



The New Zealand Way of Working & the Skills You'll Need

Workplace culture can be hard-to-define, but it nevertheless affects every minute of your working life. Culture encompasses elements such as business values, management styles, physical environment, and even dress codes. Each country (and even region or city) has its own unique culture that you'll have to learn about and adapt to if you want a successful career outside of your home country.

To fit successfully into an internship or job in New Zealand you'll need to be aware of the differences between the culture here and that in your home country, and be prepared to adjust to the New Zealand way of working.

One thing your employer and work colleagues will be looking for is the positive "can do" attitude that has made Kiwis well-liked employees wherever they travel.

New Zealanders are known for simply getting on with the job and finding solutions. It's a product of our relatively recent pioneering background when people had no choice but to get things done using whatever resources were at hand. That meant combining traditional ways of doing things with new ideas.

In this document you'll find some information on the New Zealand work culture and some tips to help you prepare and adapt to the kiwi workplace.

Kiwi Working Culture

General work behaviour

There are eight key workplace behaviours that vary across cultures (Erin Meyer, 2014). Have a think about how these behaviours are demonstrated in your culture.

- Communicating – Are they low-context (simple, verbose and clear), or high-context (rich deep meaning in interactions)?
- Evaluating – When giving negative feedback does one give it directly, or prefer being indirect and discreet?

- Leading – Are people in groups egalitarian, or do they prefer hierarchy?
- Deciding – Are decisions made in consensus, or made top-down?
- Trusting – Do people base trust on how well they know each other, or how well they do work together?
- Disagreeing – Are disagreements tackled directly, or do people prefer to avoid confrontations?
- Scheduling – Do they perceive time as absolute linear points, or consider it a flexible range?
- Persuading – Do they like to hear specific cases and examples, or prefer holistic detailed explanations?

Let's take a look at how these are reflected in the New Zealand workplace.

Communicating

People in NZ workplaces tend to be quite direct and 'to the point'. If you are asking a question, be clear and concise, don't talk around the point or include a lot of unnecessary background or context.

If someone asks you to do something, even if you don't know how or what to do, try to react positively ("can do" attitude) and ask some positive questions about what you need to do.

Because NZ workplaces have flat structures (non-hierarchical), you will find yourself talking to staff at all levels, probably even the CEO. This means communication skills are one of the most important skills you can develop.

Smalltalk is very important. Co-workers will want to have a chat in the lift, in the kitchen or walking to a meeting. Try to engage in conversation and make sure you ask questions to learn more about the people you work with.

Evaluating

New Zealanders generally don't like confrontation and will often try to give negative feedback by including some positive feedback as well. Sometimes it won't be clear exactly what they would like you to do.

It's a good idea to check you have understood correctly – if you think a co-worker or manager has given you some feedback but aren't sure exactly how to improve – ask them. This will show you are interested in learning and improving.

If you are in a position to give feedback yourself, try the feedback sandwich method. This is when you start with a piece of positive feedback, then deliver the negative feedback, then finish with another positive piece of feedback ('sandwiching' the negative feedback).



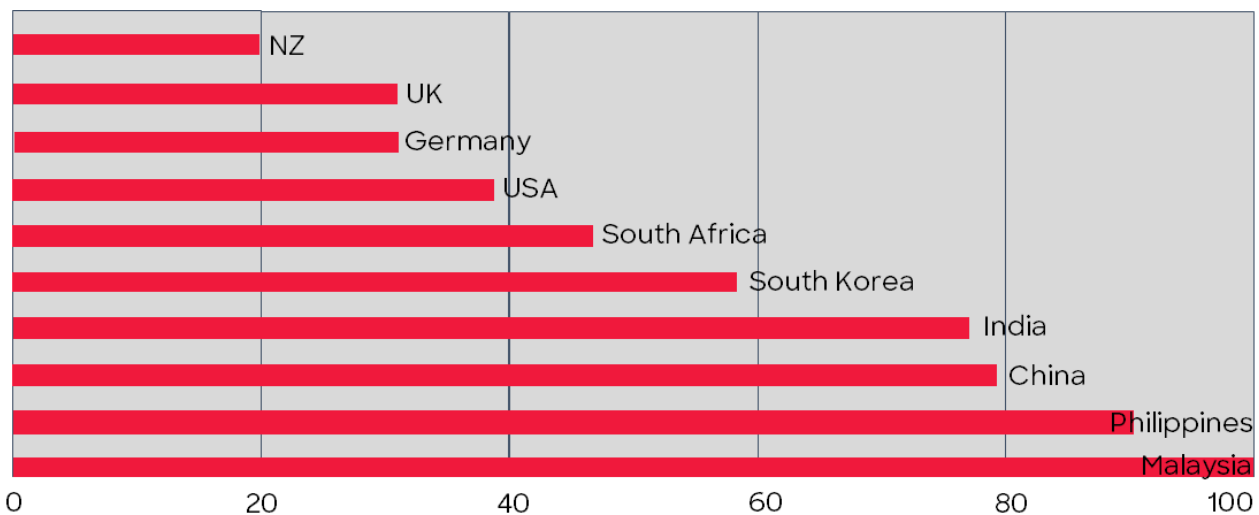
Leading

You need to be able to work both independently and as a team. NZ has the lowest amount of hierarchy than any other nation measured. Organisations from small start-ups to large businesses like Fonterra are looking for employees who can work independently and as part of a team. No-one is “better” than anyone else.

Cultural Differences in Management Style Preferences

0 = like to be left to get on with the job

100 = like to be told exactly what to do



New Zealanders enjoy a management style where they have a lot of autonomy. This means that you will largely be expected to get on with the job. However, your employer will know you will need guidance, and will expect you to ask questions. For some international students and graduates this can be challenging, as in some countries asking questions may be seen negatively, seen as an indication that you don't know what to do. Managers in New Zealand will expect you to get on with what you know how to do and ask questions about things you don't. *Not* asking questions could be taken as a sign of disinterest or you not caring about whether you do a good job, so don't be afraid to ask questions when you need to!

Deciding

Generally, decisions are made with input from the whole team. Co-workers and managers will be interested in your opinion on things and will ask you for your input. Try to build up your confidence to do this. If your opinion is different to others, that's OK – in fact that's good! It encourages others to think about things from another perspective. Diversity within the workplace is important, and your colleagues will generally be interested to hear differing opinions.

Don't feel like you should always agree with everyone else – be confident to stand out from the crowd and voice your own opinions! This should be valued by your employers.

Trusting

New Zealanders base their opinions of people on what you *do*, **not** on who you are, your role, your background, your qualifications or your social standing. If you work hard and are reliable, you will be

respected and trusted. It doesn't matter if you don't have a strong or personal relationship with your co-workers – they will base their opinion of you on your work and your attitude.

Disagreeing

As noted previously, New Zealanders don't like confrontation. They are unlikely to tell you directly that they disagree with something you have said or done. If it's minor, it will probably be forgotten about over time. If you disagree with someone it's wise to voice your disagreement as politely and positively as possible. Respect is important. Generally if you speak respectfully, disagreements can be resolved fairly easily.

This avoidance of confrontation does mean that sometimes you need to try to pick up signals from people, as they are unlikely to come out directly and tell you that you have done something wrong or that they haven't liked. This can be challenging. If you think something might be wrong – you can ask. Have a quiet word with the person in question and ask whether there is anything wrong or that they would like to talk to you about.

Scheduling

Generally, time and deadlines are fixed and are important to follow. For social occasions time can be somewhat flexible, but in a work setting you will be expected to adhere to set times.

For interviews – absolutely do not be late, but also don't be too early. You should try to arrive five minutes early. Work meetings are the same.

For project and work deadlines you will be expected to work within them. People will generally be understanding if these need to be extended (depending on the nature of the work/project) – but it is vital that you keep them updated if you are behind schedule so they can prepare for it.

Persuading

New Zealanders like to have all the details and facts in order to make a decision. Decisions are generally made based on facts and data. More specific cases and examples, less of the intangible, holistic context and background. Be clear and to the point.

The impact of Kiwi culture on the skills employers are looking for

Employability skills (sometimes called 'soft skills') refer to a set of transferable skills and key personal attributes which are highly valued by employers and essential for effective performance in the workplace.

Unlike professional or technical skills these employability skills are generic in nature, rather than job-specific, and are common to all work roles and workplaces across all industry types – for example communications and teamwork. Our work culture has an impact on the skills employers are looking for in employees.

Personal attributes that contribute to overall employability

loyalty	commitment	honesty & integrity
reliability	enthusiasm	personal presentation
commonsense	positive self-esteem	a sense of humour
ability to deal with pressure	motivation	adaptability

Below is an overview of employability skills valued by employers in New Zealand. It is essential that you are able to identify and showcase these attributes when making applications for jobs.

If you are preparing for an interview you will need to tell them about situations you have been in where you have demonstrated these skills. If you haven't had a formal job before, it is well-worth doing some volunteer or community work; or joining clubs or community groups. This will give you an opportunity to develop these skills in a real-world setting, and then talk about it when you are applying for jobs.

Skill	Element (aspect of the skill that employers think is important. The mix and priority of these aspects will vary from job to job)
<p>Communication...</p> <p>that contributes to productive and harmonious relations across employees and customers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening and Understanding • Speaking clearly and directly • Writing to the needs of the audience • Speaking and writing in languages other than English • Using numeracy • Understanding the needs of internal and external customers • Establishing and using networks • Sharing information
<p>Teamwork...</p> <p>that contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working across different ages irrespective of gender, race, religion, or political persuasion • Working as an individual and as a member of a team • Knowing how to define a role as part of the team • Applying team work to a range of situations e.g. futures planning, crisis problem solving • Identifying the strengths of the team members • Coaching and mentoring skills including giving feedback
<p>Problem-solving...</p> <p>that contributes to productive outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing creative, innovative solutions • Developing practical solutions • Showing independence and initiative in identifying problems and solving them • Solving problems in teams • Applying a range of strategies to problem solving

Initiative and Enterprise...

that contributes to innovative outcomes

- Adapting to new situations
- Developing a strategic, creative, long term vision
- Identifying opportunities not obvious to others
- Translating ideas into action
- Generating a range of options

Planning and Organising...

that contributes to long and short-term strategic planning

- Managing time and priorities
- Being resourceful
- Taking initiative and making decisions
- Establishing clear project goals and deliverables
- Collecting, analyzing and organising information

Self-Management....

that contributes to employee satisfaction and growth

- Having a personal vision and goals
- Evaluating and monitoring own performance, taking responsibility
- Having the knowledge and confidence in own ideas and visions

Learning...

that contributes to ongoing improvement

- Managing own learning and being willing to learn in any setting – on and off job
- Being open to new ideas and techniques
- Acknowledging the need to learn in order to accommodate change

Technology...

that contributes to the effective execution of tasks

- Having a range of basic IT skills
- Applying IT as a management tool
- Using IT to organize data
- Being willing to learn new IT skills

Further resources

<https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/living-in-nz/settling-in/customs-communication>

https://teara.govt.nz/en/manners-and-social-behaviour/page-1?utm_source=newzealandnow.govt.nz