Pacifika and Māori Leadership in New Zealand Sport: Barriers and Strategies

Ryan Holland, Massey University
Sarah Leberman (Advisor), Massey University
Farah Palmer (Advisor), Massey University
Robyn Walker (Advisor), Massey University

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This research investigates the representation of Pacific Island and Māori New Zealanders in senior leadership and governance roles in National Sporting Organisations (NSOs). It examines the actual participation rate in high level decision making roles, how people of Pacific Island and Māori descent gained their leadership positions, their motivations for being in these positions, barriers to gaining these positions and factors which would facilitate their recruitment, retention and development in leadership roles. This presentation will focus on the participation rate of Pacific Island and Māori in New Zealand NSOs, highlighting the barriers and facilitating factors from the first phase of the research.

As the face of the workforce diversifies, organizations have been quick to jump on the diversity bandwagon due to positive outcomes with which it is linked. These outcomes include; a decrease in costly discriminatory lawsuits; an increase in employee satisfaction, creativity and retention; an increase in the ability to attract and market to a diverse customer base; and an increase in organizational productivity. For instance, increased diversity of directors by expansion of the talent pool is recommended in the United Kingdom, as a means of improving decision making and representation (Tyson, 2003). Research that does promote the benefits of diversity in board leadership is referred to in, for example, the work of Burke (2000), Brown, Brown and Anastasopoulos (2002), and Singh and Vinnicombe (2004). The primary focus of this research, however, has been on gender, with reference to other issues of diversity such as cultural and ethnic diversity being largely absent. The companies with women on the board showed significantly higher use of non-financial performance measures in terms of board performance and were also more likely to measure innovation, corporate social responsibility, employee and customer satisfaction, communication and strategy implementation, all contributing to corporate performance (Brown et al., 2002). Singh and Vinnicombe (2004) examined the links between gender diversity on FTSE 100 boards and compliance with the recommendations of the Higgs Review. They identified 13 relevant indicators, and found that companies with women directors, especially those with multiple women on the board, had significantly higher scores overall than those with all-male boards.

Increasingly researchers argue that research into managing diversity and organisational management must be more precise about ethnic, racial and cultural identities of their participants (Fink & Pastore, 1999; Wolf et al., 2005). There appears to be little interest in considering race or ethnicity as central analysis variables. Sport sociologists have long argued lack of diversity in sport serves to reproduce the status quo while continuing to marginalize minority groups. Issues of diversity, however, have received little attention in areas of sport, physical activity, kinesiology, and physical education (DeSensi, 1995). Work by Cunningham (2010) on African American head coaches suggests that prejudice and discrimination limit their leadership opportunities, similar to Borland and Bruening’s (2010) findings for Black female head coaches. This current New Zealand research assists in understanding how managing diversity applies to race and ethnicity; gaining a more complete picture of who leads one of New Zealand’s most privileged cultural institutions (sport); determining how (and if) ethnic diversity is encouraged in sport organisations, and how this impacts on Pacific and Māori people and identifying how stakeholders, organisations and Pacific and Māori people peoples benefit from having Pacific and Māori people peoples in leadership roles.

The research adopted a mixed method approach, including a survey, interviews and focus groups. Phase 1 has been completed and consisted of a survey, interviews and focus groups. Phase 2 has been completed and consists of a survey, interviews and focus groups. Phase 3 has been completed and consists of a survey, interviews and focus groups. The findings are the focus of this presentation. All SPARC registered NSOs (n = 90) were surveyed between March and June 2010 for this phase of the research, with 84 completing the survey either via face-to-face or telephone interview, or on-line. The survey focused on the ethnic makeup of the board and other leadership positions within the NSO, policies targeting Pacific Island people and Māori, as well as perceived barriers to participation of Pacific Island peoples and Māori in leadership roles. The data was entered into SPSS and analysed for descriptive statistics and open ended comments were collated thematically.

There are 613 people currently serving on the 84 national boards surveyed, of these, four (0.65%) are Pacific and 33 (5.31%) are Māori people. All Pacific board members were male. Of the 33 Māori board members, 23 were male, and 10 female. Just one organisation had between 61-80% of Pacific and Māori board representation. Six organizations had between 21-40% of Pacific and Māori representation of their board. Three quarters of all NSOs had no Pacific or Māori representation on their board. There are three Pacific and Māori representatives on international boards. Six NSOs had Pacific Island and Māori policies.
have a board member holding specific Pacific Island or Māori-related portfolio. Nine NSOs have sub-committees relating specifically to Pacific Island and Māori. More than two thirds of all staff working with national teams is Pakeha males. The most common national team role for Māori is as an Assistant Coach (26.6%). Across all coaching categories, Pacific comprise (3.9%) and Māori (16.6%) of roles in national teams.

The findings indicate that barriers to the representation of Pacific Island and Māori New Zealanders in senior leadership and governance roles included stereotyping (unconscious discrimination and negative attitudes; board selection (lack of experience and confidence, not being taken seriously and the selection process); the organisation of time, financial structures and communication (cross-cultural and networking). Facilitating factors included cultural issues associated with family affiliation and background; the need for role models and mentors, with more similarities than differences highlighted, and the benefits of diversity to the sport in terms of greater Pacific and Māori input.

This data provides New Zealand sport with empirical baseline information from which to develop policies to improve the diversity of NSO leadership. Using the framework on diversity and board performance developed by Huse (2005), and these current findings interventions will be developed by Sport and Recreation New Zealand to encourage greater representation and participation at all levels in sport by Pacific Islanders and Māori.