

The Permission Environment

Workplace inclusion, jobs and productivity

September 2026

1. Purpose and scope

Te Uru Tāngata Centre for Workplace Inclusion is the national body for workplace inclusion and the successor to the former Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, which was discontinued following government's withdrawal from the Board of the public-private partnership.

Our interest is in whether employers in Aotearoa are able to build workplaces that use the full capability of the workforce. This paper sets out evidence on how the operating environment for workplace inclusion has changed over the current parliamentary term, and what that means for employment and productivity.

We have focused on these economic effects because the connection is direct. Workplace inclusion affects both who is able to participate in the labour market and whether the capability of people already in work is being fully used.

2. The economic case

New Zealand's central economic problem is productivity. We work long hours and produce comparatively little per hour worked. The usual explanations are capital shallowness, small scale, distance from markets and low investment in research. But there is a fourth input that rarely makes the list: how well an economy matches its people to the work they are best able to do.

That is what workplace inclusion is. Not a values programme with economic side effects, but the practice of correcting allocation failures in the labour market. Understood that way, it directly impacts the two things that make an economy grow, which are the number of people working and the output each of them produces per hour.

Exclusion suppresses both, through two distinct failures.

The first is participation.

People who could work and want to work cannot get in. In the June 2025 quarter, 38.2 percent of disabled New Zealanders aged 15 to 64 were employed, against 78.5 percent of non-disabled people. This is the largest identifiable group of people in the country who want work and do not have it, and it has been static through a period of persistent skill shortages.

The second is allocation.

- (a) People are working, but in roles well below what they are capable of. Research commissioned from BERL found migrants from majority-white countries earn up to 30 percent more than migrants from elsewhere, with the gap persisting after five to 10 years of residence. The documented mechanisms are non-recognition of overseas qualifications and

assumptions about the absence of New Zealand experience. We select these people for their skills, grant residence on that basis, and then decline to use the skills.

- (b) When work done by a particular demographic group is systematically underpaid compared to other occupations, the remuneration signal for that work is wrong. When work is undervalued, it attracts less of the potential talent in the market, which results in chronic labour shortages. New Zealand has persistent shortages in nursing, aged care, and disability support. Those are the same occupations covered by the 33 pay equity claims discontinued in May 2025, and those are also the same occupations where the Workplace Inclusion Barometer returns the lowest inclusion scores.

Each of these failures has an impact at the same place. Participation determines how many earners a household has. Allocation determines what each earner is paid relative to what they are able to do. Price determines what an entire occupation is worth to everyone working in it. This is not separate from the productivity argument. It is the same argument observed at the household rather than the national level. Capability that goes unused is income that goes unearned.

The practices that correct allocation failures are structured hiring, qualification recognition, flexible job design and pay transparency. Almost none of them are legally required. They are discretionary, which means they happen only where an employer judges them defensible.

That judgement is what the following sections are about.

3. What the permission environment is

The permission environment is the set of signals that tell decision-makers inside organisations whether inclusion work is legitimate, expected, safe to advocate for, and rewarded. It is distinct from the legal environment. The legal environment tells an employer what they must do. The permission environment tells them what they can support and defend without reputational risk.

The distinction carries more weight in Aotearoa than in comparable countries, and the reason is not that we have little employment law - we have a good deal of it. The reason is that almost all of our employment law is of one kind.

New Zealand's employment framework regulates how an individual employee must be treated. It does not require an employer to examine whether its systems produce unequal outcomes.

Discrimination and harassment are prohibited. Minimum entitlements are guaranteed and employees have the right to request flexible arrangements. These are real obligations and they matter. But they share a structure: each is reactive, individual, and complaint-driven. Something must go wrong, an individual must recognise it, and that individual must be willing to raise it, usually against their own employer, and usually while still employed there.

That framework produces remedies for some people. It does not produce structural change, because nothing in it obliges an employer to look at its own patterns in the absence of a complaint.

The obligations that do produce structural change are of a different type. They require an employer to measure, report, set targets and act on what it finds, whether or not anyone has complained.

New Zealand has almost none of these. Australia has the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, mandatory reporting for employers of 100 or more, and a recent requirement that larger employers set and report against gender equality targets. We have a voluntary calculator and an encouragement to use it. The nearest domestic equivalent is the NZX requirement that listed issuers disclose board and officer gender composition, which reaches roughly 120 companies and requires disclosure rather than action.

There was one significant exception, which was the proactive structural duties that existed in the public sector as an exemplar of what good practice looks like. Those were the closest thing New Zealand had to a system that asked employers to examine themselves. Section 5.2 sets out their removal during this term.

So, the position now is that inclusion practice in Aotearoa runs almost entirely on discretion. And where practice is discretionary, permission functions as the de facto regulatory instrument.

4. How permission is transmitted

Permission reaches decision-makers through four channels.

Channel	Mechanism
Statutory floor	What the law requires, permits or authorises.
Exemplar effect	What the Crown does as an employer.
Market signal	Procurement, funding, and contracting conditions.
Rhetoric	Ministerial language about inclusion, and minority communities.

5. What has changed

5.1 The statutory floor

The change	Who it reaches, and how	The workplace inclusion consequence
Fair Pay Agreements Act repealed (Dec 2023, urgency)	Workers in sectors with weak individual bargaining power, particularly cleaning, security, hospitality, aged care and supermarkets, where women, Māori, Pacific and migrant workers are disproportionately represented. Repeal removes the mechanism for setting minimum terms across an occupation or sector rather than workplace by workplace.	Makes inclusion a competitive disadvantage. Workplace inclusion is difficult to achieve where workers doing the same essential work experience persistently poor terms due to limited individual bargaining power. Sector bargaining offered a mechanism for addressing that imbalance collectively. Its repeal shifts responsibility back to individual workplaces and workers, with the greatest effect in sectors where women, Māori, Pacific and migrant workers are concentrated. Good practice now depends on an employer being willing to be more expensive than the firm next door.
90-day trial periods extended to all employers (Dec 2023)	New employees across all workplaces, with greater exposure for workers whose capability may be less readily recognised during a short initial period — including disabled workers requiring adjustments and migrants working across unfamiliar language and cultural norms. Employers can dismiss during the trial period without providing a reason that can be challenged through personal grievance for unjustified dismissal.	Increases the consequences of early bias. Trial periods remove the requirement to explain or defend a dismissal at precisely the stage when employers know least about a worker. This creates greater scope for subjective judgements about competence or “fit” to determine who remains in employment, particularly where capability takes longer to become visible or requires accommodation.

Minimum wage exemption retained (Budget 2024, reversing a 2023 commitment)	Disabled workers whose disability is assessed as affecting productivity. Around 900 people, most with a learning disability, are permitted to be paid less than the minimum wage under section 8 of the Minimum Wage Act. A substantial proportion are paid under \$5 an hour. Budget 2023 committed to ending the exemption by mid-2025 and funding a wage supplement to bring those workers to the minimum. Budget 2024 cancelled the replacement and retained the exemption.	Preserves unequal treatment in law. Disability remains a lawful basis on which one group of workers may be paid less than everyone else. Every conversation an employer has about disability employment now takes place against a statutory baseline that sets a lower value on disabled labour. It reinforces a deficit-based conception of disabled workers' value rather than one centred on accommodation, capability and participation.
Equal Pay Amendment Act (May 2025, urgency, no select committee)	Workers in female-dominated occupations seeking recognition of systemic gender-based undervaluation, including aged care and community and social services. Higher thresholds and tighter comparator requirements make claims more difficult to initiate and establish, particularly where there is no suitable male-dominated comparator within the sector.	Makes systemic gender undervaluation harder to remedy. Pay equity addresses discrimination embedded in the value assigned to occupations. Raising claim thresholds and restricting comparators makes this structural inequality harder to establish and correct, weakening one of the few mechanisms designed specifically to address it. Requiring the comparison to be drawn first from inside the employer's own workforce asks an underpaid sector to prove it is underpaid using an underpaid workforce as point of reference (eg aged care or social services).
Employment Relations Amendment Act (Feb 2026)	Employees seeking to challenge dismissal and workers whose status as contractors limits access to employment protections. The changes narrow routes for contesting employer decisions. The new 'specified contractor' criteria also made it harder to argue for employee status based on the real nature of the employment relationship. This effectively reduced access to statutory protections.	Weakens the practical ability to challenge exclusion. Unjustified dismissal is the route by which discrimination is usually established, because it requires the employer to justify the decision rather than the worker to prove motive. Separately, contractors sit outside inclusion infrastructure altogether with no support and are not counted in workforce data or pay gap reporting.
Health and Safety at Work Amendment Act (Jul 2026, in force Apr 2027)	Workers exposed to psychosocial risks including bullying, harassment, conflict and harmful management practices. Changes to employer duties reduce the extent to which these risks must be proactively identified and managed, particularly in smaller businesses.	Moves inclusion from prevention towards response. Bullying and harassment arise from workplace systems, norms and power rather than isolated interpersonal events. Reducing proactive obligations places more of the burden on the person experiencing harm to raise it, precisely where power differences, fear of retaliation and low psychological safety already suppress reporting.
Public Service Amendment Act (Jun 2026)	Public servants and applicants for public-sector employment and leadership roles, with wider implications for groups underrepresented in the state workforce. The Act removes statutory requirements relating to workforce diversity, representation of	Removes institutional infrastructure for inclusion. These provisions embedded representation, pay equity and good-employer expectations in public-sector employment, and produced the only public data series on workforce composition and pay gaps. An inequity that is not measured cannot be corrected. Their removal also ends the

	communities served, pay equity policy and diversity in chief executive appointments.	Crown's role in modelling inclusive practice for the wider labour market, so the demonstration goes with the data.
Migrant Exploitation Protection Visa restricted (Apr 2026)	Migrant workers who leave an employer after reporting exploitation. Visa holders are now restricted to employer-based work, narrowing the forms of employment available while they re-establish themselves after leaving an exploitative workplace.	Reduces the practical freedom to leave exploitation. Protection depends on whether a worker can leave an unsafe employer without losing the ability to support themselves. Narrowing subsequent options raises the cost of exit and reinforces the power imbalance that makes exploitation possible in the first place.
Definitions of Woman and Man Bill (before select committee)	Trans and gender-diverse workers and employers responsible for workplace records, facilities, dress requirements and accommodations. Statutory definitions of woman and man would have to operate alongside existing employment and human-rights obligations, with the interaction between them not yet settled.	Creates uncertainty around inclusion of trans and gender-diverse workers. Employers would have to translate the definitions into everyday workplace decisions while navigating existing anti-discrimination obligations. Legal uncertainty encourages risk-averse organisations to retreat from inclusive practice, and places ordinary workplace participation by trans and gender-diverse employees into a contested compliance environment.
Jobseeker Parental Assistance Test (Aug 2026, urgency; effect Nov 2026)	Jobseekers affected by parental means testing, including around 2,700 people receiving Jobseeker Support on health, injury or disability grounds. Loss of eligibility can also interrupt access to employment case management and job-coaching support connected to the benefit system.	Raises barriers to labour-market participation for people already furthest from secure employment. The measure reaches a population disproportionately affected by health and disability-related barriers. It shifts the response to labour-market disadvantage away from removing barriers to participation and towards testing individual eligibility.

Collectively, the changes move the system from structural protection to individual responsibility; from proactive obligation to individual complaint; and from measurable inclusion to employer discretion.

5.2 The exemplar effect

An exemplar employer changes the reference point. Because the Crown employs tens of thousands of people, bargains with major occupational workforces, publishes its workforce data and influences professional labour markets, what it does establishes norms well beyond its own payroll.

Over the previous period, the implied norm was broadly that good employers measure inequity, correct occupational undervaluation, design work flexibly, invest deliberately in representation and inclusion, and use collective employment mechanisms to improve conditions.

During this parliamentary term, that signal has shifted. Improvements to employment conditions are increasingly framed first as costs to be justified, rather than investments whose value (in participation, retention, capability and fairness) must also be weighed. The shift is visible not only in employment practice, but in what the Crown chooses to measure.

An inequity that is not measured cannot be argued about, budgeted for or corrected. Measurement is therefore part of the exemplar effect: it signals which workforce outcomes employers should regard as important enough to examine.

Te Taunaki is, in the Public Service Commission's own words, the only channel through which data is collected directly from public servants. It ran in 2021 and again in March 2025. What changed was its emphasis. The 2021 census was built substantially around employee experience. In 2025, productivity became its largest section, with new material on efficiency, decision-making, meetings, risk appetite and the use of artificial intelligence.

The design was shaped ministerially. An OIA response showed that the Minister's office proposed removing questions on disability, rainbow identities, religion, te reo Māori proficiency, on-the-job training and agencies' commitment to the Māori–Crown relationship, alongside adding questions on value for money. Not all of those proposals took effect, but the Minister maintained that she disagreed that tracking representation of groups over time was useful. The Commission's deputy chief executive subsequently said the focus would shift each time to align with Public Service priorities.

This matters beyond the Public Service because Crown measurement creates benchmarks. Employers can count their own workforce, but the count becomes more useful when there is something against which to compare it. Pay gaps, representation gaps and sector comparisons depend on sufficiently consistent data to establish whether a disparity exists and whether it is changing.

The issue is not that government has stopped collecting workforce data. It has not. Nor is productivity an illegitimate thing to measure. The change is in what the state considers important enough to measure consistently. As statutory obligations around diversity and pay equity have receded, the principal instrument for understanding the Public Service workforce has shifted with them.

That is the negative exemplar effect. It is not simply that the Crown is doing less inclusion work itself. It is changing the reference point for what a good employer is expected to notice, measure and act upon.

Fiscal restraint is a legitimate constraint on any government. But it does not relieve the Crown of its exemplar role as an employer; it makes that role more important. The relevant test is not whether good employment practice costs money, but whether the Crown demonstrates how a good employer manages constraint without unnecessarily transferring costs to workers, degrading workforce capability or widening existing barriers to participation.

The exemplar the country needs in difficult economic conditions is not an employer that can afford everything. It is an employer that demonstrates what good employment looks like despite fiscal constraints.

5.3 The market signal

Government is the largest single purchaser in the New Zealand economy, spending in the order of \$50 billion a year with private suppliers. What it requires of those suppliers travels well beyond the contract, because a condition attached to government work becomes a capability a firm builds and can then apply elsewhere.

Two things happened during the most recent Parliamentary term.

The procurement rules were rewritten. The fifth edition of the Government Procurement Rules took effect on 1 December 2025. The rule count dropped from 71 to 47. The title changed from *Rules for sustainable and inclusive procurement* to *Responsible expenditure of public funds*. And the Broader Outcomes framework was replaced by a single new Rule 8 requiring suppliers to demonstrate economic benefit to New Zealand.

Broader Outcomes was one of the mechanisms through which government procurement carried employment and inclusion objectives into the private market. It covered skills and training, improving conditions for workers in vulnerable sectors, and access for Māori and Pasifika businesses. Suppliers seeking government work had a commercial reason to build capability in these areas, and the requirement reached firms in construction, facilities management, cleaning and security: sectors employing many of the workers most vulnerable to exploitation and poor employment conditions.

And the infrastructure to build inclusive practices was defunded. The public-private partnership that funded national workplace inclusion capability was withdrawn, which is how the EEO Trust closed and Te Uru Tāngata came to be constituted as a new unfunded entity. We have an interest here, but the wider point does not depend on our own position. No equivalent procurement mechanism, funded delivery model or market incentive was introduced to replace what was withdrawn.

The significance is cumulative. This was deregulation without substitution. Statutory obligations were reduced, the infrastructure that helped employers build inclusive practice was withdrawn, and the procurement mechanism that gave suppliers a commercial reason to invest in that practice was redirected towards a different objective.

5.4 The rhetorical channel

In December 2025, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination published its concluding observations on New Zealand's combined twenty-third and twenty-fourth periodic reports (CERD/C/NZL/CO/23-24, adopted 3 December 2025). New Zealand reports to the Committee as a State Party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Two findings bear directly on this paper. The Committee recorded particular concern about persistent racist hate speech by politicians and public figures and called for unequivocal condemnation and effective accountability. It also identified the misrepresentation of affirmative action as racial privilege as a specific concern, describing this rhetoric as contributing to growing social division and discrimination. The latter is particularly relevant here: measures intended to correct unequal outcomes are recast as preferential treatment, changing the legitimacy attached to the measures without changing their purpose.

Following this report, the Deputy Leader of NZ First described the free trade agreement with India as a “butter chicken tsunami”, in April 2026, arguing that immigration under the agreement would drive down wages, congest roads and overwhelm public services. The Prime Minister called the remarks unhelpful. Their author subsequently defended the language as hyperbole used to achieve cut-through.

In July 2026, during a parliamentary debate, the Minister of Foreign Affairs told a Green MP born in Tianjin and resident in New Zealand since the mid-1990s to “go back to your own country”. The Race Relations Commissioner described the comment as racist, as did National's campaign spokesperson. The Prime Minister characterised it as part of a long record of attention-seeking. The Chinese Embassy lodged a formal protest with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Minister rejected the accusations as drivel.

Neither episode changed any law. That is precisely why they matter here. The Committee identified a pattern in December 2025 and warned about its consequences; subsequent political discourse provided further examples of the same pattern.

The workplace effect does not depend on political rhetoric causing discrimination directly. It operates through **social permission and risk calculus**. What senior political figures can say publicly, and the consequences that follow, help establish the boundaries of acceptable expression. Those boundaries travel into workplaces. They affect what employees feel able to say, what managers regard as

requiring intervention, and what people on the receiving end believe it is safe or worthwhile to challenge.

This matters particularly where the rhetoric concerns the legitimacy of inclusion itself. If affirmative action is understood as unfair advantage, attention to representation as identity politics, or concern about racialised language as excessive sensitivity, the perceived case for inclusive workplace practice changes. Managers become less willing to intervene, employees less willing to raise concerns, and organisations more cautious about practices that may attract public interest.

The rhetorical channel is therefore different from the statutory, procurement or employer channels examined above. It does not compel behaviour. It changes the environment in which behaviour is judged. Regulation determines what is permitted; rhetoric helps determine what is permissible. When the boundary of the permissible moves, the assessment of risk relating to speaking, challenging and intervening moves with it.

6. Counter-arguments

Four arguments are likely to be made in response to this analysis.

Merit. The stated purpose of removing the diversity provisions was to restore merit-based appointment. But the provisions did not require appointments on the basis of identity, or require any particular representation outcome. They required employers to consider whether their employment practices provided fair opportunity to groups that had historically experienced disadvantage. Merit remained the basis for appointment. The question is therefore whether removing those requirements makes the assessment of merit more reliable. The evidence on structured recruitment points the other way: reducing checks on how candidates are identified and assessed increases discretion without improving the quality of the assessment. The choice is not between merit and inclusion. It is between assessing merit with safeguards against bias and assessing it with fewer of them.

Compliance cost. Employment obligations impose costs. The relevant question is whether removing them produces a net benefit, which requires counting both the cost of compliance and the cost of the problem the obligation exists to address. Pay inequity, discrimination, exclusion, exploitation and workplace harm also carry costs, although these are often dispersed across turnover, absence, recruitment, welfare, ACC, households and future labour-market participation. A compliance saving is therefore not, by itself, evidence of an economic saving. The relevant comparison is between the cost of intervention and the cost of leaving the underlying problem uncorrected.

Need, not race. The argument is that public policy should respond to individual need and not be based on ethnicity. However, ethnicity can identify patterned differences in access, treatment and outcomes that material measures alone do not necessarily explain. The empirical question is therefore not whether need is preferable to race in principle, but whether ethnicity removes information that might support early intervention that makes public spending more effective.

Fiscal necessity. The account that public-sector workforce reductions were driven by fiscal targets is substantially accurate. Governments cannot spend without constraint, but fiscal necessity determines the size of the constraint; it does not determine every choice made within it. Decisions about which capability to retain, how restructuring is conducted, whether disparities continue to be measured, whether low-cost inclusive practices are preserved, and where the consequences of savings ultimately fall remain choices. The relevant test is therefore not whether the Crown should have avoided fiscal restraint. It is whether it demonstrated how a good employer manages constraint without callously transferring costs to workers, degrading workforce capability or widening existing barriers to participation.

7. Propositions about workplace inclusion

The debate about workplace inclusion has become entangled with a wider argument about identity, merit and so-called woke institutions. Some of that criticism deserves an answer. But it also makes it important to be precise about what workplace inclusion really is and what we risk by allowing the current narrative to prevail. We make four propositions.

7.1 Inclusive workplaces are not permissive workplaces

Inclusion does not mean lowering standards or protecting people from legitimate performance expectations. It means being clear about which standards matter and applying them fairly.

Permissiveness is something different. It is the high performer whose conduct is excused because the organisation cannot afford to lose them; the senior manager whose behaviour is tolerated because challenging it is difficult; the complaint that goes nowhere because of who it concerns. Those are failures of accountability, not examples of it.

Many of the structures associated with good inclusion practice - structured interviews, documented selection criteria, transparent progression, clear conduct expectations and functioning complaint systems — do the opposite of lowering standards. They make standards more visible and make departures from them harder to hide.

An inclusive workplace does not ask less of people. It is more consistent about what it asks.

7.2 Inclusive workplaces are productive workplaces

Inclusion matters to productivity because productive organisations need information to make the right decisions.

People need to raise problems before they become expensive, disagree with decisions that appear wrong, ask for help before work fails, contribute knowledge that others do not have and challenge assumptions when circumstances change. Those behaviours depend on whether speaking up carries disproportionate interpersonal or career risk.

This becomes particularly important during change. Organisations rarely fail to change because nobody designed a new process, system or structure. They fail when information about what is not working travels too slowly upwards, when employees comply without adapting, or when people who can see the problem do not believe it is safe or worthwhile to say so.

Inclusion therefore does not sit alongside performance as a separate social objective. At its most practical, it determines how much of the knowledge distributed across a workforce the organisation can actually use.

7.3 Inclusive workplaces are a lever for economic progress

New Zealand's diversity has economic value only if the capabilities associated with it can be used.

The free trade agreement with India was signed on 27 April 2026, covering services, investment and professional mobility. The commercial opportunity does not sit only in the agreement. It also sits in people already in New Zealand who understand Indian markets, languages, institutions, professional norms and business networks.

The relevant labour-market question is whether those capabilities are located where the economy can use them. Where migrants work below their qualification or capability level, New Zealand has already paid much of the cost of attracting human capital without capturing its full productive value.

The same principle applies more broadly. Māori and Pacific knowledge, disability-led understanding of accessibility, multilingual capability and different professional networks are economically useful where the work calls for them. Their value does not arise simply because a workforce is diverse. It arises when people have sufficient access, authority and opportunity to use what they know.

Diversity describes the resources present in the workforce. Inclusion determines how much of them the economy can use.

7.4 Inclusive workplaces contribute to social cohesion

Work has over the past decade acquired a social function that is critical in an increasingly polarised world. It is one of the remaining places where adults routinely spend sustained time with people they did not choose.

Much of modern life permits sorting. We choose our friends, media, online communities and associations, and increasingly encounter people who already share our interests and views. Work is different. A colleague may differ from us by ethnicity, nationality, generation, religion, politics, education or class, but we still have to solve the same problem, serve the same customer, meet the same deadline and depend on one another to do it.

There is a substantial evidence base for why this matters. Decades of research on intergroup contact finds that sustained contact across groups generally reduces prejudice and can increase trust, with some effects extending beyond the individuals involved to attitudes towards the wider group.

An inclusive workplace creates the conditions in which people who might otherwise know one another only as categories encounter one another as competent colleagues. In a society in which trust is becoming harder to sustain across difference, the workplace remains a place where trust can be built through repeated practical dependence rather than agreement.

Work may be one of the last places where people who disagree about the world still have to make something work together, and workplace inclusion, as a discipline, helps make that encounter productive rather than divisive.

8. What this adds up to

None of the changes examined in this paper, taken alone, determines what happens inside a New Zealand workplace. Employers remain free to measure inequity, recognise overseas qualifications, design work flexibly, examine pay gaps, recruit structurally and intervene when people are excluded. Many will continue to do so – which is precisely why the permission environment matters.

Over this parliamentary term, four signals have moved in broadly the same direction. The statutory floor has become less structural and more reliant on individuals asserting their own rights. The Crown has stepped back from its role as an exemplar of progressive employment practice. Procurement carries fewer inclusion expectations into the private market. The infrastructure that made disparities visible and helped employers respond to them has weakened. And political rhetoric has made the legitimacy of inclusion itself more contestable.

The cumulative effect is not prohibition. It is permission to do less.

That matters because the costs of inclusion do not disappear when the practice does. A disabled person who cannot enter employment remains outside the productive workforce. A migrant working below their capability remains misallocated. An underpriced occupation remains difficult to staff. Knowledge that employees do not contribute remains unavailable to the organisation. And workplaces that cannot sustain trust across difference lose competitive advantage.

New Zealand needs employers who use the capability available to them, apply standards fairly, notice where their systems produce avoidable barriers, and create workplaces in which people can contribute what they know.