

## Intelligent Careers of Pacific Island Leaders



**Polly Parker**

*University of Auckland Business School, New Zealand*

---

### Abstract

*Pacific peoples hold a unique place as an ethnic community within Aotearoa-New Zealand. The largest immigrant minority population in New Zealand brings a different culture to that of the dominant Pakeha (European). One implication is the need for acculturation into New Zealand society. Leadership, when characterised here as a process through which Pacific elders model the “Pacific way” to guide their youth, is critical to manage the tension between maintaining traditional ways and integrating into a dominant culture different from the people’s own. This paper reports an empirical study conducted with Pacific professionals working in the public sector of New Zealand. Recognised for their potential to influence Pacific peoples, the participants were sponsored by the ministries of Health and Pacific Island Affairs to attend a three-day leadership development course that included a careers component. The scarcely researched links among leadership, careers and social cultural issues are explored. Intelligent career theory is introduced and the processes associated with eliciting subjective and inter-subjective career data are explained. The results reflect the interdependence of motivation, skills and knowledge, and relationships, which together strongly influence the career and leadership behaviour of Pacific peoples to enhance the outcomes for Pacific peoples in New Zealand. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.*

---

The South Pacific is a unique region that often engenders views of peaceful countries populated by humble people. Despite this popular, though not necessarily accurate view (Traynor & Watts, 1992), many inhabitants have moved from their developing countries in search of an enhanced standard of living for themselves and their children. Their migration was facilitated by the New Zealand government, which pursued an expansionist policy to recruit immigrant labour for its own economy. Thus the unique place Pacific peoples hold as recognisable ethnic communities within New Zealand today, is based on an historical relationship combined with constitutional, geographic and demographic factors. In 2001 there

---

were 232 000 Pacific peoples (half of Samoan descent) which is 6% of the total population (New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, 2003).

The cultural context imperceptibly yet powerfully and pervasively influence human behaviour and interaction (Markus & Kityama, 1991). Although heterogeneous as a group in New Zealand, the similarities Pacific peoples share with one another, in terms of preferences, certain behaviours and attitudes reflect a particular cultural identification (Wilson, Hoppe & Sayles, 1996), that brings them closer to one another and differentiates them from Pakeha (that is, New Zealanders of European descent). This gives rise to the “Pacific way” a term often used to describe idiosyncratic behaviour of South Pacific people that is otherwise unexplainable (Traynor & Watts, 1992). The Pacific way reflects aspects inherent in the Pacific cultures, such as a sense of collectivism that contrasts with the individualistic orientation of New Zealanders of European descent. Another aspect is the special place of the church in the Pacific community, which provides ethnic migrant groups a place to maintain and retain their cultural language, beliefs and practices (Hendrikse, 1995).

The shared dilemma for Pacific peoples following migration to New Zealand is how to sustain their Pacific identity and work within a dominant culture without betraying their traditional values and heritage. This dilemma is part of a process of psychological acculturation in which Pacific peoples adjust to the Pakeha achievement-based society, which differs from their traditional Island societies in which relative position is ascribed (Trompenaars, 1993). The acculturation process is one of assimilation that reflects changes in behaviour, attitudes and values (Berry, 1990). While the relevance of the process for career issues cannot be underestimated, it may be expected to be different for those born New Zealand (58%) in comparison with those born in the Islands.

Career issues are inextricably linked with personal and social (cultural) issues in people’s lives (Pope, Cheng & Leong, 1998). Moreover, culture influences career processes not only in the way people see and act on their own careers but in the way people influence others through career management activities (Thomas and Inkson, in press). An awareness of culture’s importance has been built into leadership development programmes designed to promote Pacific people’s capabilities in leadership, strategy and change management. The programmes are part of the New Zealand government’s promotion of a distinctive Pacific peoples’ economy and society nested within the broader New Zealand economy (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 1999).

The empirical study reported in this paper was embedded within the above initiative. The author was invited to work with Pacific leaders to provide practical support for them in their career and leadership development, and consider the impact of cultural differences in the processes. The impact of cultural values on the intersection of leadership and careers has attracted surprisingly little empirical research. All participants were Pacific professionals working in the public sector of New Zealand.

The paper describes the participant group and the theoretical approach used to explore the subjective careers of Pacific leaders. It is the subjective side of the career (concerned with personal interpretation) rather than the objective side (concerned with official position) that links most directly to cultural phenomena. The data gathered are discussed under the three “ways of knowing” central to intelligent career theory – knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom – and then implications, both theoretical and applied, are considered.

*Intelligent Career Theory.* The theoretical model of the intelligent career comprises three ways of knowing – knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom – that are interdependent (Arthur, Claman & DeFillippi, 1995). Specifically, *knowing-why* incorporates themes of individual motivation, values and the construction of personal meaning and identity. Knowing-why also encompasses attitudes to family, community and other non-work aspects of life that affect career choice, adaptability and commitment. Each of these aspects changes over time as experiences, interests and family situations change.

*Knowing-how* reflects an individual's career relevant skills and understanding that underlie current work behaviour. While these areas of expertise provide the medium of exchange between employee and employer they may also be used as a lever to invest in new areas for people who wish to use or develop a broader set of skills and knowledge when compared with their present job demands. Continuous knowing-how development enhances career opportunities through increasing individual employability.

*Knowing-whom* includes the relationships people maintain and invest in to provide career support, promote the transmission of reputation, and provide access to information. Work-related relationships include internal company contacts, as well as supplier, customer and broader industry contacts. People also have personal connections through family, friends, fellow alumni and professional and social acquaintances that are also likely to grow over time.

The intelligent career differs from traditional approaches in that it is holistic and focuses on the subjective or internally prescribed perceptions of career rather than objective interpretations of others (Parker, 2002).

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants were 62 Pacific leaders from the New Zealand public sector and sponsored by the ministries of Health and Pacific Island Affairs to attend a three-day leadership development course. The three-day programme was designed as an “all Pacific Island learning situation” focused on professional development as a necessary affirmative step to increase the numbers of Pacific Island peoples in leadership roles. Courses were run in Auckland and Wellington, New Zealand.

The basis for selection of participants was their perceived potential to develop appropriate knowledge and skills to step into leadership roles when the opportunity arose. While it was recognised that a three-day course would not provide skills to immediately step up into leadership roles, it was expected to enhance confidence and provide a better understanding of skills needed to operate more effectively in the labour market. The participants were introduced to theoretical models, such as that of the intelligent career, and it was hoped that the chance to stimulate reflection on their individual careers and leadership potential would pay future dividends.

### ***Materials***

*The Intelligent Career Card Sort (ICCS)*. Eliciting the subjective career requires a different interaction between the person and the counsellor from traditional career guidance, which involves matching the characteristics of the person with occupational roles (Herr, 1996). The intelligent career card sort (ICCS), an instrument developed specifically to elicit the subjective career data (Parker, 1996), was used in the first stage of this work to elicit the subjective career of Pacific professionals. Previous research had shown the ICCS as an effective method to elicit and work with subjective career data (Parker & Arthur, 2004). However there was no evidence that this model would be appropriate in cross-cultural settings where methodological problems have been prominent (Thomas and Inkson, in press). It was anticipated that asking people to reflect on their own career situations and focus on identifying and talking about areas of concern, would bring out the contextualised perceptions of the Pacific professionals in their multitude of work and other life roles. Furthermore, card sorts had been recommended for cross-cultural career assessment because of the idiographic, subjective nature of data produced (Hartung, 1999).

The ICCS consists of three subsets of up to 40 cards reflecting the three ways of knowing previously described. That is, the knowing-why cards are concerned with a person's motivation, identity and the balance of work and family; the knowing-how cards are concerned with a person's areas of skill and expertise; and the knowing-whom cards are concerned with a person's relationships. When the ICCS is used with individuals, they are asked to select, rank, and talk about the seven most important cards from each subset (Parker, 2002).

### ***Procedure***

Participants were asked to select and rank seven items in each ICCS subset in the same way that individuals would use the ICCS. These subjective data were then aggregated and the most popular items identified. This provided a preliminary test of the level of inter-subjective agreement among the Pacific leaders. However, inter-subjective data are different from aggregated individual data (Daft & Weick, 1984). Shared meanings emerge from discussions of subjective data and do not equate to simple aggregations. Focus group discussions allow for these meanings to occur, as well as providing an opportunity for participants to build community and experience personal development through clarification of own and others' perspectives (Mirvis & Ayas, 2003).

The most important ICCS items were identified by a weighting system that took the ranking of items into account. These weights were provided as input to the focus group discussion. The resultant scale of weights runs from 0 (no selections) to 2 (unanimous selections of the item with top ranking). In practice the emergent weights fall in a range from 0–1. A secondary measure of the popularity of items, based on simple frequency of selection, was also calculated and provided to the focus groups. For each of the knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom categories, lists of the most important items, their weights and their frequencies were reproduced and used as a basis for focus group discussion.

The issue of ownership of data is particularly important for ethnic groups so that participants know that they are not mere "subjects" of research. This project was designed as a joint action-science project conducted in collaboration with the Pacific leaders (Stringer, 1996). Thus, terms of participation were negotiated. For example, following the ICCS subjective

data collection, each participant was sent a copy of the overall aggregated data for their information. Subsequently, a meeting was held and a letter was sent to all participants inviting them to participate in focus groups where inter-subjective meanings of items would be discussed. These participants were invited and chosen to be representative of the larger group (Parker, 2000).

Three focus groups were held in different geographical locations in New Zealand. The course leader (of Pacific ethnicity) acted as co-facilitator to monitor the group dynamic during the discussions, and to verify the accuracy, analysis and interpretation of the data collected. Aggregated ICCS data were used as input and weighted scores were shown to all participants who were asked to focus on their shared understanding of the items.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data were gathered and analysed using various heuristics (Kreuger, 1988; Kreuger, 1994; Kreuger & King, 1998). Following Kreuger's guidelines the analysis sought to account for frequency (the number of times words were used), extensiveness (how many people talked about an issue) and intensity (pertaining to the depth of feeling). Approximately equal time was allocated to each of the three ways of knowing to ensure that all areas were discussed. The results are set out in Table 1, which is organised around the knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom distinctions embodied in the ICCS methodology. Following that, the interplay among the three ways of knowing will be discussed.

## **Results**

### ***Knowing-why***

From Table 1, the first item was about *gaining a sense of achievement from my work*. For this multi-ethnic group, achievement was unmistakably related to enhancing the well being of Pacific peoples within the New Zealand environment. There was a unanimous expression of a feeling participants had of wanting "to achieve to the best of (their) ability". Supporting their young people was a critical aspect of achievement that seemed to take two forms. The first was maintaining traditional values within the New Zealand-born youth, "so that they can get a grounding," and the second was "being able to help our young people believe in themselves and do well for themselves."

Achievement for this cohort needs to be placed in the context of Pacific cultural values. Success and achievement by a family member result in pride not only for that person but also for the whole family. While for some this can be inspirational, for others the pressure of representing your family and your people can be immense (Tiatia, 1998). While one woman explained that "we can never break away from our community no matter how hard we might try", others had a different perspective asking questions such as "What can I do to make a difference today?" A theme that was clear was that their sense of achievement was less about making money than "just being acknowledged for the work", and the "buzz to know that other people are benefiting from the work I do". Achievement was "whenever I do something that helps my community". When one participant clarified that "society" was interpreted as "our community", the overlap with the second item *I like to make a contribution to society* became obvious.

Table 1  
Aggregated knowing-why scores: Pacific Professionals

Item	Weighted score	Frequency (%)
I like to gain a sense of achievement from my work	0.70	50.0
I like to make a contribution to society	0.63	45.0
I enjoy working in a supportive atmosphere	0.59	46.8
I want to provide for my family	0.55	35.5
I want to maintain financial security	0.44	33.9
I want to be challenged in my work	0.40	30.6
I enjoy sharing work/life responsibilities with my partner	0.38	25.8

For some, making a contribution was as practical as raising awareness of the available services, as in “I spend three-quarters of my time with work trying to get in touch with our people to make them focused, to make them understand.” Another participant who worked for the government agency WINZ (Work and Income New Zealand) provided the example of “helping them to apply for a house or to fill in a form”. Others described working in different areas at different stages of their career to broaden their knowledge about what was available: “What is available to the Palagi may not be of value to us.” Whatever their contribution, these participants were articulating “the avid interest in working hard and providing better opportunities for their children than would have been available in their country of origin” (Mara, Foliaki & Coxon, 1994, p.199).

Much of the contribution to society is effected through the church. There was evidence of a shift in attitude between those who were Island-born and those born in New Zealand. The latter group was very aware of the difference that provided an example of the tension between maintaining traditional values and adapting to the New Zealand context. Many examples were offered relating to the tensions of being brought up in two cultures. There was an awareness of the elders that “regardless of how hard we try and push our values there is no way you can stop them adopting Palagi values as well”. For the New Zealand born, there was an understanding that the dynamics in the workplace demanded adherence to other than traditional values and response to different agendas to succeed and for many this was the basis of their “interest in leadership”.

---

The respect for others inherent in the cultures of Pacific nations was often illustrated, as in the comment, “We have always looked up to Palagis.” However, it also suggests a level of discomfort in finding one’s own way in a different context. Traditionally, and particularly for the elders, the church took priority over everything else. For New Zealand-born people, while the church is important, a lesser proportion of their wages is gifted to it and the immediate needs of their extended family have taken precedence. One participant who was a minister explained the point and spoke strongly about it. He emphasised that people were encouraged to take care of themselves and their families first as a way of contributing to the church. The contribution is to the extended family and “it is hard because often you don’t work for yourself – you work for your family which is part of larger society. It is hard to maintain that.”

The experience of belonging to an extended family did however encourage them “*to work in a supportive atmosphere.*” This support was described by one participant as giving “a great feeling of collectiveness rather than working by oneself.” Another participant explained that “we all need each other and we can certainly support each other.” This was especially the case in the context of communicating and being understood at work because of critical differences in style between Palagi, where “you have to talk”, and Pacific styles in which “you pick up on non-verbal cues” and you “listen with your heart as well as your ears”. Having a mentor was depicted as particularly supportive when “the person is understood as well as the job” and he or she “knows how my people think”. The identification of “external support” spoke to having a range of network connections, including connections for support beyond the immediate workplace.

The feelings of belonging and support identified above are manifested in item 4, *I want to provide for my family*. The motivation to work was for betterment of the family at large rather than any personal gain. “Whatever I do and achieve, I give that back to my family.” The symbolism of providing meant much more to these people than the financial support. Providing for the family was publicly demonstrated in festivals such as “weddings, funerals, birthdays and the church”. When “the individual is received the family is received” and everyone contributes. “We share whatever little we have.” “It is collective rather than individual for the good of that particular family. If one celebrates, the whole lot celebrates.”

However, the younger generation are looking at it from a different standpoint after being brought up in their new country, and gradually their views were being acknowledged. The struggle for Island-born Elders was expressed by one woman who said that, “There are things that are really dear to our hearts, but there are also things that we as parents need to understand – where the children are right.” With some sadness, another agreed that for the older generation “the big occasions were blown out of proportion”.

It was not only the financial burden that concerned the younger generation. The attitude of self-effacement that differentiates Pacific cultures from other New Zealanders exacerbates tensions for Pacific peoples to thrive in “other” cultures such as that of New Zealand. The presence of the course co-ordinator facilitated an explicit discussion about this issue: “We get hindered to achieve because of the Palagi system.” “It is the Palagi system that sets us up to be individually competitive.” A particular difficulty for career development is growth in a system in which an individual is expected to speak on his or her own behalf. This is not the norm in Polynesian cultures where people speak on behalf of others as a norm. “We have to bring ourselves (to an interview), and yet all the goodness in us and our culture hinders us.” “It is the Palagi system (where) the interviews are set out that puts us down”. There was a cultural style being illustrated here and a subtle distinction between competitiveness among

themselves as opposed to being openly competitive with Palagis. There exists a paradox here, as Pacific peoples need to do well so that their families are regarded as successful and yet they cannot appear openly competitive.

Item 5, *I want to maintain financial security*, was inevitably connected to this part of the discussion. Yet again the tension between traditional ways and Palagi ways surfaced. There was a belief that everything they did reflected on their families and the strong family values which included respect and honour for family members. Thus, achievement went hand in hand with financial security.

The work context for some of the participants was in schools, where descriptions of the work done with the young Pacific peoples were expressed as achievement and simultaneously encompassed item six concerning *challenge in my work*. One participant thought of herself as “an agent of change” where “working with a hard-core bunch of kids the school doesn’t want” provided “a challenge all by itself”. She went on to describe how the community had talked about it a lot. Her perception was that “it is like moulding mats into a square box and a circle doesn’t fit in the square box and so you have the corners to deal with. If the kids don’t understand and it is not in their language they are lost and they are left”.

Participants appeared to rely heavily on their spiritual beliefs to exhibit a confidence that enable them to be assertive in a Palagi world. A criticism of themselves was inherent in the comment: “We become passengers rather than drivers.” However, there was a feeling throughout this section of a positive drive to enhance the position of Pacific peoples. While they did not identify with an agentic career approach that typifies Palagis, the young participants in this cohort group saw that they had been “built up as individuals in order to make a contribution to society”. “If our PI [Pacific Island] community has so much faith in me, how can I let them down?” Thus the knowing-why discussion had come full circle and led smoothly into the skills required to contribute as leaders of the future, the first knowing-how item.

### ***Knowing-how***

From Table 2, *I want to be a better leader* was not a surprising first choice for people attending a leadership development course. However, this does not minimise the impact of the item or its significance for those participants. The amount of airtime and energy given to discussion of the first item seemed to add to the significance of the weighting. One participant declared at the beginning of one knowing-how discussion that she saw herself as a “worker rather than a delegator” which raised the question of what leadership was. While highly valued, leadership within Pacific contexts was viewed differently from “Palagi authority.”

A good example came from one woman who holds a leadership role in the health sector when she described how “our voice” (through her) was now “heard at all levels of the organisation – and not just on health issues”. Another explained that she had become recognised as someone to be consulted “on all needs of the organisation where a cultural component was necessary”. While such influence is congruent with a leadership role, the people involved didn’t see this leadership role as work. “I have to say with our work that we don’t regard it as work. It is actually part of our mission to serve our people. It is an extension of who we are and we just love it to the max. ...It is an expectation of our people.”

Table 2  
Aggregated Knowing-how Scores: Pacific Professionals

Item	Weighted score	Frequency (%)
I want to be a better leader	0.67	38.7
I am becoming a more strategic thinker	0.66	48.3
I am open to fresh ideas	0.62	40.3
I enjoy working with people from whom I can learn	0.61	54.0
I seek training and development beyond my current job	0.53	54.0
I enjoy working in job situations from which I can learn	0.45	32.2
I seek to integrate information from different sources	0.44	37.0

Some of the younger participants were able to articulate their roles as “leaders of tomorrow”. One explained that “a lot of our old people are at the retirement stage” which had the potential to leave a “big gap”. Thus the opportunity to serve the community was one way to repay “the good grounding and the better lifestyle that our parents worked so hard to give us”. “You don’t do it for yourself, it is for our community.” “We know we have to be leaders because we have been told that we have to be leaders” even suggested an obligation to perform in a leadership role. This was reinforced by the powerful voices that drove them, especially elders: “Our husbands are just there – but our mothers, you can always hear their voice saying, ‘You can do better, that is not good enough. I expect more from you’.” Thus, an overlap with the knowing-why discussion on what motivated them became apparent.

Pacific leadership was about “getting the work done rather than leading from the front”. “Yes, we don’t have any degrees or bachelors in business, but we get the work done.” “What we have is loyalty and commitment to get the work done.” It was also a matter of “being passionate about who should serve our people” so those in positions of influence could dictate terms to the professionals. “We are very honest (with these doctors we train). We are really giving it to the medical professionals.”

Facilitating their “getting the work done” style of leadership was possession of specific attributes such as diplomacy and listening skills. Thus the role of minister or Matai was not

necessarily a hallmark of leadership. “Knowing everything” was less important than knowing “the key people whom you can develop as support, whom you can trust”. Several examples were described to attest to progress that had been made “because of that approach”. In sum, leadership was a capability that built on multiple contributions. It seemed to be a way of valuing collective efforts of the community. “People make good contributions. The best people are medium [ordinary, typical], not any professor.” One critical aspect of leadership within the current New Zealand context was “someone who understands both worlds – Samoan (or) Tongan and Palagi systems”. The last comment illustrates the importance of contextual factors in any situation and the value attributed to recognising them.

The point was well made, however, that such a discussion of leadership was in itself a Palagi concept. “You wouldn’t ask these questions of a Samoan leader. Leadership comes naturally to them” and “If you came to a Samoan function you would know a different feeling. It automatically comes to you that I am a Matai, this is how I perform, how I behave, where I sit, where I stand. Leadership in that context is wider and a natural component (of Samoan life).” These comments reinforce the contextual nature of leadership and the inherent knowledge of place and position within society. The power of Pacific leaders depends on the high level of social cohesion and almost total absence of resistance to assigned social roles and practices. A distinctive feature of lower hierarchies was their complete faith and trust in leaders to make decisions that would preserve order and stability (Tiatia, 1998).

The second item discussed was *I am becoming a more strategic thinker*. “We know what strategic thinking is from a Palagi point of view, but what do we call it?” asked one participant. Another person drew everyone’s attention to work done 25 years ago by Pacifica (a women’s community organisation) to promote leadership and strategy among Pacific peoples. She said, “We often don’t transfer that kind of natural cunning that we all have to survive in our world. We often don’t translate that into the workplace.” Thinking strategically involved “finding the right kind of people in the workplace to connect into”. She lamented the fact that “not enough of us do this. We know how to do it in our own world and I want us to be able to do it in two or three worlds.” “Getting skills from the Palagi” was one description of strategic thinking, which again suggested a vision for enhancing the position of Pacific peoples in New Zealand. Overall, strategic thinking was “seeing the bigger picture” or “taking an approach of seeing things overall rather than taking the tunnel vision approach”.

Item 3, *I am open to fresh ideas*, was described as a way to learn from each other. There was a heightened awareness of the value of fresh ideas because of the leadership course these participants had all recently attended. “I listen to as many people as I can” although for a few that in itself provided the problem of “knowing which ideas to act on”. In agreement, one suggested that “my weakness was that I listened to so many ideas (on the course) that everything was in a muddle”. Others saw that their informal discussions with others they respected and trusted generated fresh ideas.

The informal style associated with the “Pacific way” was also inherent in discussions of Item 4 *I enjoy working with people from whom I can learn*. The informality seemed to enhance opportunities to learn from each other. There was an appreciation of the strategic value stemming from a range of networks to promote that learning. Often the networks which were “very large outside of work” provided role models and “professional people who I can look up to”. At the same time there was a dilemma in that extensive networks were “both great and overwhelming”. During the focus group discussions when participants who were regarded as more senior spoke, the others carefully listened. They were learning from their role models in the process.

Little time was spent in any group on the last three items, mainly due to the time and energy spent on the leadership issue. *Seeking training and development beyond my current job* was perceived as “attending courses” and pursuing academic qualifications that would “be recognised by Palagi”. Item 6 about *working in job situations from which I can learn* was discussed within an organisational context that illustrated the narrowness of some on-the-job training. Item 7 about *integrating information from different sources* was scarcely mentioned except for a comment that this ability “came with experience”.

#### *Knowing-whom*

Table 3  
Aggregated Knowing-whom Scores: Pacific Professionals

Item	Weighted score	Frequency (%)
I develop and maintain relationships with family	1.22	69.3
I spend time with people from whom I can learn	0.64	45.2
I seek to develop relationships to access new information	0.63	48.4
I cultivate relationships with customers or clients for my work	0.48	35.5
I cultivate relationships with people who have power and influence	0.42	35.5
I give support to people inside my industry	0.42	33.4
I cultivate relationships with professional colleagues	0.40	29.0

Discussion of the first item, *I develop and maintain relationships with family*, almost served to summarise the other sections. The weighting of the first item was more than double that of the second, which graphically illustrates the significance of family within the Pacific Island cultures. “To us Pacific people, the most important people in our life are our family and that is why we make this (item) more important.” That “our families are our backbone really” was undisputed in any group. “Anything that affects an individual affects the family”, provided further elucidation in that the comment emphasises the depth of family ties. It is “unlike Palagi thinking” where “if you did something wrong, it is your problem and you are the one in disgrace, for the Samoans and Pacific Islanders if somebody does something wrong it affects everyone and it hurt.”

However the meaning was even deeper because it was the source of identity and self-esteem. As explained by one of the senior participants: “The fundamental thing is that people know themselves – for stability and security.” In one group one man told a story of how he could now speak Samoan when standing at a crowded bus stop because he felt secure in himself as a person. Such security had been expressed many times as a vision several participants held for young Pacific Islanders, a motivating force that inspired them to work. There was widespread recognition that in order to be accepted the initial response is to “act to be like them” (Palagis) whereas “when you mature you realise that is wrong”. For these participants, agreement was easily reached about knowing-whom, namely that it was about “knowing who you are, and identifying yourself and knowing where you stand”. All subsequent items were subsumed under this umbrella.

The relationship between family and community was changing for those who were New Zealand born. It was explained that “the concept of knowing your family first before your community is the best way to do things” although for others “within our community at home, the family comes after community”. Apparently the shift to reverse the order was emphasised as a way of encouraging self-care “before looking at a bigger or wider community”. It was a way of retaining cultural values while adapting to life in a foreign context. The message here was to “look after your family first”.

*Spending time with people from whom I can learn*, the second weighted item, was mainly considered in relation to the immediate work environment. “I think knowing the organisation, knowing everyone in it and how they function helps you to go further in that organisation.” Some, however, took a broader view, drawing on the family elders for support. “With the old people there is a different level of language and through learning that you earn their respect.” The support (of family) was also seen as a resource to be leveraged as required. “You are fortunate enough to be able to go back to your community, get to know how to go about things, because you have the ticket.” The “ticket” in this instance referred to a knowledge of the system that “enables you to become a leader” (by applying knowledge of the system). “In a Pacific environment you can do anything;” whereas to be accepted in the Palagi context required application of knowledge in an organisational context. The theme of these comments suggests the complexity of learning about contexts in order to appropriately apply knowledge. Whereas the Pacific environment was known, the New Zealand workplace was perceived to be the domain of the Palagi and therefore acceptance at work had to be earned differently for Pacific peoples.

Item 3 about *developing relationships to access new information* reinforced the message from the knowing-how discussion about being open to new ideas. *Relationships with customers and clients* were regarded as a context in which respect for others could be demonstrated as a fundamental principle of inter-personal relationships. Some criticisms were voiced about *cultivating relationships with people who have power and influence* even though it had been weighted as the fifth item. “I don’t like power” was contrasted against benefits such as “it helps you to help people” and “as the network spreads wider and wider you can help someone else”. When the speaker was pushed to provide a context, *relationships with professional colleagues* (item 7) were offered. While these comments were reminiscent of an overarching theme of working to enhance the position of Pacific peoples in New Zealand, there is again the possibility of providing responses that are culturally appropriate (regarding power). Power in Pacific communities relies on solidarity and traditional (hierarchical) social structures (Tiatia, 1998). Therefore power relations are not likely to be explicitly claimed.

---

## Discussion

### *The Three Ways of Knowing*

Within the knowing-why arena, themes of family connections and values were clearly evident. A strong knowing-why motivation was to enhance the position of Pacific Island peoples in New Zealand. Particular emphasis was placed on the young people who were perceived by the participants as being at risk of “losing their way” in a foreign culture. Their concerns around achievement and challenge revolved around supporting Pacific Island youth, as a way to contribute to a society defined by cultural parameters. Tensions were experienced in trying to maintain traditional values at the same time as promoting acculturation into a broader context of life in New Zealand. Because of this, working in a supportive environment was highly valued. The support came from two major sources. First, and most fundamental, was that of the extended family who understood the purpose of the endeavour and also what support meant in the “Pacific way”. Second, support came from within the immediate work environment, and often from Palagi colleagues rather than kinship ties.

Providing for family required maintaining financial security, and so these items were significant. The “mana” (the standing a person or group has within their ethnic community) of the family was reflected in the provision for family that was made by individual members, and ceremonies such as weddings demonstrated the public standing of families in the community. Furthermore, many families in New Zealand still provided for members resident in the Islands, thus increasing the number of people dependent on any single worker.

The strength of the knowing-why drivers explains the rationale behind the selected knowing-how items. These results support literature that portrays values as a culturally situated variable that is crucial for comprehending the meaning of work and career in the context of people’s lives (Patton, 2000). Furthermore, although typically constructed as a person variable, Hartung (1999) reminds us of the added relevance of values in a cross-cultural context.

Within knowing-how, leadership skills were considered critical to people’s achievement, and to their contributing to society. Rather than taking any self-serving position, many participants felt that providing leadership was a service that had been developed specifically to deliver, and so they accepted the challenge on behalf of, and with the explicit support of, their people. Strategic thinking was perceived as a skill that was useful in the Palagi culture and one to be learned from Palagis. However it was also recognised for the potential to make a difference to outcomes for Pacific peoples.

A similar view emerged in the desire, and recognised need, for openness to new ideas and new ways of doing things. Learning new skills and processes to improve the overall standing of Pacific peoples in New Zealand provided a compelling career agenda. Furthermore, these skills reflect a communal, rather than any individual agenda.

Knowing-whom items reinforced the centrality of family, and the support provided from that extended infrastructure. The highest weighted item in any category of the card sort concerned developing and maintaining relationships with family. The other significantly weighted knowing-whom items reflected the inherent “Pacific way” qualities of respect towards others. Furthermore, all relationships and interactions reflected on the broader family as well as on the individual, providing further reasons to maintain integrity in relationships.

### *Interplay Among Three Ways of Knowing*

The links among the ways of knowing appeared clear. The power of the (knowing-why) motivation to work to enhance family positions, in turn drove the (knowing-how) skills required to effect such enhancement, and further strengthened the (knowing-whom) relationships within the family. Cultivating relationships with others to learn and to gain new information was also connected to the expressed knowing-how items of finding new ways in a Palagi context.

The Pacific leaders demonstrated clarity of purpose. There was a collective push for leadership development, not for personal gain but to provide strong role models for their people. Their expressed aim was to “step up” in confidence in their own abilities and subsequently influence their communities at work and beyond. Leadership drew on the shared desire and collective belief of these participants to make a contribution to society in a way that actively respects traditional community values while forging new processes to engage with the world of work and life in New Zealand.

From a career perspective the Pacific professionals sought to effect change from their positions in the public sector. They espoused and practised organisational loyalty and respect, which they saw as a prerequisite for career development, but there was also the broader and subtler issue in that the integrity of each interaction reflected on the family, and held greater significance than individual reputation. Thus, relationships with clients and customers were perceived to be as important as relationships with colleagues. Their work orientation was seen as a way to further the primary objective of enhancing the position of Pacific Island people. This point has added significance because health and housing are two areas of greatest need among Pacific peoples.

Cultural differences can account for many of the actions and interactions of Polynesian peoples. Perceived benefits to individuals are secondary to the collective advantage of the ethnic groups. Through such a lens, this cohort provided a unique perspective in understanding the impact of cultural values on career and leadership.

The described methodology offers possibilities for additional cross-cultural research and deeper analysis of data to facilitate greater understanding of particular motivators, such as beliefs, values, preferences and goals, that underpin career behaviour. This is particularly important cross-culturally as factors relating to work “do not function as a single unit, but operate according to their position in relation to other goals that are important to strive for and achieve in life” (Holt & Keats, 1992, p. 441). Furthermore, the methodology suggests a potential to enhance “cultural validity” in career assessment (Hartung, 2002).

Further collaboration with different nations of Pacific peoples would provide finer distinctions currently subsumed under a broad concept of the “Pacific way”. For example, Tongan and Samoan societies have very different bases of authority and so larger samples here might reveal different orientations to authority and leadership (Macpherson, personal communication, April 2000). Furthermore, a more detailed comparison between first and second generations might reveal more pronounced differences than has been shown here. It would be expected that the second generation’s orientation to and expectations from work and life may be changing rapidly and because they make up a growing proportion of the population.

Implications exist for application of these results in both leadership and also career development approaches for Pacific peoples. Working from a premise of a holistic career framework, such as the intelligent career, and using a process that participants own may enable Pacific peoples to form an overarching picture of the social context in which they can assume work and life roles congruent with Pacific ways. This emphasises the relevance of presenting development options for either career or leadership in a Palagi society.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has reported research with Pacific professionals who represent a recognisable ethnic community working in the public sector and committed to social change through their leadership in that sector. There was an ideological underpinning to both career and leadership development that reflected the impact of traditional beliefs. The desire to contribute to the betterment of society, specifically the Polynesian societies with which they identified, was a fundamental aspect of the collective identity of the participants and also led to work and life situations upon which their desire to contribute could be expressed.

The methodology appears to have facilitated progress towards cultural validity in a framework that allowed these Pacific professionals to give voice in a new way on their own career perspectives. The participants have provided a unique lens into the nexus of career and leadership development within a diverse cultural context and the results offer increased insight into the beliefs and values that drive the career behaviours of a culturally diverse group of Pacific peoples in New Zealand.

Multicultural sensitivity and competence is an ongoing lifelong process for people of all ethnicities to understand each other. The vast changes that are occurring in racial and ethnic make-up of our society and in the world of work present an imperative to increase our multicultural knowledge and awareness. In sharing their orientations to leadership and careers, these Pacific leaders have provided a contrast with ethnocentric ways and an invitation to recognise and honour both.

### **References**

- Arthur, M. B., Claman, P. H., & DeFillippi, R. J. (1995). Intelligent enterprise, intelligent career. *Academy of Management Executive* 9(4), 7-20.
- Berry, W. (1990). The psychology of acculturation: Understanding individuals moving between cultures. In R. Brislin (Ed.), *Applied cross-cultural psychology: Cross cultural research and methodology series* (pp. 232-53). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Daft, R., & Weick, K. (1984). Toward a model of organizations as interpretation systems. *Academy of Management Review* 9(2), 284-295.
- Fulmer, R. (1999). The new HP way: Leveraging strategy with diversity, leadership development and decentralization. *Strategy and Leadership*, 27(6).
- Hartung, P. J. (1999). Interest assessment using card sorts. In A.R. Spokane, *Occupational interests: Their meaning, measurement, and use in counselling* (pp. 235-252). Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black.
- Hartung, P. J. (2002). Cultural context in career theory and practice: Role salience and values. *Career Development Quarterly*, 51(1), 12-34.
- Hendrikse, E. P. (1995). Migration and culture: The role of Samoan churches in contemporary Aotearoa. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.

- Herr, E. L. (1996). Toward the convergence of career theory and practice: Mythology, issues, and possibilities. In M. L. Savickas and W. B. Walsh (Eds.), *Handbook of career theory* (pp. 13-35). Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black.
- Holt, J. & Keats, D. M. (1992). Work cognitions in multicultural interaction. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 23(4), 421-443.
- Kreuger, R. A. (1988). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Kreuger, R. A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kreuger, R. A. (1998). *Analysing and reporting focus group results*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kreuger, R. A., & King, J. A. (1998). *Involving community members in focus groups*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Larsson, R., Brousseau, K., Driver, M. J., Holmqvist, M. & Tarnovskaya, V. (2003). International growth through cooperation: Brand-driven strategies, leadership, and career development in Sweden. *Academy of Management Executive*, 17(1), 7-24.
- Mara, D., Foliaki, L., & Coxon, E. (1994). Pacific Islands Education. In E. Coxon (Ed.), *The politics of learning and teaching in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (pp. 180-214). Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press.
- Markus, H. K. & Kityama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98, 224-253.
- Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (1999). Social economic status of Pacific People report. Navigating the currents of the new millennium. Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Government.
- Mirvis, P. H., & K. Ayas (2003). Reflective dialogue, life stories, and leadership development. *Reflections*, 4(4), 3-48.
- Mumford, M. D., Marks, M. D., Connelly, M. S., Zaccaro, S. J., & Reiter-Palmon, R. (2000). Development of leadership skills: experience and timing. *Leadership Quarterly*, 11(1), 27.
- Parker, H. L. P. (1996). The new career paradigm: An exploration of "intelligent career" behaviour among MBA graduates and students. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Auckland, New Zealand.
- Parker, H. L. P. (2000). Career communities. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Auckland, New Zealand.
- Parker, P. (2002). Working with the Intelligent Career Model. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 39(2), 83-96.
- Parker, P., & Arthur, M. B. (2004). Coaching for career development and leadership development: an intelligent career approach. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 13(3), 56-60.
- Patton, W. (2000). Changing career: The role of values. In R. Young (Ed.), *The future of career* (pp. 69-82). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Pernick, R. (2002). Creating a leadership development program: Nine essential tasks [Electronic version]. *Public Management (US)*, 8 (7), 1-18.
- Pope, M., Cheng, W. D., & Leong, F. T. L. (1998). The case of Chou: The inextricability of career to personal and social issues in a multicultural context. *Journal of Career Development*, 25(1), 53-64.
- Raelin, J. A. (2000). *Work-based learning: The new frontier of management development*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- New Zealand Institute of Economic Research. (2003). Pacific Peoples in New Zealand: Preliminary review of development issues. Wellington, New Zealand: Author.
- Stringer, E. T. (1996). *Action research. A handbook for practitioners*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Thomas, D., & K. Inkson (in press). *Careers across cultures*.
- Tiatia, J. (1998). *Caught between two cultures: A New Zealand-born Pacific Island perspective*. Auckland, New Zealand: Christian Research Association.
- Traynor, W. J., & Watts, W. R. (1992). Management development in the Pacific during the 1990s: How to survive with coconuts. *Journal of Management Development* 11(2), 6-69.
- Trompenaars, F. (1993). *Riding the waves of culture*. Burr Ridge, IL.: Irwin.
- Wilson, M. S., Hoppe, M. H., & Sayles, L. R. (1996). *Managing across cultures A learning framework*. Greensboro: Center for Creative Leadership.

**Authors' Note**

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Polly Parker, the University of Auckland Business School, University of Auckland, New Zealand. Email: [Polly.Parker@griffith.edu.au](mailto:Polly.Parker@griffith.edu.au)

Manuscript originally submitted November 11, 2004

Revised, re-submitted and accepted April 15, 2005