



VALUE Culture IN THE workplace

Top tips to build a work environment that values and respects different cultures

● Understand the cultural diversity of your community

Ethnic diversity is increasing in organisations. Most country's have five large ethnic groups such as New Zealand European, Maori, Chinese, Samoan and Indian. Ethnic and cultural differences are part of New Zealand society and our work environments need to be open to those differences.

Make it clear cultural discrimination is unacceptable

Global laws prohibits discrimination but organizations need to take responsibility for their work culture. Company policy and day-to-day actions inside the business will determine whether the work environment delivers a positive experience for all cultures. Ensure everyone understands that there is no acceptable level of discrimination – from 'harmless' jokes to exclusion from informal work gatherings to behaviour in shared office spaces that makes colleagues uncomfortable. Managers should be supported (and trained) to talk to staff about inappropriate behaviour, resolve issues and take action if the behaviour continues.

● Share the vision – explain why cultural diversity is important to your business

Along with making it clear 'what not to do', take the time to discuss why an inclusive, multi-cultural work environment is important to your company. Is it because you want employees that can identify and connect with a culturally diverse client base? Is it because the company values the different perspectives that come from culturally diverse teams? Is it because the company has global plans and needs greater cultural knowledge to enter new markets? Is it because your organisation wants the largest possible talent pool to choose from? Sharing your company's thinking will help to position cultural diversity as a goal that everyone needs to work towards.

There is no acceptable level of discrimination



● Build your team's cultural knowledge

Ignorance is one of the greatest barriers to positive cultural diversity in the workplace. Invest some time in educating your workforce on ethnic make-up. Check out relevant events and training on offer from the EEO Trust or access research and other resources.

Ethnic and cultural differences are part of society and our work environments need to be open to those differences.



● Understanding cultural norms is a good starting point

Appreciating different cultural norms gives a business a good platform for understanding how they can show respect for the diverse cultures in their company. Each culture has "cultural norms" which act as a guide for socially acceptable behaviour. Cultural norms can influence everything from what a person eats to what they wear and how they interact with colleagues in the work environment.

Listed here are five key cultures present in the workplace and some of their common characteristics or cultural norms.



Maori cultural norms

Extending manaakitanga or hospitality toward visitors is an intrinsic part of the Maori culture. This cultural norm can help build strong relationships with clients

and other colleagues but it may need to be factored in, for example it may mean catering/providing food for some meetings and leaving more time for introductions and social interaction.

Maori identity is closely linked to whakapapa (genealogy) and whenua (the land), which is why the cultural norm around introductions is to share information about where a person comes from and who their family is. Making these sort of introductions part of staff inductions or important meetings would be one way to show respect for the culture.



Pacific cultural norms

In many Pacific cultures, direct eye contact – especially if it is maintained – can be seen as a sign of confrontation or disrespect. This is particularly true between young and older people and people of the opposite sex, so the cultural norm is to keep eye contact to a minimum. Lowering the eyes is a sign of respect or deference to authority figures or to elders.

Respecting this cultural norm could simply mean recognising lowered eyes as a sign of respect and not interpreting it as a sign of deceit or disrespect. Where younger managers are working with older Pacific team members, they could consider limiting eye contact as their own sign of respect.

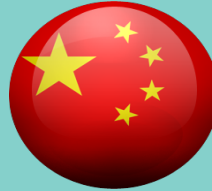


Indian cultural norms

Saying “yes” or agreeing to provide what has been asked for is part of the Indian culture. In a work environment, the cultural norm of saying “yes” can make it harder

to clarify what is actually feasible if an employee is reluctant to say “no, the work cannot be done” even with good reason.

The upside of this cultural norm is a real desire to find a solution and meet the request of clients or colleagues. Employers should not label the tendency to say “yes” as dishonest. To ensure it doesn’t cause conflicts, managers need to ask the right questions, for example “what do you need to get this work done?” or “what are the obstacles that could make it hard to complete this work?”



Chinese cultural norms

Duty, loyalty, honour, respect for age and seniority are all important aspects of Chinese culture. It is also extremely important not to lose face or cause

others to lose face. In the work environment this can mean an individual would be uncomfortable delivering – or receiving – criticism in a meeting with other colleagues or clients.

To respect this aspect of Chinese culture, an organisation could look at seeking feedback through other channels that aren’t face-to-face, for example sending a report out via email and asking for suggestions. Feedback on work performance should also be delivered one-to-one where possible.



Middle Eastern cultural norms

Many Middle Eastern individuals will have strong religious beliefs that are central to their culture. Muslim religion governs the way a person

lives and has to be observed through prayer every day at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening.

During a normal nine-to-five work day, two of these set prayer times would occur – at noon and in the afternoon. A respectful work environment could either provide a space for this prayer, for example in an unused meeting room, or could invite Muslim employees to suggest somewhere nearby they could carry out the prayer and allow the two short break times.