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**JUST HANGING ON IN THERE
WHY MAORI LEAVE EMPLOYMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Auckland Institute of Technology aims, by 2003, to increase its numbers of staff who are Maori to a level commensurate with their presence in the Auckland Region population. Despite this commitment, through 1997 and early 1998 Maori and other staff began to observe high numbers of Maori staff leaving the Institute compared with other groups. A staff turnover report for the period 1 April to 30 June 1998 showed (at 26.9%) that the turnover rate for Maori staff outside of the Maori studies faculty was more than twice the average (12.6%) for all groups. The Institute's response was to commission an investigation of the experience of Maori staff who left AIT during the period in an attempt to discern any cultural, management, systemic and other factors that might be causal to the problem. This paper, *Just Hanging on in There, Why Maori Leave Employment*, reports the findings of the investigation.

JUST HANGING ON IN THERE WHY MAORI LEAVE EMPLOYMENT

INTRODUCTION

Employment status and income are important determinants of social progress and economic wellbeing for individuals and collectives (Te Puni Kokiri 1998:17) and fair treatment in employment markets and the workplace is a basic human right in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Human Rights Act 1993, s22). In their report on the *Stability of employment and equality of employment opportunity for Maori workers* the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (1997:5) maintains that the status of a group in the workforce is the sum of the status of its constituent members in localised labour markets. Following this, any one group tending to have 'more fragile attachment within the localised labour market (exhibited by higher turnover rates, shorter duration of employment with any particular employer)' can be expected to have a lower employment status than the workforce as a whole (NZCTU 1997:5). Maori, quite clearly, is one such group (see for example Te Puni Kokiri 1998, NZCTU 1997, Mitchell & Mitchell 1993, Fletcher 1999, Jefferies 1997).

Responding to issues such as those outlined, the Government requires chief executives of tertiary institutions to 'recognise the employment aims and aspirations of Maori and the need for their greater involvement in the education sector' (State Sector Act 1988, s220a). While recent years have seen a further widening of gaps between Maori and non-Maori across a range of social indicators (Te Puni Kokiri 1998) it would be naïve to assume that the only reasons why organisations should seek to increase their Maori staff numbers are social justice ones. Maori are projected to increase from fifteen percent of the national population (1996 census) to around twenty percent by the year 2031. At the same time factors including their indigenous status, the return of assets to iwi through Waitangi Tribunal settlements and increased political representation under MMP are combining to prosper their influence at national and local levels (Wilson 1998).

Recognising all of the above and seeking to build on its past endeavours the Auckland Institute of Technology (AIT) states its intent in its Statement of Objectives (1999-2001) to have, by the year 2003, at least one hundred and thirty salaried employees who are Maori.

Despite this commitment, through 1997 and early 1998 Maori and other staff were noting that the numbers of Maori staff "quitting" the Institute appeared to be much higher than for other groups. A staff turnover report covering the period at issue (1st April 1997 to 30th June 1998) highlighted a crisis situation amongst Maori staff employed outside of the Institute's Maori studies faculty. Figures for the whole of 1998 suggest a trend.

Table One: Comparison of turnover rates of cohort with the average for all groups

	Research Period		1998	
	%	Ratio	%	Ratio
Maori staff (outside Maori faculty)	26.9	14/52	22.7	10/44
All groups combined	12.6	132/1051	9.7	93/954

THEORY

About Maori

When White (1999) observes that 'the tragedy of Pakeha development is that it is done at the expense of Maori development' she makes the point that, unlike sand which naturally sinks to the bottom in water, the overly negative status of Maori in New Zealand society is not mere fate. Through processes of colonisation including numeric swamping, acts of war and manipulative legislation, particular cultural groupings seize control of states from indigenous and other populations (Cope and Kalantzis 1995: 367-368). In Aotearoa/New Zealand this group is called variously Pakeha, European, white. Maori are New Zealand's colonised indigenes.

About Turnover

Voluntary turnover or a quit (the primary concern in this research) reflects an employee's decision to leave an organisation while involuntary turnover or a discharge reflects an employer's decision to terminate an employment relationship (Shaw et al 1998). Staff turnover can be a benefit and/or a cost for organisations. Benefits accrue; for example, if a new hire is more effective or lower waged than the one replaced (Dalton and Todor 1993). Costs are both direct (e.g. advertising and hiring) and indirect. Indirectly, turnover can disrupt friendships and group bonds and replacement period work cover can stress and undermine the performance of remaining staff (Wai Chi Tai and Robinson 1998). Pertinent to groups with 'fragile attachment' to the workforce, high turnover inhibits promotion opportunities and overall improvement in employment status for individuals and their collectives (NZCTU 1997:3).

"Traditional" thinkers distinguish a relationship between job satisfaction, organisational commitment and employment options (Griffeth and Hom 1995, Adams and Beehr 1998, Lee and Mitchell 1994, Johnston et al 1993). Within this their focus appears to be on reviewing, refining, adding to and integrating various models that incorporate this base premise. Wilson (1986) advises that it is meaningless to relate job satisfaction and turnover without also identifying the job and organisational factors responsible for the dissatisfaction. Nkomo (1993) criticises the way in which "traditional" research has 'treated organisations as homogeneous entities in which distinctions of race and ethnicity are either "unstated" or considered irrelevant'. Reich (cited in Nkomo 1993) notes that this is 'despite the fact that race is one of the major bases of domination in society and a major means through which the division of labour occurs in organisations'. Such dismissal, it should be noted, facilitates dominant group control. Thus, consideration of exclusionary (or inclusionary) organisational theories most particularly as they relate to minority and "different" group members (including colonised indigenes) is critical for the purposes of this study. These theories are discussed alongside the themes highlighted in the interviews.

METHODOLOGY

Acknowledging that socio-cultural and psychological environments influence behavior Schmid (in Krefting 1990) describes qualitative research as the 'study of the empirical world from the viewpoint of the person under study'. Field and Morse (in Krefting 1990) explain that a 'phenomenological approach' to qualitative research 'asks what it is like to have a certain experience' in order to accurately describe 'the experience of the phenomenon under study'. Within this frame a researcher's job is to 'represent the experiences of informants as accurately as possible, and to test the findings against people from whom the data was drawn or who are familiar with the matter under study'. A qualitative study is credible when it presents accurate descriptions or interpretations of human experience which people who share that experience recognise (Krefting 1990).

This qualitative study employed phenomenological (described above) and kaupapa Maori methodologies. Kaupapa Maori methodologies seek solutions to problems in terms of Maori aspirations, preferences and practices (Bishop 1994). To this end the study was Maori initiated and led and all interactions with research participants were by Maori with Maori.

Ten Maori staff members from outside of the Maori studies faculty participated in two focus groups. Participants were encouraged to describe both positive and problematic aspects of their employment at AIT. The process allowed themes to emerge from their own experiences, thoughts and understandings so that their contributions influenced the direction of the discussion. The aim was to discover what they considered important. The themes that emerged from the focus groups formed the basis for the semi-structured interviews that followed.

Of the fourteen who left the Institute during the research period, eight were quits and six discharges (redundancies and dismissals). Thirteen were contacted, in the first instance, by the Institute's human resources division, with an invitation to participate in an interview. Seven of the eight quits accepted; the eighth was not reached. Individual interviews, approximately one hour in duration were

conducted, taped and transcribed. Data from the interviews was analysed by research team members to identify recurrent themes and concepts. Validation of the analysis was sought through participant feedback and other Maori staff 'recognition' (Krefting 1990).

The interviewees had been employed in six different departments. Most were female and lecturers. All had been permanent full-time. Their respective lengths of employment in the Institute ranged from two to twelve years. On leaving the Institute, three had jobs to go to, four did not. To cloud the identities of both interviewees and current AIT staff who might have been party to some of the interactions described interviewees are referred to as she and are identified by number as Tahi (one) through to Whitu (seven).

THEMES RAISED

In spite of the range of issues canvassed by interviewees and their gender and role differences the experiences they described were remarkably similar. This section sets out, as broad themes, six major factors identified as causal to their ultimate turnover: violations of psychological contracts, marginalisation, hostile workplaces, adverse stereotypes, mismanagement and resignation. While the themes are presented separately they are inseparable in real life. Further, though the general tenor of the findings might seem negative it is important to know that most interviewees, given suitable opportunity, would want to return to AIT. Said one: 'Despite all the challenges --- there is great potential at AIT --- and lots of good structures for Maori'. Said another: 'It is probably one of the better places to be'.

Violations of Psychological Contracts

Organisations set up, in individuals, beliefs about what is agreed between themselves and their organisations (Rousseau in Grant 1999) that are formed by what organisations say and write and the ways they behave. These agreements are described in the literature as 'psychological contracts' (Grant 1999). AIT's avowal in its Charter that it 'accepts the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi' is one such contract. Violations of psychological contracts occur when an employee considers that an organisation has failed to fulfil an obligation he/she perceives to be 'in the contract' (Rousseau and Parks in Turnley and Feldman 1999).

Interviewees spoke of disjunctions between what was articulated by AIT in support of the Treaty and what was experienced. Tahi, for example, recounted being given 'all these signals to work hard for equity and yet some of the things that I got back were blatantly racist'. She remembered being 'in a meeting where I was representing a Maori perspective' around a particular process 'when it got to the point where one of the group members --- stopped the proceedings and very loudly and clearly said [that] she gets pissed off with Maori staff. You know, she was saying "I'm sick of this, I don't want to hear it again". Some of those things were distressing --- make you think what's the point.' This was not an isolated incident. Ono found her participation on Institute "Maori" committees discounted when she sought promotion on the grounds that 'it was only Maori stuff'. Toru noted that despite her department's espousals of commitment to the Treaty Maori staff 'had to always justify why the --- Maori component was in there' and in addition 'had to keep reassuring them (non-Maori) that it would be okay'.

Marginalisation

Networks allocate a range of social-emotional and instrumental support to their members (Ibarra 1993). For minority employees limited access to or exclusion from networks means they have difficulty gaining beneficial support (Ibarra 1993). This is because individuals tend to prefer the company of their own kind to that of other groups (Tsui et al 1992) and majority group members establish and control most groups including, arguably, all the most influential. As a consequence those individuals most distant from others on demographic attributes are the least likely to be socially and instrumentally integrated into groups and the most likely to leave (O'Reilly et al 1989). As

Neville (1997) puts it: 'The desire for the dominant and successful group to dance with partners who mirror their own kind socially, intellectually and psychologically has marginalised the rest of society for centuries'.

The AIT marae provides a uniquely Maori space where Maori can gather for social and emotional support on their own terms. Toru spoke of it as 'a heartthrob place' into which 'you can go --- and get pumped up and then come out again and do some work outside in this other place'. While on one level this is a positive statement, on other levels it demonstrates how hard Toru had to work to get the emotional support she needed and how much that 'other place' was a place of depletion for her. Wha focused quite specifically on issues of exclusion and marginality. She spoke at length about what she termed 'the English club' comprised of members of 'the dominant race' who 'ostracised' those to varying degrees different from themselves. She recalled being interrupted when she spoke in meetings and having her suggestions negated because she was 'not from the right group'. Later, when 'someone else would come up with the same thing who was from the right group --- it would get heard --- and that would be good for them'. There are significant parallels between these and Tahi's story where she was marginalised in a meeting.

Hostile Workspaces

Dominant group members are usually 'unaware of their power' and can carry on their daily activities without any substantial knowledge about or meaningful interactions with people who are different from them (Griffin and Howard in Howard 1999:58). For people who are "different", however, nonengagement is not an option. Instead they must develop "expertise in translation and transition" between their own culture and the culture of dominance' (Griffen in Howard 1999:58). Speaking of Aboriginal people Howard (1999:58) relates how they:

--- Have had to be studious observers of the moods, quirks, rituals and emotions of --- the White colonial psyche. Have had to know where they are safe and where they are not --- how to devise strategies for survival --- how to read the intentions and avoid the hostilities of Whites [who], by comparison, know very little about [their] actual experiences and feelings ---.

Rua, like Toru, moved between two worlds. One, a world of Maori where 'there were always eyes looking and people listening and talking --- in ways that I could relate to'. Another, a world where she was careful who she spoke to and what she spoke about. Four classes of interaction could be differentiated in Rua's account. Some people were genuinely 'open to korero. These people Rua wanted to talk to because 'I was maybe the only representative they --- have contact with who could have informed knowledge'. A second class of people Rua found 'deliberately difficult and --- you had to be careful of what you could say'. With a third class Rua was 'very careful about what I said and how I said things'. Finally, some people 'I wouldn't say anything to --- I withdrew whenever they addressed me'. Referring again to Tahi's story, it is easy to see that she failed to distinguish the appropriate class of interaction that was possible in that group. Attempting to engage class one dialogue she met class three hostility.

Adverse Stereotypes

Three stereotyping strategies are found in the literature: descriptive, prescriptive (Eberhardt and Fiske in Hsiao 1996) and attributive (Nkomo 1993). Relative to these, 'dominant group members are both the defining group and --- the best' (Keto in Nkomo 1993:489). Descriptive strategies say what the defined group member is (Hsiao 1993). For Haig (1998:40) this meant being blamed 'for a toy gun being stolen --- for neighbourhood children swearing --- for a grassy bank being set on fire': Criminal, uncouth, dangerous: natural for a child who is Maori in contrast with those others not. Prescriptive strategies say what the defined group member should be (Hsiao 1998). In the American South '(d)eference was demanded by whites and any Negro who would not accord it was defined as 'uppity', threatening and in need of correction' (Barton 1998:121). These were 'bad Negroes'. Good Negroes (Sambos) who did defer, might reap reward (ibid.). Attributive strategies lock in the stereotypes.

Negative behaviours are whole group characteristics, positive behaviours are special cases (Pettigrew in Nkomo 1993:494) or, because she has 'majority blood'. Attributive strategies enable defining groups to maintain both their negative assessments of other and their assessments of themselves (Nkomo 1993:494) as 'the best'.

Adverse stereotyping by its very nature is violating, hostile and exclusionary. Additionally, as dominant group members wield most power in these situations, it is their stereotyping that has most impact in the workplace. Ono remembers 'talking on the telephone and I put it down and [a non-Maori colleague] says out of the blue, you're Ono, when I think of you I don't think of you as Maori -- and she could have dropped me with a feather. I was just so astonished that anyone would have the audacity to challenge the fact whether I'm Maori or not --- '. Apparently Ono 'failed' to fit this definer's picture of what a Maori is. At a later time Ono 'fails' yet again when another definer competes with her for a particular role on the basis that 'I'm more Maori than she is. I can even speak the language' '. In the same department others coach Rima when she feels 'daunted by their expectations of me as Maori' because she had 'never done this type of thing before'. They 'were aware that I felt a little uncomfortable and were very helpful and gave me suggestions at what I should or—could do'. On the other hand when there is a Maori-related issue elsewhere in the Institute Rima does not trust her helpful colleagues. Instead she keeps 'very quiet about it --- I didn't want to let people know [because] they would say – well yes that's typical isn't it --- I thought they would have said that'.

Mismanagement

Maori staff in the public service reported 'frustration with incompetent management' as a consistent factor that influenced [them] to leave the public service' (Gardiner and Parata 1998:32). This corresponds with "traditional" literature which, Nkomo point out, centres dominant group thinking and writes out "other". Incorporating their "otherness" public service Maori staff elucidated further:

That middle level managers insidiously obstruct corporate commitments in respect to Maori, and senior managers find it hard to make the intellectual leaps to dealing with matters such as the Treaty outside their ordinary frames of reference.

So for these staff, management incompetence is a double jeopardy, combining incompetence as it affects all staff and specific incompetence (obstructive actions and intellectual paucity) impacting on Maori only.

AIT experiences bore out these findings. At the general level Whitu found her manager 'demanding, draining and negative'. Specifically, though she was unable to 'put my fingers on the reasons why --- being Maori for her --- was a issue'. What Whitu's manager said 'sometimes didn't feel genuine. There was a difference between what she said and what she did'. While her manager 'knew she had to have a Maori face' amongst her staff, she was 'not appreciative of it and did not take the time to understand'. This made Whitu 'think hard whether what I was seeing was there --- question my own -- values --- instincts'. For Rua a change of manager resulted in 'Maori issues [becoming] more of a problem for me'. Toru found herself invidiously positioned between her managers and other Maori staff. She was the one, it seems, the managers preferred to deal with. Clearly the double jeopardy outlined above contributed to Maori staff dissatisfaction in major ways.

Resignation

In the end all interviewees terminated their employment relationships with the Institute. The excerpts detail some of their final reasons why:

I was working really hard yet I was getting this bad reputation. I felt my integrity was being challenged by non-Maori staff. In the end I was offered quite a lot more money (Tahi constantly challenged the mono-cultural viewpoint).

I felt that I was denied opportunity because of my colour, because of my race, because of my heritage and that's a really hard thing to get over. When I left the Institute I was very angry (Rua).

I was offered a better job; a higher paid job for the knowledge and expertise I had to offer (Toru).

What's the point of struggling, working hard, staying year after year, trying to improve yourself when you're just fighting the club all the time. It's not like you're going to get anywhere (Wha).

You know how rolling stones gather no moss. I tend to do that. I just couldn't see myself staying for too long (Rima).

And somebody else got the --- and I thought, "Oh bugger this". You know I was tired of fighting, of banging my head against the wall basically (Ono).

There was a lack of flexibility. I felt overworked, used, devalued, unappreciated. Didn't like the manager's style (Whitu).

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the experiences of Maori staff who "quitted" the Institute in a given period in order to identify factors causal to their leaving. It was anticipated that the outcomes of the research would assist AIT to improve its Maori staff retention practice. It was also anticipated that other organisations experiencing similar problems would find the study useful. Cameron (1986) notes that measuring effectiveness is especially difficult in organisations that do not have clearly defined goals. This discussion, therefore, is framed very generally in terms of the questions: What Maori staff retention goals has AIT set and how effective are they? Who is concerned? How might AIT improve its Maori staff retention practice?

AIT states its intent to increase its Maori salaried staff numbers to minimum 130 by the end of 2003. Actually, however, Maori staff numbers have declined from a high of 77 in 1996 to a current 66. In 1998 a one to three "in" to "out" Maori staff employment pattern was reported. A similar pattern is evidencing in 1999. This hard in, easy out pattern contrasts directly with that of the dominant group. While the pattern is of concern in some quarters, AIT has not published turnover bottom-lines for Maori staff. Therefore, while managers are encouraged to increase Maori staff numbers there is no comparative contingency on them to support their retention once employed. This is a critical goal gap. Why should AIT be concerned? A range of reasons has been canvassed already in this paper. Because legislation says it must, increased Maori political and economic influence suggests it would be wise to, demographic trends indicates it makes good business sense. Maori staff bring with them skills and understanding specific to their communities and spheres of influence. Institutions need these skills to further important institutional purposes. Smith (1997:204) provides a Maori perspective. "Making space within institutional structures", she says 'is a necessary part of Maori --- work'. The spaces to be made, she explains, are:

Theoretical spaces, pedagogical spaces, structural spaces --- about culture, history and power, about transforming, struggling against, making sense of the institutions within which we work --- to connect our work to our aspirations --- [to] contribute to the wider world in which we too are citizens.

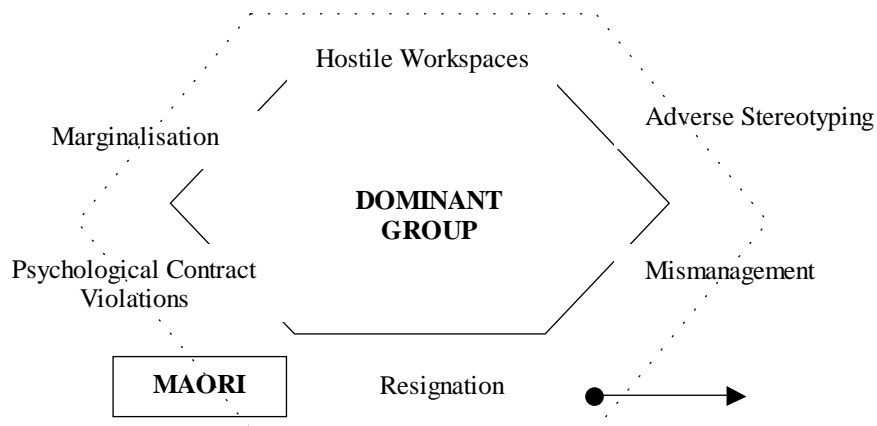
Maori need institutions to further important Maori aspirations. The needs (institutions and Maori) are complementary.

Clearly, therefore, it is in both AIT and Maori interests for AIT to retain a critical mass of highly skilled Maori staff. Clearly also, AIT is finding this hard to do.

Irwin (in Smith) speaks of 'the university' as 'a site of struggle for Maori --- in which the very construction of "Maori" is contested on a number of different levels'. For Foucauld such contests are part of the 'myriad of power relations at the microlevel of society --- that make centralized, repressive forms of power possible (in Sawicki, 1999:20).

AIT interviewees' stories reiterate Smith, Irwin and Foucauld. The themes highlighted are modeled below as different sides of a single construct, interrelated and interacting. Maori are positioned precariously on the unstable edges of the construct, their hard in and easy out patterns easy to see. From the centre dominant group members dictate Maori staff employment experiences and terms. The themes: violations of psychological contracts, marginalisation, hostile workspaces, adverse stereotyping, mismanagement and resignation (as in giving up) are critical predictors of Maori staff dissatisfaction and turnover.

Table Two: Predictors of Maori Staff Dissatisfaction



Ignoring matters of race traditional literature tends to focus on instrumental indicators of dissatisfaction (pay rates, access to promotion, professional development). However, as the model shows, Maori are struggling at much more fundamental levels within their organisations. For personal safety and emotional wellbeing, for the right to be Maori and to self define, for respect, for security, for institutional citizenship on their terms, for space at the centre. Setting aside whether or not Maori staff are achieving the instrumental satisfaction they seek and, indeed, quite what that might be, it is at these deeply personal levels that AIT is failing its Maori staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE PRACTICE

Three particular areas of practice to be addressed can be discerned. Non-specification at operational level of turnover bottom-lines means that the Institute is not developing and implementing staff retention strategies in a managed way. Non-specification of key statements of commitment to Maori (AIT acknowledges the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, Maori Development, the aims and aspirations of Maori are examples) invites assumptions leading to misperceptions and psychological contract violations. Dominant group subjugation of Maori staff at many levels leads to frustration, hostility, unhealthy working relationships. The recommendations that follow provide guidelines for action only. As a fully managed and strategic response is needed to address these complex business issues the first recommendation is key:

1. Establish a core group of Maori and non-Maori senior managers to develop, establish, implement and monitor a full response to the findings of this investigation.
2. Continue researching in related areas. Important areas of study for kaupapa Maori methodologists include:
 - Investigation of the experiences of staff currently employed outside of Maori studies (have they stayed because they are satisfied?).
 - Investigation of the experience of staff currently employed inside Maori studies (do their experiences differ from those of non-Maori studies staff?).
 - Investigation of Maori staff discharges (is this a recruitment problem?).
 - Comparative investigations in other organisations (is the AIT experience unique?).

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