and 'competent practice and the Treaty of Waitangi' (New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002a). Guidance on cultural competence can be drawn from the Code of Ethics (New Zealand Psychological Society, 2002b). The Code contains the principles that should underpin the learning context of psychology, influence the development of practice and be manifested in the daily behaviours of psychology. At the outset of the Code of Ethics the importance of cultural competence is highlighted in Ethical Principle One: *Respect for the Dignity of Person and Persons*. It suggests that psychologists

are required to hold knowledge of how to work in a respectful manner with people from varying cultures to their own, and have the ability to work with various peoples in a manner that upholds their dignity. New Zealand is a multi-cultural society, but prominence is given to the relationship of the tangata whenua and psychologists. Specifically psychologists are required to understand the meaning and implications of the Treaty of Waitangi to their work, and undertake education to enhance their understanding of how to appropriately show 'respect for the dignity and needs of Maori in their practice.'

One viewpoint holds that in considering the relationship between psychology and the Treaty of Waitangi, psychology as a general discipline can be defined as a "practice that contributes to the social control exercise within the modern state" (Nairn, 2000, p.132). As such, the profession of psychology is constituted by statute and its governing bodies are required to adhere to the Treaty of Waitangi principles. The Psychologists Board and the Psychological Society govern I/O psychologists working in New Zealand who are registered professionals or members of the Society, therefore they must adhere to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. Thus I/O psychologists need to understand how they can incorporate these principles into their psychological work. For example the Treaty principle of government or *kawanatanga* allows acknowledgement that psychology as a profession constituted by government legislation has a right to establish laws of practice, however these laws must protect Maori interests and *tino rangatiratanga*. A practical example of this principle is the need to ensure that psychological models, standards and ethics do not unfairly disadvantage Maori and their interests. The principle of partnership in the Treaty of Waitangi guarantees a legal equality between Maori and other citizens of New Zealand. This can influence psychologists' approach when dealing with Maori, as Maori "must, like all citizens, be able to expect and participate in practises that are culturally just" (Nairn 2000, p.132). Practical examples that can

demonstrate 'partnership' include ensuring that selection processes are not biased against specific cultural groups and psychometric assessments are culturally fair. In the public sector this has been reflected in the option of whanau support at selection and other interviews or discussions. Smith et al (1999) offer a range of examples of strategies for working effectively with Maori in the workplace. I/O psychologists working with Maori businesses should be familiar with the recently published corporate governance guidelines for Maori organisations (Ministry of Maori Development and Federation of Maori Authorities Inc, 2004; Te Puni Kokiri, 2004). These guidelines acknowledge that although Maori businesses are governed by the same legislation as other New Zealand businesses that Maori cultural practices lead to a different style of governance and workplace practices.

### **Practical implications for I/O psychologists in NZ**

It has long been acknowledged that culture, societal or organisational, is a dynamic phenomenon. That is, facets of culture are continually in negotiation and change (Alvesson, 2002; Schein, 1985, 1990; Williams, 1980). The culture of New Zealand business today is different to the culture of New Zealand business in 1985, or as it will be in 2025. Additionally there are significant cultural variations both within and between cultures. The culture of large businesses may be quite different to that of small enterprises. Helping people adapt to cultural change, run successful businesses, and treat others fairly is part of the I/O psychologists' role. Dealing with the prejudices and fears of client organisations is a core activity regardless of whether it is in relation to the introduction of new technology, new structures or work practices, or a new team member. We maintain that cultural competence is at the heart of this core activity.

At a practical level we suggest that this translates to four areas of attention for I/O psychologists: 1) constant monitoring and evaluation of the range of assessment tools we use to ensure that they are not unfairly biased or unreliable for use with particular

individuals, groups or organisations; 2) the need to be skilled in communication, alert to, and respectful of, cultural differences in communication and language practices; 3) the need to be aware of our own biases and tendency to social categorisation which may lead us to unfairly discount some people and promote others; 4) to ensure that we deliver well informed, expert advice which addresses poorly founded prejudices and fears of organisations, employers and workers.

There are many potential examples of the application of these four areas to the core activities of I/O psychologists. At the most basic levels this may be as simple as whether we pronounce names correctly when we deal with workers from different cultures; through to whether we have ensured that workplace design, equipment instruction, training, job analysis or organisational survey or assessment questionnaires, performance management documentation, employment agreements, interpersonal interactions, briefings and interviews are in a language or form that is understandable for all workers.

Are we aware how different cultures regard interpersonal behaviour? For instance that it may be offensive to touch someone's head, even when demonstrating safety procedures. Direct eye contact is regarded as disrespectful by some cultures, while other cultures may expect eye contact. Whakama (humility, shyness or embarrassment) can occur if a Maori person is singled out for feedback or comment during team building, group assessments, or if there is an expectation of self-marketing (for instance in selection processes). Whakama is described as a state of mind that some Maori experience when they feel at a disadvantage. It may be characterised by unresponsiveness, fear, uncertainty, embarrassment and frustration (Metge & Kinloch, 1984). In Samoan culture a similar concept is referred to as masiasi. One solution in a selection setting is to allow the possibility of whanau support to speak on behalf of the candidate. Where this is not possible we should check the judgements we make about people of different cultures who do not respond well in some settings. For instance we could verify our judgements by having

mixed cultural membership of selection committees, and by using multiple selection methods. Additionally we should be clear about what are truly essential skills for the job and what are skills for which one could train or develop. Meeting protocol between cultures also varies, for instance Maori and Samoan cultures place emphasis on formally welcoming guests to meetings whereas European culture tends to minimise introductions to devote more time to the business at hand. Just these few small examples of differing cultural expectations and perceptions of interpersonal behaviour illustrate how easy it is for misinterpretation of behaviours to occur, particularly in situations that may involve an I/O psychologist in making judgements about a person.

Are we sure the methods we use do not introduce or perpetuate cultural bias? When we conduct job analyses and evaluations do our methods acknowledge workplace activities which are culture specific, for example, routinely calling on particular workers to manage cultural protocols like powhiri (welcome). We need to have considered issues of test bias, test fairness and cultural equivalence that may impact the validity of psychometric instruments we use for selection and assessment in work settings, particularly when applied to people from different cultural backgrounds. At minimum we should investigate the test's reference population and possible limitations of the instrument with other populations. We should also interpret the data appropriately given the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the person being assessed (American Psychological Association, 2002). Ideally we should initiate studies monitoring candidate performance on these tests over time to determine who we are rejecting or negatively assessing and on what grounds.

How do we define job performance? Are our definitions restrictive, culturally narrow or biased? When seeking to define or improve performance we should consider cultural issues, e.g., the need to support learning new ways of doing things, or allowing that different ways may be equally effective. This may require identifying the implicit

theories of individual differences in job performance that we use and that our clients use. For instance, assumptions about performance may unfairly focus on motivational explanations or ability to learn explanations or something else (Hunter, Schmidt, Rauschenberger & Jayne, 2001). Additionally as part of good psychological practice we should examine the predictive relationship between our selection procedures and our notions of job performance.

As professional I/O psychologists the goal of our advice is to make it easier for organisations to accommodate workers (and guests) of different cultural backgrounds, without unduly compromising the viability of the organisation. This is a two way process in which we not only assist organisations to gain from and recognise the worth of their workers of different cultures, but also make adapting to our workplace cultures easy for workers from different backgrounds. This means professionally we should strive to improve our cultural competence, for instance keeping up to date with the resources provided by the EEO Trust ([www.eeotrust.org.nz](http://www.eeotrust.org.nz)) and other private and public sector agencies dealing with workplace issues (e.g., Department of Labour, Ministry of Economic Development, Chambers of Commerce, Trade Unions, etc). As part of a professional community we could also engage in discussion with other I/O psychologists on potential tensions and successful culturally competent practices.

## Conclusions

The foregoing review of literature regarding cultural competence and New Zealand specific influences, suggests that such competence in practice leads to more effective delivery and outcomes in cross-cultural environments. Also that it is increasingly important in New Zealand workplaces. Common themes in the discussions of cultural competence portray the competence as a blend of beliefs/attitudes, knowledge and skills which encompass cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and operating effectively in different cultural settings. As well as 'how' we work or interact, cultural competence requires us to be mindful of 'what' we do that is, the tools, interventions, frameworks

and practices we use may be culturally biased. In a New Zealand specific sense cultural competence entails particular consideration of the needs of Maori, and extends to a broader notion of human rights ranging through age, religious belief, disability, sex, and so on, not just race or ethnic origin. However, we found that these notions have not been much discussed for I/O psychologists, thus three main questions need to be considered: how should I/O psychologists develop cultural competence? How should those trained in I/O psychology work with clients or employers in a culturally competent way? Where to from here for I/O psychology and cultural competence?

In answer to the first question of how to develop cultural competence the literature tends to outline a three-phase developmental process involving self-awareness, skill building and ongoing developmental activities (Chrobot-Mason & Ferdman, 2001). Thus building cultural competence goes to the heart of our education and socialisation processes in I/O psychology. A perusal of New Zealand university website information on courses in full I/O psychology qualifications does not reveal overt reference to cultural competence or related concepts, except at Waikato University which offers a non-compulsory paper in psychological applications and the Treaty of Waitangi. However, it could be that all universities canvass issues of cultural competence as an integrated component of every psychology paper. On graduation from university maintenance of, and socialisation to, I/O psychology practice can be somewhat ad hoc. Graduates scatter to a range of different types of job and employer. The I/O psychology division of the New Zealand Psychological Society is active through seminars and the IONet email discussion group, and there are good connections to the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand. But the majority of professional development courses and documentation related to cultural issues for psychology is geared to clinical psychology.

In regard to the second question of how to work with our employers and clients in a culturally competent way we have discussed the tensions

for I/O psychologists particularly in relation to perceived conflicts between the business systems in which we work and other cultures. We have highlighted that cultural competence is not about replacing one culture with another but about fairness and accommodation. This does not make businesses any less competitive and in many instances gives them an advantage. Cultures are constantly changing in incremental ways and to be culturally competent is to understand this and assist organisations and individuals to reach their potential.

We contend that an I/O psychologist, whether employee or consultant, is utilised by an organisation for their expertise. To hold expertise means that one should give informed but independent expert advice. This may include advice that attempts to break down prejudices often based on unsubstantiated fears. Working with such fears is core business for the psychologist. Thus to be culturally competent is integral to a psychologist being able to assist organisations and individuals to work more effectively, deal with cultural change, etc. To do otherwise is to relinquish one's role as a professional I/O psychologist and to become solely an employee or outsourced worker. However, even these roles do not preclude taking a critical perspective on the tools and skills that are utilised in workplaces. We have provided numerous practical examples of ways in which to ensure our practices are culturally competent, from interpersonal judgements and behaviour, the tools we use, the assumptions made, through to how we work with client and employing organisations.

We hope that this article will open the topic of cultural competence and I/O psychology for wider discussion and debate. This debate is not just for those who carry the I/O psychologist title (i.e., registered psychologists), but for all who take some professional or disciplinary pride in their I/O psychology education and training. The process of continually developing our individual cultural competence in I/O psychology should start in our tertiary education psychology programmes. It can continue through supervision, or mentoring programmes, and through discussion

events or formal training focused on cultural issues for I/O psychology. At a systemic level the continual review and questioning of the tools and embedded assumptions of I/O psychology is an activity that is integral to the role of psychology graduate as scientist practitioner. Cultural competence represents an important area of nexus between research and practice in I/O psychology and challenges us to define our profession.

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