

A Kaupapa Māori Approach to Human Resource Practices in Aotearoa

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High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) are defined by Datta, Guthrie, and Wright (2005) as “systems of human resource (HR) practices designed to enhance employees’ skills, commitment, and productivity” (p. 135). Specifically, HPWS are “designed to enhance employees’ skills and efforts” (Takeuchi et al., 2007: 1069), making employees more committed and trusted, who then use their discretion to enhance organisational goals (Roumpi & Delery, 2019). Harley, Allen, and Sargent (2007) note that HPWS are a “systematic use of mutually reinforcing human resource management (HRM) practices which have an emphasis on selecting the ‘right’ employees (e.g., through psychometric testing), developing their skills, organizing work so that employees have the discretion to solve problems creatively...” (pp. 608-9). These practices leave employees motivated to work more effectively and enhance their performance. Overall, HPWS enjoy meta-analytic support towards firm performance (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Subramony, 2009; Zhai & Tian, 2019).

Despite this wealth of knowledge and findings, we understand little about HPWS in Aotearoa and what effects they might have on Māori employees. Importantly, in the context of the present study’s focus on Māori workers, there have been calls to test the universal nature of HPWS, including in distinct settings (e.g., Yalabik, Chen, Lawler, & Kim, 2008). Specifically, Allen, Ericksen, and Collins (2013) called for more testing of HPWS on unique situations and groups, to determine whether the benefits of HPWS are universal or limited by these differences. In the present study, we seek to test HPWS on a sample of Māori employees and also seek to explore whether Aotearoa firms offer culturally specific HPWS to their Māori workforces.

This research followed the principles of kaupapa Māori research (Smith, 1999) around conducting scientifically rigorous research while being culturally sensitive and safe, and this approach has been utilised in quantitative and qualitative research on Māori employees (Haar, Roche, & Brougham, 2018; Roche, Haar, & Brougham, 2018). We conducted six case studies in total, including three on Māori firms/employers, and found clear differences between these two groups. The Māori firms offered a wide range of distinct Māori-specific HRM practices, and we identified and generalised a number of HRM practices from this part of the research. Next, we triangulated findings to produce a list of seven Māori-specific HRM practices.

Using the evidence from our case studies and triangulation, we then undertook a quantitative survey of 400 Māori employees to test our bundle of Māori-HPWS as

well as traditional HPWS towards key employee outcomes (job satisfaction and engagement). Factor analysis showed the Māori-HPWS and HWPS bundles split into distinct factors; providing support for Māori-HPWS specifically, although Māori-HPWS were less common than HPWS. Regression analysis was conducted and the two types of HPWS (Māori-HPWS and traditional-HPWS) were also combined (moderation) to see if together they enhanced job outcomes. Hypotheses were largely supported including a significant interaction towards job satisfaction, with the highest satisfaction amongst Māori employees when both Māori-HPWS and traditional-HWPS were high. Implications show that Māori-specific HRM can have specific benefit for Aotearoa firms, which is encouraging.