

10. VALUING MULTICULTURALISM

Business engagement with the challenge of multiculturalism

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The debate surrounding multiculturalism has become prominent in recent times. Opinions on the costs and benefits of multiculturalism are being voiced at a societal level around the globe, and academic literature contains a rich array of research and scholarly views on the topic. In this chapter, we first present a brief review of the literature and media sources on the issue of multiculturalism at a national economic and cultural-societal level. We then consider findings from the literature on the role of multiculturalism in business, as we consider this to be a major contributor to a country's economic improvement. We are particularly concerned with the question of how New Zealand businesses and government departments interact with multiculturalism in the context of their involvement in international markets. Specifically, we seek to understand the extent to which they both utilise the talents of immigrants from Asia in their endeavours to develop their business in Asian markets; our particular focus is China and India. We draw on established literature to help examine this question, and illustrate these findings with quotes from a range of participants involved in our empirical work. This provides a basis for understanding how the activities and perspectives observed in these organisations in New Zealand relate to the international perspectives of multiculturalism at an organisational level.

The empirical work presented in this chapter derives from a larger study involving an investigation into the internationalisation of seventy New Zealand firms into China and India, using a qualitative, interview-based approach¹. We will not elaborate on the details of this study here, but instead will focus on the engagement of New Zealand firms with migrants in New Zealand from these countries. The chapter concludes with some reflections on the findings and offers conclusions on the overarching research context, namely valuing multiculturalism at a business and government level in New Zealand.

Critics of multiculturalism

The rapid growth of immigration that has accompanied the reduction of national boundaries within some of the world's largest trade blocs has led to the re-emergence of old concerns about the effects of immigrant workers on a country's own 'native' workforce.² According to some researchers, this has tended to lead to a backlash against multiculturalism.³

Many argue that multiculturalism is under attack. Scarcely a day goes past without news of clashes between religions, sects or ethnicities. Both fringe political parties and, increasingly, mainstream parties around the world (such as in the 2012 French presidential election debates) have condemned multiculturalism, calling for an end to immigration and the preservation of 'traditional values'. Critics of multiculturalism point to its role among the causes of a number of violent and socially divisive situations, such as the London bombings of 2005, the 2001 riots in British mill towns, the murder of film-maker Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands in 2004, and the Norway massacre of 2011. Many critics question whether these events are in part the result of too much tolerance of cultural diversity.⁴

In some societies, multiculturalism has been pronounced a 'failure', often by leaders of nations that once encouraged inflows of cheap immigrant labour. For example, German Chancellor Angela Merkel caused a stir in 2010 with a speech at Potsdam. According to Matthew Weaver of the *Guardian*:

... [Merkel] courted growing anti-immigrant opinion in Germany by claiming the country's attempts to create a multicultural society have 'utterly failed'.

*Speaking to a meeting of young members of her Christian Democratic Union party, Merkel said the idea of people from different cultural backgrounds living happily 'side by side' did not work. She said the onus was on immigrants to do more to integrate into German society. 'This [multicultural] approach has failed, utterly failed,' Merkel told the meeting in Potsdam, west of Berlin, yesterday. Her remarks will stir a debate about immigration in a country which is home to around 4 million Muslims.*⁵

In Britain the BBC reported a similar sentiment from Prime Minister David Cameron:

David Cameron strode firmly into a debate where many politicians tread timidly ...

It is the first time he has spoken so directly as prime minister, but there are echoes of what has gone before. Tony Blair edged away from multiculturalism in the years after the 7/7 bombings in London, and his ministers moved to stop funding any community organisation that did not challenge extremism. And what of Gordon Brown's continual quest to strengthen 'Britishness'?⁶

Concerns about immigration and the effects of multiculturalism are also gaining momentum in the US, Canada and other parts of the European Union, where freedom of cross-border migration has facilitated increased immigration into many countries previously less accessible, and from a more diverse range of source countries. Typical among host-country concerns about multicultural immigration are the fiscal costs to the host country (including social welfare costs), and the potential accentuation of high unemployment levels.⁷ Maria Aguirre suggests that sources of conflict concerning multicultural immigration at a national level arise from '... a misperception of the economic impact ... the impact on the receiving culture, and the difficulty found in harmonizing civil and political rights of minorities and majorities.'⁸

To a certain extent New Zealand is insulated from the deeper tensions of countries such as Germany and Britain, but, as some have pointed out, this should not encourage complacency. Kate McMillan noted that 'immigration and multiculturalism [have not] become the wedge issues they became in Australia, the United States and across Europe', not because of 'good management' but because of a 'less challenging set of circumstances'.⁹

Recently the sale of the Crafar farms – New Zealand's largest family-owned dairy business – to a Chinese conglomerate raised tensions throughout New Zealand society and brought the immigration and multiculturalism debate back into the forefront of political issues.¹⁰ Apprehensions about Chinese immigration stretch back to the nineteenth century, but in contemporary New Zealand these have been supplemented by concerns about the effect on house prices, particularly in Auckland, and the impact on the social security and health systems. There has been resistance to Chinese involvement in forestry and mining, the transfer of manufacturing to China, and the effect of imports from China on local production. The sale of farmland to foreigners has been particularly

contentious and, in our opinion, exceeded any rational calculation of costs and benefits, both actual and potential. Perhaps farmland is seen as the core attribute of the New Zealand myth, the place where the real Kiwi, a lonely individual, battles adversity to wrest a living from the land with few resources other than a supportive family, hard work, ingenuity and a little No 8 wire.¹¹ The sale of the Crafar farms was seen and portrayed as violating the New Zealand dream.¹²

Defence of multiculturalism

While multiculturalism has its critics, others offer perspectives in defence of the concept. Influential defenders of multiculturalism, such as Will Kymlicka, claim that the social and economic benefits of cultural diversity resulting from migration should be embraced.¹³ Considerable research has been conducted into the economic effects of multicultural immigration, including its impacts on employment, income distribution and the welfare state of the host country. Contrary to the widely held view that immigration is detrimental to indigenous employment, research results consistently show no negative effects on employment and wages at the macro-economic level.¹⁴

At an organisational level much has been written about the human capital gains of multiculturalism, in particular the economic benefits of greater access to the wide-ranging and diverse talents of people from around the world. Jenny Hoobler posits, 'It is time for organisations to understand how to utilize all of the talent available to them.'¹⁵

Some defenders of multiculturalism conceptualise it as a 'counter-hegemony' movement and an enabler of intellectual and demographic diversity.¹⁶ Extending this argument, Schubert suggests that a more constructive way of viewing the effects of multiculturalism is through the use of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence', which refers to 'the ways in which daily practices produce and foster domination, including those of the dominated themselves'.¹⁷ Schubert claims multiculturalism must be supported in order to avoid societies and individuals succumbing to the negative effects of symbolic violence.

While supporting multiculturalism as an important concept, others propose new ways of looking at multiculturalism. For example, Modood suggests the idea of 'civic multiculturalism', which argues for the incorporation of democratic and civic values into the concept.¹⁸ In a similar

vein, Rodríguez-García advocates what he terms 'interculturalism', which 'reconciles cultural diversity with social cohesion'.¹⁹

In New Zealand multiculturalism receives support from the government through the work of a number of government agencies as well as specialist organisations, such as the Office of Ethnic Affairs and the Asia New Zealand Foundation (ANZF). The latter defines itself as 'a non-partisan and non-profit organisation dedicated to building New Zealanders' knowledge and understanding of Asia'.²⁰ Notwithstanding several public incidents exposing anti-immigration sentiments and intolerance of foreign cultures in New Zealand, particularly relating to Asia,²¹ and on-going questions about New Zealand's multicultural position,²² the country still enjoys good relations with its main Asian trading markets. As Mervin Singham, director of New Zealand's Office of Ethnic Affairs notes, the potential trade benefits for New Zealand from Asia's (notably China and India) impressive growth can be greatly enhanced if the country draws more on the talent and human capital of Asian immigrants living in New Zealand. He highlights that 'multiculturalism brings the globe within our borders', but cautions that New Zealand must put in place strategies to ensure that it gains from the opportunities offered by its multicultural society.²³

A report resulting from the New Zealand government-initiated forum 'Seriously Asia' supports the need for more proactive engagement with multiculturalism in New Zealand, stating, 'We need to tap more effectively into the skills and networks of our Asian migrants. Asian communities, both new and old, bring Asia-relevant skills and connections to the regions.'²⁴ The challenge, from a business perspective, is to move from the representation of New Zealand as a country that values the cultural backgrounds of its citizens, to one that actually utilises those assets. In particular there is the use of the diaspora to project New Zealand into foreign markets.

Multiculturalism at a business level

Aguirre explains that culturally diverse immigration can contribute to a nation's economic efficiency by directly impacting on business practice. She identifies a number of ways in which this happens: business managers, through their migrant employees, gain cultural awareness and knowledge that is useful in export markets and for developing new culturally adapted goods and services for the domestic market; productivity is increased with lower absenteeism and turnover of workers; creativity is promoted through



1. Max Ma and Grace Gao of the Beijing office of the Christchurch-based company Commtest Instruments, 12 May 2010. *Tim Beal*

cultural diversity; and the flexibility of the firm is enhanced by virtue of the variety of talents, languages and thinking processes that comes from a multicultural workforce.²⁵

In a study of US multinationals, Hoobler addresses the question of the extent to which multiculturalism is embraced by organisations, and the effectiveness of organisational diversity programmes. Following Foucault, Hoobler suggests that organisations traditionally internalise values of conformity and homogenisation²⁶ and states, 'the homogenisation of individuals is central to the philosophy of the modern organisation.'²⁷ She concludes that the multiculturalism efforts of modern US organisations are simply paying lip-service to the concept. This perspective is further explained by Lois Foster and David Stockley, who indicate that cultural pluralism threatens the power and class differences of modern organisations.²⁸

In categorising immigrants and considering the extent of social embeddedness in their home and host countries, Xiaohua Lin identifies four types of immigrant that characterise four corresponding types of immigrant economic adaptation.²⁹ Three are particularly relevant to our study because they interact in some capacity with host country businesses:

namely, immigrant employees, returnee business people and transnational entrepreneurs. According to Lin, immigrant employees are employed in the mainstream economy of their host country, and tend to have quite strong social embeddedness. Returnee business people, sometimes referred to as 'returnee migrants'³⁰ or 'contemporary diasporic entrepreneurs',³¹ are immigrants who have resettled in their home country but retain an affiliation with their former host country or countries. Although 'dually' embedded in both home and host country, they tend to be aligned more with the home country. Transnational entrepreneurs are immigrants engaged in business activities involving both host and home countries. They remain domiciled in the host country but committed to their home country, and usually establish business links across both countries.

Multiculturalism in New Zealand business

In this section, we explore these three immigrant types in more detail, drawing from the established literature and the interview data from our study of New Zealand firms. Specifically, we examine the ways in which businesses in New Zealand, in the context of their business engagement with China and India, interact with each of these immigrant types.

Immigrant employees

Henry Chung, Peter Enderwick and Jinda Naruemitmongkonsuk have examined the influence of immigrant employees within New Zealand's international service sector.³² They show that firms utilised an immigrant employee's knowledge, social networks and contacts while conducting business in the employee's country of origin. This is termed the 'immigrant employee effect'.

In our study, we found that some managers doing business in China enjoyed the benefits of having an employee with experience in both China and New Zealand, as well as in the industry. Managers indicated that these employees can create a valuable resource for the business, for example by communicating with Chinese customers in the New Zealand office, as well as advising on operations in China:

[Our employee in NZ] is of Chinese descent, born there, has been ... schooled here and also went to university here, and he's been in multiple areas in the business. He's grounded in the industry and he's grounded

*in both China and New Zealand. He understands both cultures really well and, from our perspective, I guess we can learn a lot from that as well. And when it comes to an issue where we do need to pick up the phone, or ... where an understanding is important, particularly when it comes to language, he's the best person to have. He can speak Mandarin and Cantonese as well.*³³

The importance of having Chinese staff on the company's payroll has been of great value to one New Zealand company in the tourism industry: 'It's made an enormous difference to our business. It's been a big investment for us but it has been well worth it.'

In other cases, New Zealand managers with business connections in India have deliberately sought the talent and experience of Indian immigrants for employment in their firms:

... a lot of these guys are very well educated. A guy who is coming out of university there has gone through an extremely stringent competitive process ... So he's quite intellectual, he's got a lot of training, a lot of dexterity, a lot of capacity. We've got five Indians right now in [our branch in] Auckland. Every one [of them] has got a Masters in computer science or a Bachelors in engineering or computer science. So they're fairly well qualified and it's quite important to recognise that kind of skill set being available here, as well as the experience of these people. Quite a lot of the guys we have here worked in other countries – two of them have worked in the US, one in the UK and another one has just finished a project in the Middle East in Dubai.

The 'immigrant employee effect' is the impact of an immigrant's knowledge of their country of origin on the performance and strategy of the firm in which they are employed. Firms in service industries have a primary reliance on the provision of high-quality performance in order to succeed in their foreign markets. In addition, they require a good understanding of customers' preferences, cultures and local customs in these markets – aspects with which immigrant employees from these countries will be familiar. Research findings suggest that cultural understanding appears to be the primary contribution of immigrant employees.³⁴

In the context of New Zealand and China, our study found that many New Zealand managers have deliberately sought Chinese nationals or New Zealanders with strong Chinese language and cultural fluency for

employment in their New Zealand office, or to represent them in China. According to one manager from an electronics company:

... there were times when we deliberately aimed to employ Chinese-speaking people. Now whether that happened to have been a Kiwi who just spoke fluent Chinese, that would have been okay but, you know, we aim to hire people fluent in the language and the culture.

Immigrant employees also have a strong influence on creating and maintaining customer relationships, and their home-based social network links are important for trust and solidarity. They can also assist in adapting the firm's marketing strategy to local market (immigrant home-country) conditions.

A number of managers in our study recognised the talent available from the large number of Chinese graduates in New Zealand, and aimed to recruit and nurture appropriately skilled graduates. Having Chinese staff available in the New Zealand office as well as in China has helped some firms enormously by improving communications and overall customer service with Chinese customers. The manager of a software company noted:

You can actually leverage off the skills of all these ... Chinese students ... we've got Chinese-speaking staff here in Auckland and in our London office, manning help desks and things like that. We're seriously considering recruiting for our Chinese office in Auckland and actually saying, 'Having finished your degree, do you want to go home to a job?' ... we are using the diaspora, which is here in New Zealand. And we intend to use it more ... We have quite a United Nations of staff.

Sometimes there is a multiplier effect, where the links of immigrant employees into their local ethnic community bolsters the performance of their employer. For instance, in the education sector, some New Zealand managers reported that local Indian communities in New Zealand helped with student recruitment into programmes at their institutions:

... we have a local Indian agency here and they're active in the Indian market. They've been active in recruiting a number of our students.

Chung indicates that the immigrant employee effect can help firms expedite their learning process about the foreign market. Immigrant employees can be hired to overcome differences between home and host

countries, confirming the view that they contribute knowledge and reduce uncertainty.³⁵ One Chinese immigrant employee described her experiences and the benefits she was able to provide the New Zealand firm for which she worked:

There was recruitment agent, and I was looking for a job after graduation. And at that point in time they were really looking for a Chinese person that had an education in New Zealand ... because ... the company knew it would be moving to China at some stage. And I just jumped up and they found me, and then we had a chat. And I thought at the time that it will be quite a good move for them as well, and for me to show ... not only my professional expertise but also ... my Chinese background. And that I can probably do something more than other New Zealanders can do. So it was a good opportunity for me, so then I decided to join [the company], and that was in 2005 ... I have started as a developer in the company, software development, and slowly moved on to help [the CEO] with the trade shows and with customer prospects – Chinese prospects here in China.³⁶

Transnational entrepreneurs

Alejandro Portes, Guarnizo and Haller identify a transnational entrepreneur as a self-employed immigrant whose firm's success depends on their contacts and associates in another country, primarily their country of origin.³⁷

Transnational entrepreneurs rely on physical and virtual social networks between their host and home countries to create new opportunities, and often position others to act as intermediaries, usually in their home market. As such, transnational entrepreneurs are uniquely positioned to identify customers, distribution infrastructure providers and finance, for their own and others' businesses. Transnational entrepreneurs are generally seen as an elite, qualified, experienced and successful group.³⁸ This perception is exemplified by a number of the managers in our study.

Many business people of Indian descent living in New Zealand have networks in India that may be of direct value to New Zealand firms, such as the following consultant:

I'm a partner in this business, and I also have business interests back in India. And some of my childhood friends are now leading lawyers in

India, and that's quite useful because they operate in the corporate world. They can act as conduits to introduce New Zealand managers to business people in India. They can take them through the legal minefield and all the regulation in India.

Many New Zealand managers that we interviewed saw innovation as key to gaining a competitive advantage in India. They indicated that Indian companies frequently seek innovation, as well as ways to improve their existing products and services and co-develop new offerings. The role of Indian business people in New Zealand in linking New Zealand managers with potential customers in India is seen to be extremely beneficial, as explained by this education consultant in India:

So you know, doing business in India gives India access to New Zealand innovation, but also gives New Zealand businesses access to India, to the Indian market. That's a role we can play – in connecting New Zealand firms with firms in India.

Our study found that, although not generally self-employed, researchers in the education sector otherwise display similar characteristics to transnational entrepreneurs. For example, some education sector participants in our study highlighted the research links that are often established between New Zealand and Indian universities. According to one education consultant in India:

There are research relationships that are active in India, but they're more often driven by the Indian diaspora members in New Zealand institutions, who can connect back into their own system, or what was their own system.

Returnee migrants

There is extensive literature on return migration, specifically concerning the issues and challenges returnees face before, during and after returning to their country of origin.³⁹ Some literature suggests that migration has multiple effects on returnee migrants, including return preparedness, re-employment, re-embedding and engagement with social networks.⁴⁰ Disorientation is not uncommon, and the nature of the confusion produced by conflicting identities is not merely a matter of cultural displacement – it is also very much embedded in the historical and evolving relationship between the countries involved.⁴¹

Several managers in our study expressed caution about the wisdom of employing a Chinese person in New Zealand if there was any intention to relocate that person to China as a company representative. They noted the difficulties these employees often face when returning to their home country, including dislocation from former networks and problems with realising expectations for themselves and their families. One design manager observed:

[Our employee] spent three months here with us. She'd been working for a New Zealand company for a couple of years, she had a business degree, she had New Zealand experience, her English was flawless, and she was looking to go back to China. So we brought her in here for three months, and we liked her. She went to China and she panicked. She completely panicked. She was suddenly floundering, and within a month she resigned. She certainly had to go back to parental expectations and possibly she wasn't used to the level of, I guess, disregard that she faced, and she wasn't credible in the role.

This lack of credibility faced by returnee migrants in China can also be a result of the perception of New Zealand: although held in high esteem as a 'clean, green' country with beautiful scenery, New Zealand is not usually recognised in China as a place from which high-tech products and innovation emanate.⁴²

I think New Zealand companies should do much more promotion work ... In the [eyes] of ordinary Chinese people, New Zealand is a tourist destination. They are not business partners, because if you ask the Chinese people [what] country [they] want to do business with, they will choose America, Canada, Japan, Germany or even Australia, but for New Zealand they all said 'it's a beautiful country to spend holidays'.⁴³

Some New Zealand managers in our study tried to ensure that their immigrant employees were well prepared for their role of representing the company in their country of origin. For example, a number employed Chinese graduates in their New Zealand operations before relocating them to China, to ensure that the employees developed company loyalty and a good understanding of the business to transfer to the market. One manager from an engineering consulting company said, 'If we can employ a key Chinese graduate, a Chinese national who has an aspiration to work in New Zealand for a period and then return to China, that's absolutely appropriate.' In another firm, a software company, an employee was appointed to run the

office in China. She had been resident in New Zealand since she was sixteen and travelled on a New Zealand passport.

Choosing the right people and providing them with the opportunity to use their talents in China has been a rewarding and successful strategy for some New Zealand managers:

He [a Chinese postgraduate] approached us and said he was looking to go back to China. His objective was to represent some New Zealand companies in China. We gave him a business card and he got us our first job in China.

The education sector tends to draw quite strongly on the Chinese diaspora. For example, many institutions in this sector employ Chinese graduates of New Zealand tertiary institutions to assist market expansion in China, as well as to bring Chinese graduates and New Zealand businesses together. Some of these former students remain in New Zealand to assist student and agent support services, while others return to China to assist in the market. A spokesperson for one educational institution noted:

We certainly have had our alumni becoming agents and working as agents on an on-going basis, or else introducing us to other agents or to other institutions. A lot of our marketing staff are our former students – we get first cut. They know the institution and they know at least one programme quite well, and, because they're often fairly recent graduates, they're more of the age group that can work with the students once they're here. Our marketing team really has two functions – servicing the agents, and also, either in the marketing division of student services or the administration area, to support Chinese students here. They are so valuable to us because [of] their knowledge of us and what we do ... they love New Zealand.

Some New Zealand firms undertaking business in India utilise the talents of the Indian diaspora in New Zealand. These include returnee Indian staff employed to manage branch or representative offices, who have had experience working for the company in New Zealand, as in this engineering company:

XXX is from India. He has worked in the company in New Zealand for two years, and [has] managed the installation in India during the last year. He has been our main person in this site. We're now doing a hand-over to a local Indian engineer, who will run our service office there.



2. Val Lindsay with Ashish Hemrajani of Bigtree Entertainment, Mumbai, which markets the cinema booking software of New Zealand company Vista Entertainment Solutions in India. *Tim Beal*

Potential for greater utilisation of diasporic links

These examples illustrate the effective engagement by New Zealand managers with multicultural immigrants in their businesses, and reflect mutual and varied benefits. By tapping into the New Zealand diaspora of various nationalities, New Zealand businesses gain access to valuable knowledge relating to the immigrants' countries of origin, as well as industry-related talent and networks of business counterparts in their home markets. The immigrant population gains access to employment, new cultural experiences, industry knowledge and, often, opportunities to return to their country of origin as a representative of the New Zealand company for which they have worked. In addition, for transnational entrepreneurs, engagement with New Zealand firms provides further business opportunities.

While our study demonstrates relatively widespread utilisation of links with multicultural diaspora by New Zealand managers, many noted the

considerable potential for wider and deeper engagement with diaspora by New Zealand business. A number of managers acknowledged the valuable resource of people of Indian descent in New Zealand that is not being adequately tapped, while others highlighted the importance of the Chinese diaspora in assisting New Zealand's efforts to engage in China, particularly in the future. For example, they noted the opportunity to draw more heavily on Chinese people in New Zealand, particularly those who wish to return to China to work with New Zealand firms in the market. As the representative of one agritech company said:

... our best opportunity [in China] as a nation is all the Chinese who have come to immigrate to New Zealand. Once they have been in New Zealand for a while, and understand the way we do business, and our culture, and maybe see things as from a New Zealand perspective – they are the people who may be the best to go back – and certainly if they have the language.

Conclusion

The role and benefits of multiculturalism are widely debated. While a number of commentators suggest that multiculturalism has 'failed' because of its perceived connection with political and social unrest, others indicate that multiculturalism is essential for maintaining and enhancing world trade, political stability and cultural awareness, particularly among the younger generation.

Through examining the contemporary literature and relevant media reports on multiculturalism, we have noted the importance of national-level awareness and support for multiculturalism in achieving the economic and socio-cultural gains that have been reported. It is clear that an informed society, along with government-led initiatives that proactively manage the challenges and opportunities of multiculturalism, can lead to benefits on a societal level.

Multiculturalism presents New Zealand business with particular challenges, opportunities and responsibilities. A workforce of varied ethnicities, religions and cultures is more difficult to manage, but both the literature and our research suggest that it is possible to do this well, and in doing so to realise the benefits inherent in diversity. As a small, open economy seeking to engage globally, it is important that we endeavour to

leverage domestic multiculturalism in order to interact knowledgeably and smartly with our overseas markets and embed ourselves into their economies, so that we grow as they grow. The more we can harness the resource of increasing multiculturalism, the better we will engage in the complex, demanding, but profitable markets that lie offshore.

Many firms in New Zealand are proactively engaging with multiculturalism through interaction with immigrant employees, transnational entrepreneurs and returnee migrants, and enjoying enhanced business opportunities as a result. Our findings suggest that the potential for more widespread engagement is substantial.

ENDNOTES

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