

**Best practices in intercultural communication that support
diversity, equity and inclusion in
three New Zealand media workplaces**

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Abstract

This study investigates the application of intercultural communication knowledge in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices within three prominent New Zealand media organisations – TVNZ, NZME, and Stuff. Using the Aotearoa Inclusivity Matrix (AIM) framework, the research examines how these organisations use the seven DEI components in the workplace: leadership, diversity infrastructure, diverse recruitment, inclusive career development, bi-culturalism, inclusive collaboration, and social impact.

A qualitative thematic analysis identifying the DEI components was conducted on 348 publicly available data items, collected across paid, earned, shared, and owned (PESO) media. Each DEI component was critically assessed using an aligned intercultural communication theory to determine the extent of theory-informed practice.

The findings revealed the presence of all seven DEI components in the organisations in varying measures of priority, shaped in part by their ownership structures. The most prioritised practices included social impact and inclusive career development. Inclusive collaboration and diverse recruitment practices showed an overall low presence across the organisations, particularly during periods of restructuring.

The study highlights that while intercultural communication theory is implicitly present in many DEI initiatives, its explicit and strategic application is inconsistent. The findings advocate for a more deliberate integration of intercultural communication knowledge into DEI policies to ensure sustainable, culturally responsive practices. These insights contribute to the growing discourse on the value of DEI in workplaces by proposing a strong theoretical framework of intercultural communication knowledge to support the effectiveness of DEI in organisational practices, thereby offering guidance for media and other industries in multicultural contexts.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

(Samrita M. Deygan)

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Chapter One: Introduction

“The single greatest barrier to business success is the one erected by culture”
(Hall & Hall, 1987 p. xvii).

Acknowledging the intricate relationship between communication and culture has become imperative for organisations seeking to establish a competitive edge and cultivate a constructive workplace environment (Shahid, 2022). In an increasingly globalised world, intercultural communication (IC) is the cornerstone of organisational success. Diverse workplaces offer opportunities for employers and employees to develop a mutual understanding of cultural perspectives, contributing to overall organisational growth and success (Harvey, 2014; Simons & Rowland, 2011).

The term ‘intercultural communication’ was first used in 1959 in the book *The Silent Language* (Hall, 1959), and the book was considered the ‘founding document’ of the field (Rogers et al., 2002). A simple, yet effective, definition of the term is the communication, verbal or non-verbal, that transpires between people and entities that are culturally different. It is this cultural diversity that shapes communication during interactions, combining individual perceptions and societal structures (Oetzel, 2009).

1.1 Intercultural Communication in New Zealand Workplaces and Media Organisations

New Zealand's multicultural workforce is a defining characteristic of its labour market. With a current population of over five million which is a mix of Māori, European, Pacific Island and Asian influences, New Zealand is a melting-pot of cultures. The most recent data on the ethnic make-up of jobs across Aotearoa New Zealand is Europeans 67%, Asians 18%, Māori 15%, Pacific Peoples 6%, and MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African) and others at 2% (Stats NZ, 2024). According to the Ministry of

Ethnic Communities, almost 20 per cent of New Zealand's population identifies as ethnic and this is estimated to grow to 25 per cent by 2033 (2022-2023 Annual Report, n.d.). The 'ethnic' communities are composed of Asians, Continental Europeans, Africans, Middle Easterners and Latin Americans. These statistics make it clear that New Zealand's cultural landscape shall continue to broaden in the coming years, making intercultural interactions an everyday reality in workplaces. This makes a continued study on intercultural communication in New Zealand workplaces relevant and important.

The media sector, as a conduit of cultural narratives and societal representation, serves as a compelling context for exploring the nuances of intercultural communication in New Zealand. In November 2020, New Zealand's independent media organisation Stuff published a national apology for its anti-Māori bias in its past media representation of the community (BBC, 2020). The diversity and inclusion report by Stuff, released in June 2021, showed a 7.1% internal workforce representation of Māori, and only 5.6 percent representation of the community in leadership roles. This data, coupled with misrepresentation by Stuff, highlighted that achieving unbiased media representation of minority communities is closely tied to the internal composition of media organisations. Diversity in leadership and decision-makers is crucial for the representation of varied narratives in the media and entertainment industry (World Economic Forum, 2021). Going by this assessment, New Zealand scores extremely low in the overall ethnic representation in leadership roles across sectors – Europeans 75%, Māori 12%, Asians 11%, Others 5% and Pacific Peoples at 3% (Stats NZ, 2024). There is no existing report specifying the diversity in leadership roles within the media industry. However, there is data (dated 2018) to support the ethnic constitution of workers in the media and broadcasting sector in New Zealand, which shows European ethnicity to be leading at 80%, followed by a large gap with Asians at 12%, Māori at 11% and Pasifika at 5% (Angus & Associates, 2023).

1.2 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in New Zealand

DEI is a framework designed to create an environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds feel valued and receive the necessary support to perform to their fullest potential (Tessema et al., 2023). In 1992, as an acknowledgement of the evolving dynamics within the New Zealand workplaces by public and private sector leaders, the Equal Employment Opportunity Trust was formed. In 2016, it became Diversity Works New Zealand. Funded by a partnership of employers and government, it is a national body for workplace diversity, equity and inclusion. With globalisation, the late twentieth century highlighted the emerging need for research and training initiatives aimed at developing organisational capacity to effectively manage an increasingly diverse workforce (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.; Merelo, 2019). The critical need for DEI initiatives in workplaces in New Zealand was answered through the establishment of a national standard for workplace DEI by Diversity Works New Zealand called the Aotearoa Inclusivity Matrix (AIM) (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.).

AIM is an evidence-based framework, supported by a suite of assessment tools, to help organisations analyse the level of their DEI capabilities across seven components that form part of a strategic approach to DEI. These components – leadership, diversity infrastructure, diverse recruitment, inclusive career development, bi-culturalism, inclusive collaboration and social impact (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.), are used as a benchmark for assessing an organisation’s DEI capabilities by identifying corresponding internal practices employed. According to Diversity Works New Zealand, they are the best practices in DEI that organisations adhere to in order to foster an inclusive workplace.

1.3 Intercultural Communication Theories Inform DEI Framework

DEI in the workplace refers to the presence of differences – including cultural backgrounds – within an organisation, where individuals have equitable access to opportunities and feel valued in an environment that empowers them to perform at their best (Kushwaha et al., 2024). Given that DEI inherently concerns the interaction of diverse cultures, understanding it through intercultural communication theories provides a necessary theoretical foundation. The application of established theoretical models and frameworks enhances the understanding of implementation processes by offering deeper insights into the factors that contribute to their success or failure (Lynch et al., 2018). Without an intercultural communication-informed approach, DEI strategies risk overlooking the deeper cultural dimensions that influence workplace dynamics.

This research attempts to bridge this gap by drawing on the interconnectedness of intercultural communication and DEI and advocating the importance of knowledge underpinning practice.

1.4 Purpose, Scope and Importance of the Study

This study focuses on three media organisations in New Zealand, namely TVNZ (government owned), Stuff (independently owned), and NZME (shareholder owned). The selection of these organisations reflects the diversity of ownership models within the media sector, each of which presents unique challenges and opportunities for intercultural communication.

The PESO (Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned media) model is used to collect publicly available data for each of the three organisations. The collected data is analysed using the seven DEI components of the AIM framework, to assess whether

all, or some, of these best practices are embedded in the workplaces. The identified DEI practices of each organisation are directly informed by intercultural communication theories to arrive at the answer to the central research question:

RQ. What are the best practices in intercultural communication that support DEI in the three New Zealand media organisations being studied?

Existing literature on intercultural communication has predominantly focused on global organisations (Washington et al., 2012) or specific industries such as healthcare (Mannes, 2023) and education (Salahshour, 2021) in New Zealand. There is a notable lack of research within the New Zealand media sector. Media organisations play a dual role as both employers and influencers of societal narratives, making them a unique case for examining intercultural communication dynamics. Additionally, while DEI has gained traction in organisational discourse, its integration with intercultural communication in the New Zealand context remains underexplored. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating intercultural communication challenges and best practices in three New Zealand media organisations with varying ownership structures.

The study contributes to the growing body of research on intercultural communication by providing a localised perspective on its application within the New Zealand media sector. By integrating intercultural communication theories with DEI frameworks, the study highlights the importance of culturally inclusive practices in fostering workplace equity. The findings aim to inform organisational strategies for addressing intercultural communication challenges, with broader implications for policy development and industry standards. Additionally, the research seeks to advance the discourse on the intersection of intercultural communication and DEI, offering a nuanced understanding of their interdependence in multicultural workplaces.

While many DEI initiatives are well-intentioned, they often lack a robust intercultural communication framework to guide their implementation. Intercultural communication theories offer tested principles that can support more inclusive, respectful, and sustainable organisational practices. For instance, one of the findings in this study revealed that while TVNZ in principle supported the DEI component of inclusive collaboration, this was not duly observed in its organisational restructure in 2024. The media outlet, on its part, claimed to have done due diligence to the process by using an internal programme 'Te Paerangi' as a form of communication. This programme was designed to support the organisation in its transformation to a digital-first organisation (TVNZ, 2024a). However, the worker's union, E Tū, argued that this general programme did not meet the legal requirements for consulting the staff prior to a restructure, as laid down under its collective agreement with the organisation, nor did it address redundancies in particular. As a result, this led to an Employment Court action, and the eventual ruling declared TVNZ's action to be symbolic and not substantial (Business Central, 2024; Dundas Street, 2024; Otago Daily Times, 2024; RNZ, 2024). This breakdown reflects a critical shortfall in the DEI component of inclusive collaboration, in TVNZ's lack of considered process implementation. Had TVNZ informed its DEI practice with Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988) of intercultural communication, which emphasises mutual respect, face-saving, and culturally sensitive engagement during high-stake or conflicting interactions, the outcome may have been more constructive. The theory emphasises the importance of validating others' identity and autonomy, particularly in times of change. This incident illustrates how, without theoretical grounding, even legally obligated DEI practices can fall short. By revealing such misalignments, this research demonstrates how intercultural communication theories can serve as practical tools for making DEI both ethical and effective in real organisational settings.

The relevance of intercultural communication and DEI has been further underscored by recent political and social changes. The announcement of a push back

of DEI initiatives by the Donald Trump administration in the US has had significant implications for global DEI practices, including New Zealand (Hidesley, 2025). These changes have sparked renewed interest in DEI strategies within organisations, making the study of intercultural communication and DEI in the New Zealand media sector particularly timely and relevant.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis is organised into six chapters. The first chapter, Introduction, outlines the research objectives, scope, and significance of the study. Chapter two, Literature Review, provides an overview of the existing research on intercultural communication and DEI, with a focus on their application in organisational contexts. Chapter three, Methodology, details the research design, data collection methods, and analytical framework employed in the study. Chapter four is Findings, which presents intercultural communication challenges and best practices within the selected organisations using thematic analysis. Chapter five, Discussion, interprets the findings in relation to the research objectives and broader theoretical frameworks, and directly informs DEI practices with intercultural communication theories. Finally, chapter six, Conclusion and Recommendations, summarises key insights, implications, and suggests recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Overview

As workplaces are becoming increasingly diverse, effective intercultural communication competencies are central to professional success (Yusof et al., 2019). With New Zealand seeing an increase in immigrants and ethnicities every year, building intercultural competency in a multicultural country is critical to the success of the nation (Malik et al., 2014).

This study uses the AIM framework (Chapter One, Section 1.2), and intercultural communication theories that support its DEI components. This is to provide a theoretical foundation for evaluating the DEI practices in three media organisations in New Zealand – TVNZ, NZME and Stuff. The chapter reviews and critiques the relevance of and extent to which each intercultural communication theory addresses the AIM components of DEI. The aim is to study the intercultural communication theories underpinning best practices that enhance organisational performance in diversity, equity and inclusion.

Practices that have consistently been acknowledged as effective by numerous well regarded institutions and are endorsed by many practitioners or experts for achieving successful outcomes are considered good or best practices (Xu & Yeh, 2010). As the seven AIM components have been established by a national body for workplace DEI, they are considered best practices. From these, the ones most commonly observed by media organisations then become their best practices. While there is substantial research on diversity reportage and ethnic content in New Zealand media, there is a lack of sufficient research that looks at organisational diversity and the level of intercultural communication practices within media networks. By using

three leading media networks of New Zealand belonging to different ownership models – government, independent and shareholder – this study can compare how institutional structures use intercultural communication practices, thereby strengthening the broader relevance and transferability of the findings. Additionally, by identifying areas where the organisations fall short of the AIM best practices, the study highlights specific gaps and challenges in implementing effective intercultural communication strategies. This can inform future research and policy-making aimed at addressing these gaps.

The structure of this chapter begins with DEI within the New Zealand context. This is followed by a brief history of intercultural communication, tracing its evolution, and its direct links to the AIM components that underpin DEI best practices in the workplace. This chapter also explains existing global and local DEI guidelines that organisations in New Zealand can use to assess and structure their diversity and inclusion efforts. This provides the rationale for choosing AIM.

A section explains the PESO (Paid, Earned, Shared, Owned media) model as data collection depends on the sources obtained within this model. The following section identifies and underpins the AIM components with relevant intercultural communication theories, providing a theoretical foundation for evaluating the intercultural communication best practices in the selected media organisations.

2.1 DEI in New Zealand

As an outcome of the changing workplace demographic in New Zealand, the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Trust was formed in 1992, in partnership with private and public sector employers, in order to manage the increasing diversity in organisations. The trust is funded by a partnership of employers and government. In 2016, the EEO Trust was rebranded as Diversity Works New Zealand to signify

broader diversity aspects in the workplace and an increased importance on inclusion. Although a voluntary body, the organisation is recognised as a national body for workplace diversity, equity and inclusion. A membership of Diversity Works New Zealand publicly demonstrates an organisation's commitment to equity and inclusion in its workplace. Today, it comprises over 700 member organisations of all types and sizes (DiversityWorks, n.d.).

In 2018, two of the three media organisations studied in this research became members of Diversity Works New Zealand, namely Stuff and NZME, thereby establishing their commitment to DEI. This also means that both these organisations have used the AIM framework for an internal assessment of their DEI practices. However, this study examines the DEI practices of these organisations in more recent times (2021 to 2025) and it does that through a robust theoretical framework which aligns intercultural communication theories with DEI practices. Additionally, this research only uses data which is publicly accessible, in order to evaluate internal intercultural communication. This study also acknowledges an impending name change of Diversity Works New Zealand to Te Uru Tāngata Centre for Workplace Inclusion in 2025 (DiversityWorks, n.d.). Consequently, there is a possibility that the organisation may be operating under a different name by the time this thesis is submitted.

In 2021, Diversity Works New Zealand launched an evidence-based framework providing organisations with a suite of assessment tools to evaluate the maturity of their workplace DEI practices across five levels, from starter to advanced, in each of seven DEI components - leadership, diversity infrastructure, diverse recruitment, inclusive career development, bi-culturalism, inclusive collaboration and social impact (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Aotearoa Inclusivity Matrix

THE AOTEAROA INCLUSIVITY MATRIX

This is an evidence-based framework developed specifically for New Zealand workplaces that allows organisations to identify the maturity of their diversity, equity and inclusion measures across seven components. It will provide a basis for workplaces to understand their current capabilities, identify areas for improvement and create a roadmap for transformation.



1 STARTER	2 EMERGING	3 DEVELOPER	4 INTEGRATED	5 ADVANCED	
<p>LEADERSHIP</p> <p>Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) not seen as a top priority</p> <p>DEI is relevant but approached through informal and sporadic action at the top</p> <p>DEI is a priority supported through formal and continuous action at the top</p> <p>DEI is formally practiced through a set of holistic systems supported from the top</p> <p>DEI is embedded in the culture and proactively and exemplarily supported from an accountable top</p>					<p>LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL INDICATORS</p> <p>Rationale for diversity and inclusion; organisational values; location and type of accountability; visible commitment and participation in initiatives; the ability and willingness to role model expected behaviours; the overall strategic approach to diversity management.</p>
<p>DIVERSITY INFRASTRUCTURE</p> <p>Overall absence of initiatives beyond legal requirements</p> <p>Basic ad hoc initiatives, requiring a formal, informed and coordinated response</p> <p>Core components of DEI achieved and basic support systems are formally in place</p> <p>Diversity infrastructure is continuously practiced, measured and improved</p> <p>Stable levels of success in an embedded infrastructure are continuously met</p>					<p>DIVERSITY INFRASTRUCTURE POTENTIAL INDICATORS</p> <p>Five core elements achieved; cornerstone and targeted policies; specific interventions to support employees from a DEI perspective; perceived diversity climate or similar periodically measured; employee networks; cultural celebrations; accessible facilities.</p>
<p>DIVERSE RECRUITMENT</p> <p>Overall absence of initiatives beyond legal requirements</p> <p>Ad hoc, informal initiatives to remove barriers to DEI to access the pipeline</p> <p>Formal processes enable access of diversity into the pipeline</p> <p>Practiced systems enable a proactive search to onboard talent from a DEI lens</p> <p>Systems are strategically embedded to bring DEI into the organisation.</p>					<p>DIVERSE RECRUITMENT POTENTIAL INDICATORS</p> <p>Bias prevention; talent and recruitment diversity metrics; bias and barrier removal practices; overall candidate experience design; methods for a proactive search; diverse talent pools; job design and organisational architecture; DEI in onboarding.</p>
<p>INCLUSIVE CAREER DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Overall absence of initiatives beyond legal requirements</p> <p>Informal and sporadic initiatives to bring DEI into career development exist</p> <p>Career development is formally enabled through initiatives mindful of DEI</p> <p>Integrated systems to grow talent from a DEI perspective are continuously practiced</p> <p>DEI is embedded in culturally supportive career development systems</p>					<p>INCLUSIVE CAREER DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL INDICATORS</p> <p>Career development metrics (e.g. career tracking, remuneration, diversity promotion rates); pay gap reduction interventions; diverse mentoring programmes; equitable access to training; equitably oriented performance appraisal systems; organisational culture development programmes.</p>
<p>BI-CULTURALISM</p> <p>Overall absence of the foundations needed to develop bi-cultural awareness</p> <p>Informal and/or unstructured initiatives of bi-cultural openness, awareness and relationships are in place</p> <p>Formal bi-cultural competence, systems, relationships and representation are enabled through specific and monitored processes</p> <p>Formal bi-cultural competence, systems, relationships and representation are continuously practiced, evaluated and improved</p> <p>Bi-cultural systems and relationships are successfully and strategically embedded in the organisational culture</p>					<p>BI-CULTURALISM POTENTIAL INDICATORS</p> <p>Māori representation in leadership positions; Māori representation across the structure; Tikanga/kawa/te ao Māori integrated systems; Treaty of Waitangi literacy; te reo Māori competence; bi-cultural celebrations; Māori cultural competence programmes; engagement with Māori; whi relationships; Treaty of Waitangi responsibility initiatives.</p>
<p>INCLUSIVE COLLABORATION</p> <p>Overall absence of initiatives</p> <p>Informal and ad hoc approach</p> <p>Formally enabled, strategically addressed and informed approach</p> <p>Inclusive collaboration strategically addressed, continuously practiced, valued and evaluated.</p> <p>Inclusive collaboration is strategically embedded in the culture and continuously improved</p>					<p>INCLUSIVE COLLABORATION POTENTIAL INDICATORS</p> <p>Diversity and inclusion inventory of skills (continuously mapped and evaluated); existence of employee-led initiatives; initiatives on communication styles; diverse collaboration; diversity intelligence; equity awareness; relational bridges interventions.</p>
<p>SOCIAL IMPACT</p> <p>Overall absence of initiatives</p> <p>Aware, concerned but no real action planned or fully developed</p> <p>Initial baseline initiatives enable societal work</p> <p>Systemic and practiced societal-oriented DEI initiatives</p> <p>Embedded DEI practice formally and regularly connected with external networks</p>					<p>SOCIAL IMPACT POTENTIAL INDICATORS</p> <p>Diversity partners; educational diversity and inclusion programmes with external stakeholders; supply chain diversity; any other sort of initiatives to build diversity from a societal, sustainable perspective.</p>

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Note. For visual clarity of the table please see Appendices 1 – 4. (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.)

This framework, as shown in Figure 1, is called the Aotearoa Inclusivity Matrix (AIM). According to Diversity Works New Zealand, the AIM framework clearly and simply sets out what good practices in workplace inclusion look like (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.).

This framework also gives the indicators for each of the seven DEI components. The indicators for the first DEI component, leadership, include rationale for diversity and inclusion, organisational values, location and type of accountability, visible commitment and participation in initiatives, the ability and willingness to role model expected behaviours, and the overall strategic approach to diversity management. For the second DEI component, diversity infrastructure, the indicators are five core elements achieved, cornerstone and targeted policies, specific interventions to support employees from a DEI perspective, perceived diversity climate or similar periodically measured, employee networks, cultural celebrations, and accessible facilities.

The AIM indicators for the third component, diverse recruitment, are bias prevention, talent and recruitment diversity metrics, bias and barrier removal practices, overall candidate experience design, methods for a proactive search, diverse talent pools, job design and organisational architecture, and DEI in onboarding. The fourth component, inclusive career development, includes the indicators career development metrics (e.g. career tracking, remuneration, diversity promotion rates), pay gap reduction interventions, diverse mentoring programmes, equitable access to training, equitably oriented performance appraisal systems, and organisational culture development programmes.

The AIM indicators for the fifth DEI component, bi-culturalism, include Māori representation in leadership positions, Māori representation across the structure, Tikanga/kawa/te ao Māori integrated systems, Treaty of Waitangi literacy, te reo Māori competence, bi-cultural celebrations, Māori cultural competence programmes, engagement with Māori, iwi relationships, and Treaty of Waitangi responsibility initiatives. The indicators for inclusive collaboration, the sixth DEI component, are diversity and inclusion inventory of skills (continuously mapped and evaluated), existence of employee-led initiatives, initiatives on communication styles, diverse

collaboration, diversity intelligence, equity awareness, and relational bridges interventions.

The seventh and last DEI component, social impact, includes the indicators diversity partners, educational diversity and inclusion programmes with external stakeholders, supply chain diversity, and any other sort of initiatives to build diversity from a societal sustainable perspective.

Based on the recognition of the seven components outlined in the AIM as best practices in DEI for organisations, this study utilises these components as themes to evaluate recent DEI practices in the three identified media organisations. It uses the specified indicators for an in-depth analysis of the practices. Moreover, this study recognises that as organisations practise DEI in their people development and management practices, the seven components will be mentioned in their communication more readily rather than intercultural communication terms and concepts. By underpinning each of the seven components with corresponding intercultural communication theories, the findings clearly capture the intersection between DEI practices and intercultural communication.

There is considerable research indicating that when effectively managed, a diverse workforce can lead to accelerated growth rates, increased financial returns, significant market advantages, and a wealth of innovative talent (Credit Suisse, 2016; Deloitte, 2017). According to the Workplace Diversity Case Model by Diversity Works New Zealand, the benefits of adopting DEI practices by organisations are also underscored by improved productivity and decision-making, as well as enhanced stakeholder engagement and brand reputation (Merelo, 2019).

An important annual Workplace Diversity Survey conducted by Diversity Works New Zealand explains the current DEI leanings of organisations, lending an in-depth

scope to this study. The 2024 survey (Diversity Works New Zealand, 2024) engaged 594 respondents including both DEI practitioners and individuals without DEI responsibilities. When asked to identify the most important DEI-related topics within their organisations, DEI practitioners prioritised an inclusive workplace culture and te ao Māori as the top two areas of focus. In contrast, respondents without DEI responsibilities ranked te ao Māori, te Tiriti responsiveness, and an inclusive workplace culture as their top three priorities. These findings reflect recent trends in DEI, emphasising the growing importance of inclusivity and bi-culturalism in contemporary organisational practices. It would be prudent to study the areas prioritised by the three media outlets and what intercultural communication strategies and underpinning theories are used to support their efforts.

The study acknowledges other existing global and local DEI guidelines that could guide organisational action and reiterates the rationale for selecting the AIM framework. As New Zealand has no binding legislation mandating DEI programmes, as stated by Diversity Works New Zealand's Chief Executive Maretha Smit (Hildesley, 2025), organisations often follow voluntary standards set by global and local institutions. Many such standards, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), the Global Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Benchmarks (GDEIB), and the New Zealand Public Service Act, could guide research of this nature. However, each presents limitations in relation to the scope and aim of this study.

At the global level, the UN SDGs promote values aligned with DEI through Goal 5 - Gender Equality, Goal 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth, and Goal 10 - Reduced Inequalities (www.undp.org, n.d.). Yet, the 2030 timeline for their implementation and their broad international focus make them impractical as an evaluation tool for current IC practices in New Zealand's media sector. Similarly, GDEIB offers an 80-page guidebook on global DEI benchmarks with 275 best practices

across 15 categories (Global DEI Benchmarks, 2025). But its extensive structure exceeds the methodological capacity of a master's thesis.

At the national level, the Public Service Act 2020 (*Public Service Act 2020 Reforms - Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission*, n.d.) provides a legislative foundation for DEI within the public sector, overseen by the Public Service Commission (Te Kawa Mataaho). The Commission's two-year DEI plan promotes leadership diversity, diverse representation and improved DEI data collection and reporting (*Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan 2024 and 2025 (2-Year)*, n.d.). However, both the Act and the Plan apply only to public agencies and are not mandatory for private media organisations. Additionally, its two-year scope limits its suitability as a long-term evaluative tool for this study.

Although these global and national guidelines offer valuable direction for shaping organisational DEI values, their inherent limitations make them unsuitable for the purposes of this research. In contrast, the AIM framework offers a focused, contextually grounded, and thematically structured lens through which DEI practices in New Zealand media organisations can be analysed more effectively. Therefore, the AIM framework has been chosen for its suitability and effectiveness in the context of this study and its objective.

2.2 History and Relevance of Intercultural Communication

Given the inherent complexity of the term 'intercultural' itself, it is appropriate to explore its historical development to fully appreciate its enduring significance in contemporary contexts. Intercultural communication has typically been defined as communication between people from different national cultures (Croucher et al., 2015). Since the mid-20th century, it has been a developing discipline. While Edward T. Hall's *The Silent Language* (1959) is recognised for first introducing the term 'intercultural

communication' and drawing attention to culturally embedded patterns of time, space, and context that influence interaction, its significance goes beyond simple definition. Hall's framing of culture as a system of silent, non-verbal codes helped shift scholarly interest towards understanding how these implicit cultural structures shape communication processes, and inspired research that investigated differences in cultural context and communication styles across diverse societies. This foundational work catalysed subsequent academic attention to intercultural variables, contributed to the emergence of intercultural communication as a distinct area of inquiry in communication departments in the 1960s and 1970s, and laid the groundwork for later theoretical developments that explore culture-communication interdependencies across varied contexts (Nyíri & Breidenbach, 2015; Croucher et al., 2015). About 10 years after the book was published, the discipline entered the academic curriculum. The first official university class and workshop was offered at Pittsburgh University in the late 1960s (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1978).

By the 1970s, a higher acceptance of the field was seen in the form of specialised IC courses, and creation of societies and journals related to the field. By the early 1980s there was a surge in the field with the works of William Gudykunst and Young Yun Kim, who established intercultural communication -oriented theories (Jiang, 2006). In the 21st century, and the age of globalisation, intercultural communication is ingrained in the fabric of multicultural workplaces and is an important element of organisational success. In fact, the term 'intercultural competence' is commonly used in diverse workplaces and is defined as a person's ability to think and act in an interculturally appropriate way (Hammer et al., 2003).

Ting-Toomey (1999) conceptualised intercultural communication competence as a four-stage developmental process, referred to as the "staircase model." The model begins with unconscious incompetence, where individuals are ignorant of their communication limitations in intercultural interaction. This progresses to conscious

incompetence, where awareness emerges but behavioural change is lacking. The third stage, conscious competence, is where individuals are aware of their “nonfluency” and are willing to deliberately apply their intercultural knowledge and skills into practice. This is also the stage of full mindfulness. Finally, in the unconscious competence or “mindlessly mindful” stage, individuals demonstrate spontaneous intercultural engagement where interactions flow organically, without making a conscious effort. Ting-Toomey emphasises that competent communicators often shift between the latter two stages to maintain and sharpen their intercultural fluency. The model reinforces the role of mindfulness and motivation in developing the flexibility required for effective engagement across cultural differences.

In the context of New Zealand, any discussion on cultural diversity must begin with recognising the nation’s bi-cultural foundations and honouring the place of the Māori people as the original inhabitants of the land (Chua, 2015). With steady migration, reports by the Ministry of Ethnic Communities state that the population of ethnic communities is expected to reach 25% by 2033 (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2023; 2024). This ongoing development clearly calls for the blending of bi-culturalism with the growing multiculturalism for better ethnic relations and cultural competency. Notably, bi-culturalism also forms an important component of AIM.

2.3 Intercultural Communication and DEI

Although research connecting intercultural communication and DEI is sparse, there are studies demonstrating that enhancing intercultural competence is a key approach to fostering inclusivity and improving the integration of diverse and underrepresented groups such as the work of Green and Chaudhary (2023) that focused on intercultural competence in higher education institutions. Historically, intercultural communication and DEI are contextualised in different areas. Intercultural communication is often linked to international contexts and DEI to domestic diversity.

However, with growing multicultural diaspora, the two fields are increasingly recognised as interrelated, and scholars argue for their intentional synergy to better address today's superdiverse environments (Golubeva, 2025).

Furthermore, recent studies stress that DEI must be embedded within cross-cultural performance frameworks, as applying a DEI lens to intercultural communication knowledge enriches workplace interactions by ensuring that cultural differences are not merely acknowledged but actively leveraged to create inclusive, equitable, and productive workspaces (Feitosa et al., 2022). Given this growing body of research, this particular study adopts an integrated approach that analyses the intercultural communication knowledge underpinning the AIM components of the DEI framework to determine best intercultural communication practices in managing diverse workplaces effectively.

2.4 The PESO (Paid, Earned, Shared, Owned) Model

The PESO model is the chosen framework for data collection in this study as it presents a comprehensive range of media that an organisation uses to communicate with its stakeholders. The data gathered about the seven AIM components from a media organisation's paid, earned, shared and owned media would reflect the organisation's DEI strategies in the workplace.

This study focuses on the DEI claims made by the three media organisations and other DEI elements found on their various communication platforms. The rationale for this is to assess organisational communication about their DEI practices. This approach is considered more objective than personally gathering management claims about DEI practices through interviews with selected employees. Also, the scale of such a study would not be feasible for research at this level.

The PESO model provides a complete range of media sources for accessing DEI practices being implemented within organisations. First introduced by Gini Dietrich, the PESO model categorises communication into paid, earned, shared and owned media (Dietrich, 2018). This model is widely used in communication research for source classification and by industry professionals (O'Neil & Eisenmann, 2017; Thabit, 2018). Paid media refers to promotional efforts involving financial transactions such as advertisements and sponsored content. Earned media alludes to publicity gained through non-paid efforts including media coverage and word-of-mouth. Shared media involves content distributed through social media platforms, where user engagement and sharing play a crucial role. Owned media includes content that an organisation creates and controls such as its website, blogs and social media channels.

There has been considerable debate about the efficacy of the PESO model for public relations practitioners. With the gradual increase in the social media platforms, Macnamara et al. (2016) predicted a shift in the media channels used for communication by organisations, from the traditional PESO to an SOEP (shared, owned, earned, paid) model. This shift implies a greater focus on shared media, followed by owned media, while reducing reliance on earned and paid media.

In the context of New Zealand, public relations professionals have placed the highest importance (88%) on social media channels to address their audience, with a significant number (77.6%) also valuing face-to-face communication as an important additional channel (Macnamara et al., 2017). Based on these findings, Martens (2020) argued that interpersonal communication, which is particularly significant in the New Zealand context, was overlooked by both the PESO and SOEP models. Consequently, a new model – PESOI -- was developed, where 'I' stands for 'Interpersonal' and included meetings, speeches and events. Martens (2020) noted that the traditional PESO model was flawed from a New Zealand perspective as it did not comprehensively reflect the communication channels prevalent in public relations

practice. While the role of interpersonal communication is vital in a dialogic exchange, this study is focused on the DEI contents on an organisation's communication platforms that can be accessed by external publics. As such, the PESO model is most suitable for the purpose of this study.

In using the PESO model, one aspect distinguishes media outlets from other organisations. The idea of owned, paid and earned media vary from traditional applications. For instance, media organisations often use their own platforms to publish stories or updates about themselves, which can be categorised as both owned and earned media since they have decided that their story is newsworthy for publication without advertising costs. While this content is created and controlled by the organisation (owned media), it also represents an opportunity cost, as the space used for self-promotion could have been sold for advertisements (paid media). This interlinked categorisation highlights the unique nature of media organisations, where the lines between different media types can blur.

2.5 Theoretical Foundation: Intercultural Communication Theories Underpinning the AIM Components

To better understand intercultural communication in the three media outlets in New Zealand, this study uses intercultural communication concepts to explain the seven DEI components of the AIM framework.

2.5.1 Leadership

According to the AIM, leadership refers to organisational support, action and strategic direction that is led by the top management (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.). Fraser et al. (2020) postulate that leadership is critical in driving organisational commitment to DEI while Agrawal et al. (2024) espouse that inclusive leadership can

enhance diversity management and boost organisational performance. In the AIM framework, the indicators of leadership in an organisation includes an overall strategic approach to diversity management and forward-thinking strategies to address workplace diversity.

The intercultural communication theory that informs the leadership component is Hofstede's theory of Cultural Dimensions which explains cross-cultural differences in organisations and defines national culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (Hofstede, 2001, p.9). The theory identifies six dimensions that compose national cultures: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede, 2011). Based on their definitions, three of these dimensions clearly demonstrate how cultural values influence leadership styles.

Applying Hofstede's concept of “national culture” in the New Zealand context is complex and needs to be justified. The concept was originally developed through research on IBM employees across multiple countries, where shared organisational values and behaviours were observed. Applying the concept to New Zealand is less straightforward as it is a nation with a society shaped by bi-cultural foundations and increasing multicultural diversity. New Zealand is founded on a partnership between Māori and the Crown, alongside the presence of multiple ethnic communities. This implies the lack of a singular “national culture.” Despite this, Hofstede's theory is useful for defining cultural values (see page 32) although he categorised these as “national identities”. This study does not employ Hofstede's dimensions to characterise New Zealand as culturally uniform. Instead, the framework is used to examine how organisational leadership practices reflect particular cultural value orientations. In this bounded application, Hofstede's dimensions remain useful for interpreting leadership behaviours without reducing cultural complexity to a single national identity.

Power Distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members of organisations accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2011). In cultures with high power distance, hierarchy is seen as natural and unquestionable, creating clear distinctions between leaders and subordinates. Here, leadership tends to be authoritative. In high power distance leadership, the reporting structure is hierarchical rather than flat or linear. Conversely, low power distance cultures favour participative leadership, where subordinates are consulted, and reporting structure is linear, fluid and negotiable. While power distance explains how authority and hierarchy shape leadership practices, leadership is also influenced by how organisations position individuals in relation to the collective. This relational orientation is captured through Hofstede's individualism - collectivism dimension.

Individualism versus Collectivism dimension refers to the extent to which individuals in a society are integrated into groups (Hofstede, 2011). Leaders in an individualistic culture promote autonomous decision-making and personal initiative. In contrast, collectivist culture emphasises group harmony and consensus, influencing leaders to prioritise team achievement over individual accolades.

Uncertainty Avoidance measures a society's tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty (Hofstede, 2011). In the leadership context, high uncertainty avoidance cultures would prefer structured environments and clear rules, leading leaders to adopt directive approaches. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures are more comfortable with ambiguity, allowing for flexible and adaptive leadership styles.

While Hofstede's model of Cultural Dimensions has been widely used in studies relating to the impact of cultural factors in organisational leadership (Escandon-Barbosa & Salas-Paramo, 2022; Kortsch et al., 2023), there are many critiques surrounding it as well. One of the most common criticisms is around Hofstede's

oversimplification of culture with its limited characterisation, and failure to account for its complexities by assuming cultural uniformity through a “national culture” (Baskerville, 2003; McSweeney, 2002). Hofstede, according to a critique, “overlooked the innate ‘fuzziness’ of culture” (Signorini et al., 2009). Additionally, the model’s reliance on datasets from a single multinational corporation has raised questions about its generalisation across different contexts (McSweeney, 2002). Another common criticism pointed out that this static model did not fully reflect the evolving nature of cultures (Signorini et al., 2009).

Despite these critiques, Hofstede's dimensions remain a fundamental reference point for its usefulness in examining how cultural values influence leadership behaviours, and they continue to be widely utilised by scholars and practitioners (Venkateswaran & Ojha, 2019). Research has demonstrated the framework’s effectiveness in shaping cross-border mergers and acquisitions, underscoring its ongoing relevance in multicultural organisational settings (Rozen-Bakher, 2018). Hofstede's model offers a structured framework that connects theory with practice, fostering both communication skills and cultural awareness that are essential for navigating a globalised workplace (Cong-Lem, 2025). It also aligns well with AIM's emphasis on culturally informed leadership accountability and vision. This organisational framing is further supported by the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004; 2013), which advances the concept of Culturally Endorsed Leadership Theory. Rather than treating culture as a fixed national attribute, GLOBE conceptualises culture as shaping shared expectations about what constitutes legitimate and effective leadership within specific contexts. Importantly, the framework distinguishes between societal cultural values and organisational leadership practices, acknowledging variation both within and across societies. This approach allows leadership to be examined as a socially constructed and context-dependent phenomenon, aligning closely with this study’s focus on how leadership commitment to DEI is communicated and represented

within organisational media discourse, rather than as an expression of a singular national culture.

2.5.2 Diversity Infrastructure

The DEI component of diversity infrastructure (DI) refers to the systems, policies, processes and interventions that an organisation puts in place to support the inclusion of diverse employees (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.).

Diversity infrastructure intersects with Edward T. Hall's (1976) High and Low Context Communication Theory. This theory classifies cultures based on how information is conveyed and interpreted. High context cultures rely heavily on implicit communication, non-verbal cues and shared understanding while low context cultures prefer explicit, direct communication where clarity and precision are emphasised. This distinction is particularly valuable in understanding how cultural norms shape communication styles and influence expectations (Cong-Lem, 2025). This distinction is reflected in the DEI policies and perspectives of organisations. For instance, high context cultures may rely more on informal mentorship networks, unwritten norms and embedding DEI practices through cultural celebrations and employee networks. In contrast, low context cultures might emphasise formalised policies, structured diversity training, transparent reporting mechanisms and clearly documented DEI interventions.

Despite the continued popularity of the high and low context communication theory, it has faced some critique. A meta-analysis revealed that many of its propositions lack empirical support, particularly those related to directness in communication (Cardon, 2008). Similarly, based on a systematic review of literature, inadequate evidence, inconsistencies, and limitations have been found in the classification of national cultures as high or low context (Kittler et al., 2011). However, by acknowledging its limitations and applying it thoughtfully, this model can still provide

a meaningful contribution to contemporary intercultural communication research in workplaces. In this study, the high and low context communication model is not used to categorise national cultures but to support the interpretation of organisational communication styles, specifically the degree to which meaning is communicated explicitly or implicitly within PESO media channels. This application is particularly relevant for analysing diversity infrastructure, where organisational commitments to inclusion may be conveyed through symbolic language, contextual cues or indirect framing rather than explicit statements. Used in this bounded and interpretive manner, Hall's framework provides a useful lens for examining how intercultural meaning is constructed and communicated within contemporary media organisations.

Another theory that informs diversity infrastructure is Linda Beamer's model of Intercultural Communication Process which she describes as a cyclical approach to learning intercultural communication competence (Beamer, 1992). The model comprises five key levels: a) acknowledging the existence of diverse cultural perspectives, b) organising new cultural information based on existing cultural stereotypes, c) posing questions to challenge these stereotypes to refine one's understanding and move beyond surface-level perceptions, d) analysing and interpreting intercultural exchanges, and e) generating culturally adaptive messages. This model aligns closely with the indicators of the diversity infrastructure component as it caters to the evolving nature of intercultural understanding in workplaces. For example, targeted DEI policies in a workplace first acknowledge the presence of diverse cultural groups, while cultural celebrations create spaces to challenge stereotypes and promote intercultural exchange. Additionally, periodic assessments of perceived diversity climate align with Beamer's emphasis on analysing communication episodes to refine intercultural exchanges.

2.5.3 Diverse Recruitment

Diverse recruitment (DR), as defined by the AIM, is organisational practices aimed at attracting candidates from a variety of backgrounds in order to create a workforce that better reflects the societal and demographic changes in New Zealand (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.).

To implement these practices effectively, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory provides a foundational framework. Among its six cultural dimensions, Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, and Uncertainty Avoidance are most relevant to explaining how recruitment processes can be adapted to meet the needs of a multicultural workforce. While cultural values impact the responses of applicants to recruitment messages, assessment methods and overall recruitment processes (Allen & Vardaman, 2017a), applying Hofstede's dimensions allows recruiters of organisations to design culturally sensitive job advertisements, unbiased interview processes, and an overall positive experience for applicants.

Power Distance: The extent to which less powerful members of society accept unequal power distribution directly impacts how recruitment structures are perceived. In cultures with low power distance, transparency and equity are crucial. Candidates can expect open communication with hiring managers and flat application structures. There is less hierarchical decision-making from the management perspective. Organisations also ensure bias prevention through structured interviews and blind hiring methods. For example, anonymised CV screening can reduce unconscious bias and demonstrate equity. There is existing research to suggest that New Zealand falls under a society with low power distance (Hofstede, 2001). In contrast, high power distance cultures may expect clearly defined roles and hierarchies during recruitment, where authority and respect for decision-makers are emphasised. High power distance

cultures also design more formal and structured recruitment processes (Allen & Vardaman, 2017a).

Individualism versus Collectivism: Some studies have proven that context-orientation can result in a wide range of behaviours (Yen et al., 2016), both from the recruiters and the job seekers. Based on Hofstede's theory of Cultural Dimensions, an organisation with an individualistic national culture would focus on an applicant's individual achievements, performance and the ability to thrive in a competitive environment, during a recruitment process. In contrast, a collectivist orientation will value a team player and someone adept in achieving group goals (Adamovic, 2022). It has also been studied that the recruitment method in collectivist cultures is informal, that is, based on word-of-mouth referrals, or other relationship focussed approaches where personal connections and social relationships play a key role.

Additionally, Hofstede et al. (2010) suggest that in individualistic cultures, hiring and promotion decisions are primarily based on skills and adherence to rules, with tasks taking precedence over relationships. Consequently, positive relationships with management and colleagues are considered less significant than job satisfaction.

Uncertainty Avoidance (UA): This dimension refers to a culture's tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty. In the context of Diverse Recruitment, it plays a critical role in shaping how hiring practices are perceived across cultural contexts. Jeanquart-Barone and Peluchette (1999) found that high UA cultures, such as Germany, tend to prefer formal recruitment systems that reduce unpredictability and increase fairness and trust. These may include structured interviews, defined selection criteria, and comprehensive onboarding. In contrast, low UA cultures like the US often tolerate ambiguity, embracing more flexible and informal hiring processes. Therefore, managers designing recruitment strategies in multicultural settings would need to align their processes with culturally informed expectations, particularly regarding bias

prevention and candidate experience design. Acknowledging UA enables organisations to attract and retain diverse talent more effectively by addressing different comfort levels with a well-designed recruitment structure.

In summary, these three dimensions - Power Distance, Individualism versus Collectivism and Uncertainty Avoidance - offer insights into the intercultural sensitivities involved in Diverse Recruitment. Therefore, by training recruitment managers in these dimensions, organisations can reduce cultural barriers, enhance candidate experiences and build an inclusive workforce.

2.5.4 Inclusive Career Development

As a DEI component, inclusive career development (ICD) concerns how organisations contribute to the fair and equitable experience of its people belonging to non-dominant groups. It includes various factors such as induction, promotion, remuneration, and professional development (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.).

The Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory (Gudykunst, 1995) provides a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics of ICD. Gudykunst started developing this theory since 1985, and its integrated version with a focus on intercultural communication competence was reached only in 1995 and was called AUM Theory. In the process of developing the theory, Gudykunst constructed 94 axioms, in two phases, to connect the concepts of uncertainty, anxiety and mindfulness. The theory posits that managing uncertainty and anxiety is necessary for effective intercultural communication. The theory suggests that the primary factor influencing the process of intercultural adjustment is the ability of “strangers” to manage their uncertainty and anxiety in the host culture. By effectively managing these feelings, “strangers” can achieve a sense of comfort in the new cultural environment (Gudykunst, 1998).

Uncertainty is a common global phenomenon in international encounters. According to the AUM Theory, uncertainty is a cognitive state where individuals face difficulties in predicting and understanding events and behaviours, while anxiety is an emotional state characterised by feelings of unease and tension. If uncertainty and anxiety are excessively high, individuals cannot function effectively. Conversely, if these levels are too low, they lack the motivation to engage in interactions. Therefore, achieving optimal levels of uncertainty and anxiety is essential for effective communication in intercultural interactions (Gudykunst, 1995).

In the context of inclusive career development, this theory underscores the importance of creating organisational environments conducive for professional growth, for employees from diverse backgrounds. Such an environment helps shift the focus from anxiety to equitable access to career progression. Gudykunst's (1998) illustration of the use of the AUM theory to design training programmes to improve communication and adjustment of employees to a new culture is highly relevant to inclusive career development's indicators of equitable access to training and an organisational culture of development programmes.

There is existing research to suggest that the AUM theory addresses the "awkwardness to act" in cross-cultural settings, emphasising the need for cultural sensitivity training to enhance employees' intercultural competence (Keizer-Remmers et al., 2021), and its impact on improving relational outcomes in organisation-public relationships (OPR) (Ni & Wang, 2011). These point to the management of anxiety and uncertainty for employees in a new cultural setting, which can be achieved through the ICD indicators of diverse mentoring programmes and training. Ismail (2015) further supports this by illustrating how AUM theory, when combined with social capital, facilitates knowledge transfer between expatriates and host country nationals. He argues that the reduction of anxiety and uncertainty enables more open and trust-based interactions, which in turn encourages the sharing of knowledge and

professional guidance or mentoring. This process significantly enhances career development opportunities, particularly for culturally diverse employees who might otherwise lack access to informal support networks.

Ismail (2015) identifies knowledge transfer as a fundamental element of knowledge management and broader organisational development. According to him, knowledge transfer is not merely about sharing skills but strengthening social capital and fostering trust between culturally diverse employees. Such an exchange promotes learning across the organisation, enhances mutual understanding and creates equitable access to knowledge. This aligns closely with the inclusive organisational culture indicated under ICD. These insights collectively justify the application of AUM theory to the Inclusive Career Development component of the AIM, as it underscores the importance of managing uncertainty and anxiety, in cross-cultural interaction, to foster a supportive and inclusive career growth environment.

Despite its contributions, the AUM theory has faced several critiques over the years. Ting-Toomey (2012) pointed out five conceptual issues with the theory: the need for motivational factors and host-side variables in the uncertainty reduction process, the lack of focus on relational changes, the necessity for research on dyadic reciprocity, the integration of more contextual dimensions, and the presence of Western-based ideologies in the concept of intimacy. Griffin (1997) criticised the theory for its form. According to him, it caused complication and confusion with 94 existing axioms, and the additional danger of a possible expansion of axioms with an increase in cultural variability. Yoshitake (2002) critiqued the AUM theory for not sufficiently prioritising effective communication, relying too heavily on the concept of consciousness, and constructing axioms with a Western cultural bias. Despite these criticisms, AUM theory remains applicable and appropriate for underpinning the Inclusive Career Development (ICD) component of the AIM because it provides a comprehensive understanding of uncertainty and anxiety management that employees

from diverse cultural backgrounds may experience in the workplace. By addressing these emotional and psychological challenges, organisations can create a supportive environment that fosters career growth and development for all employees.

2.5.5 Bi-culturalism

Bi-culturalism (BC), as outlined within the AIM framework, refers to the deliberate and respectful integration of Māori and non-Māori worldviews in Aotearoa New Zealand workplaces. It recognises the partnership with Māori and its values, and how these have shaped the country and given it a unique identity (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.).

The suggested intercultural communication theory that informs this AIM component is the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1986). DMIS outlines a continuum of six stages - Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration - through which individuals progress in their sensitivity to cultural differences. The model transitions from ethnocentric stages, where one's own culture is central, to ethnorelative stages, where cultures are understood in relation to each other. This model is particularly relevant in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, where the co-existence of Māori and non-Māori worldviews in workplaces is essential.

Despite its strengths, the DMIS has faced some critiques. Hansen (2020) explores the complexities of multiculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand, highlighting the tensions between government-led narratives of social harmony and the lived experiences of culturally diverse communities. Hansen's ethnographic study reveals that while official discourses often portray New Zealand as a harmonious and tolerant nation, the reality is more fragmented and multi-faceted. This aligns with Bennett's DMIS by emphasising the need for organisations to move beyond superficial

understandings of cultural diversity and engage deeply with the nuanced experiences of multicultural communities. The study underscores the importance of progressing through the stages of intercultural sensitivity to achieve genuine ethnorelative perspectives, which are crucial for fostering an inclusive and respectful workplace environment.

DMIS has been effectively applied in workplace contexts to assess and enhance intercultural sensitivity. The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), based on DMIS, has been utilised to measure intercultural sensitivity among employees, facilitating targeted interventions to promote cultural competence (Hammer et al., 2003). Such applications align with the indicators of bi-culturalism, as they support the development of organisational practices that respect and integrate diverse cultural perspectives.

The DMIS has also been critiqued for not fully capturing the non-linear and fluctuating nature of intercultural sensitivity development. Past research has found that learners often moved inconsistently between ethnocentric and ethnorelative stages, challenging the linear progression suggested by DMIS (Garrett-Rucks, 2014; Hammer et al., 2003). A potential for cultural bias in the model is also noted. As the model was primarily developed within a Western context it may not adequately account for the ways in which cultural differences are perceived and managed in non-Western societies (Hammer et al., 2003). This limitation raises concerns about the universality of the DMIS and its effectiveness in diverse cultural settings. However, despite these criticisms, DMIS presents a reasonable perspective for understanding and enhancing intercultural competence. Its structured approach provides a clear framework for organisations to assess and improve their cultural sensitivity, making it highly relevant for research on intercultural communication and diversity in Aotearoa workplaces.

2.5.6 Inclusive Collaboration

Inclusive collaboration is the practice of fostering a work environment where diverse perspectives are valued, and all team members are encouraged to contribute equitably (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.).

Two intercultural communication theories inform this component - High and Low Context Communication Theory (Hall, 1976) and the Face Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988). Hall's theory has been used previously to underpin the AIM component of Diversity Infrastructure. This theory is equally relevant for understanding how diverse teams can navigate communication differences to foster inclusive collaboration. For instance, initiatives on communication styles and diverse collaboration can benefit from recognising these cultural differences, ensuring that all team members feel understood and valued.

The Face Negotiation Theory (FNT) provides another valuable framework for inclusive collaboration. This theory explores how individuals from different cultures manage conflict and maintain their self-image, or "face," during interactions. In a diverse workplace, understanding facework can help in designing relational bridges and interventions that respect and uphold the dignity of all employees.

The updated FNT (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) provides a valuable lens for understanding inclusive collaboration in multicultural workplaces. This updated version reframes the theory from a descriptive model to a more applied framework. The theory emphasises facework competence, which involves effectively managing one's own and others' face concerns in intercultural conflict through the integration of cultural knowledge, mindfulness and interaction skills. In diverse work environments, where collaboration often involves navigating differing communication styles and cultural expectations, FNT offers practical strategies for reducing misunderstandings and

promoting equity. Training employees in facework competence has been shown to enhance mutual respect and cooperative problem-solving, reinforcing a culture of inclusion. By encouraging mindfulness, knowledge and interaction skills, FNT aligns with inclusive practices such as culturally responsive communication training and collaborative conflict resolution strategies (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998).

2.5.7 Social Impact

Social impact (SI) focuses on how organisations extend their internal DEI values into wider society through external engagement. These include identifying organisational impacts on employees, customers, stakeholders, as well as the external environment (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.). To underpin this component, the study draws on the Social Ecological Framework (SEF) as adapted by John G. Oetzel from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. Originally developed to understand human development across nested environments, SEF was reframed by Oetzel to study intercultural conflict communication. He identified four interrelated levels of environmental influence: interpersonal, organisational, community, and international (Oetzel et al., 2007). These levels shape both the communication processes and broader structural outcomes of intercultural engagement. Therefore, SEF clearly underpins social impact which incorporates both internal organisational DEI messaging and its effect on external audiences, stakeholders, and society at large. More recently, Purdie-Greenaway and Turetsky (2020) applied the socio-ecological model to understand inclusion within diverse social groups. It studied how environmental factors at different structural levels shape the experience of social groups. These studies reinforce SEF's relevance to intercultural communication. In the context of this study, SEF offers a valuable lens to analyse how media organisations in New Zealand engage in socially impactful DEI practices. Social Impact includes partnerships with external communities, public advocacy for underrepresented groups and culturally responsive content. SEF helps in a structured understanding of how

these practices emerge from interpersonal convictions, are formalised through organisational infrastructure, gain traction through community relationships, and respond to broader national and global shifts in DEI discourse. It also outlines the interrelatedness of social levels where decisions at organisational levels can have a positive or negative social impact on employees and the communal units of society.

2.5.8 Summary of the AIM Components and their Corresponding Intercultural Communication Theories

Table 1 shows the theoretical framework of this study. Each of the seven AIM components is supported by an intercultural communication theory or concept. As explained in the preceding sections, these intercultural communication concepts and theories inform AIM’s DEI components such as cultural dimensions in leadership practices and communication preferences for high and low context cultures that have an impact on diversity infrastructure.

Table 1: Intercultural communication (IC) theories underpinning the DEI components

DEI Component	IC Theory
Leadership	Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions theory
Diversity Infrastructure	Hall’s High and Low Context Communication theory & Linda Beamer’s Intercultural Communication Process Model
Diverse Recruitment	Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions theory
Inclusive Career Development	Gudykunst’s Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory
Bi-Culturalism	Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

Inclusive Collaboration	Hall's High and Low Context Communication theory & Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation theory
Social Impact	Oetzel's Social Ecological Framework (SEF)

The concept of cultural dimensions is also used to examine diverse recruitment, where cultural orientations influence recruitment strategy and values alignment. Managing uncertainty secures the growth environment for employees, thereby fostering inclusive career development. A deeper intercultural sensitivity with a shift from narrow cultural views to appreciating diverse ways of thinking and working, helps in understanding bi-culturalism.

Using communication context and face-sensitive communication in team dynamics, helps examine inclusive collaboration. Finally, examining how inclusive and equitable practices are communicated and adopted in both organisations and society, gives an understanding of their social impact.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed DEI in New Zealand, the historical development of IC and its DEI underpinnings. It has also covered global and local DEI guidelines available to organisations in NZ and explained the rationale for the AIM framework. This chapter also introduced the PESO model for data collection and thematic analysis as the methodology for data analysis. Most importantly, by aligning each of the seven AIM components with the relevant intercultural communication theories, this chapter has made a case for the intercultural communication theory-informed model of DEI components within the AIM framework. This connection bridges the gap between practice and theory, allowing for a deeper evaluation of how New Zealand media

organisations reflect intercultural communication best practices through their DEI initiatives.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0 Overview

This chapter outlines the methodological approach to investigate the research question for the three media organisations Stuff, NZME and TVNZ:

RQ. What are the best practices in intercultural communication that support DEI in the three New Zealand media organisations?

The established link between the seven DEI components from the AIM framework and the corresponding intercultural communication theories (see Chapter Two, Section 2.5), serves as the basis for analysing the intercultural communication knowledge that underpins the DEI practices in the three media outlets. The methodology demonstrates how the research inquiry is grounded in a structured coding process, ensuring that the method supports the aim of the study.

The chapter is structured into seven sections. It begins with a section on the sampling method which outlines the rationale for choosing the three media organisations and their suitability for this study. The second section is data description which introduces the nature and scope of the data, describing the type of data used, its sources, the time span selected for data collection, and also the ethical considerations. The third section explains the data collection procedure, with a focus on how Newztext – a New Zealand media database – and the PESO model are used to guide data gathering across media types, and it also lists some limitations. The fourth section is research design and demonstration of coding. This section outlines the study's methodological approach of qualitative research and thematic analysis, followed by a demonstration of the coding process offering a worked example using data from one of the media organisations to show how themes and indicators are applied in practice. The fifth section is data presentation which gives an overview of the findings for one

media outlet as an example. The section after this explains the validity and reliability of the findings and the final section concludes with a summary of the chapter.

3.1 Sampling Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach to evaluate the best practices in intercultural communication across three New Zealand media organisations. A systematic review by Luo and Chan (2022) illustrates that in the assessment of intercultural competence, particularly in higher education settings, qualitative methods dominate, with writing-based assessments, thematic analysis and narrative reflection primarily used for data collection and interpretation. This pattern is further corroborated by Aneas and Sandín (2009), who argue that qualitative methods are best suited to understanding the complexity of cultural dynamics.

In qualitative research, sampling is the intentional selection of cases that can offer meaningful insights into the research question (Guetterman, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). The study uses a combination of purposive and convenience sampling strategies. Purposive sampling involves selecting cases based on their relevance to the research objectives and their potential to yield rich, contextualised data (Etikan, 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). In the context of this research, purposive sampling focussed on identifying well-known local media outlets with different ownership structures and varied communication channels.

TVNZ is a state-owned entity, NZME is a shareholder-owned media company, while Stuff is independently-owned (AUT Research Centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD), 2024). These outlets collectively provide diverse institutional contexts for comparison. Convenience sampling complements this by prioritising organisations that consistently publish external content across multiple PESO

channels. The accessibility of their communication outputs, ranging from annual reports and press releases to social media posts and sponsored campaigns, ensure that a sufficient volume of data representative of these organisations can be gathered. This is particularly suitable for a document-based, exploratory study reliant on publicly available material.

In addition, the decision to include media organisations with different ownership structures is supported by UNESCO's view that diversity in media ownership structures contributes to the diversity of sources and perspectives across a range of media outlets (UNESCO, n.d.). By sampling from state-owned, shareholder-owned and independently owned media, this study is better positioned to capture a broader spectrum of intercultural communication practices across New Zealand's media industry.

3.1.1 Positionality and Rationale of the Research

I come from a society widely recognised for its extensive cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity - India. Growing up and working in India involved routine engagement with people from different regions, languages, and cultural traditions, making intercultural interaction a normalised part of everyday social and professional life. Scholarship frequently characterises India as one of the most culturally plural societies in the world, where diversity is embedded within a shared national framework (Parekh, 2001; Ray & Singh, 2015). While navigating cultural differences across regions and communities presented challenges. Interactions largely occurred within a single national context, where a shared national identity provided a unifying reference point.

After coming to New Zealand, I encountered a qualitatively different intercultural environment. Intercultural communication in New Zealand operates within a

foundational bi-cultural context grounded in the relationship between Māori and Pākehā, alongside increasing cultural diversity shaped by sustained immigration. In this setting, intercultural encounters more frequently involve individuals from distinct national, cultural, and migratory backgrounds. I experienced this shift as a compounding of intercultural complexity, where differences were no longer primarily intra-national but increasingly transnational. This transition prompted a deeper interest in examining how cultural assumptions, power relations, and belonging are negotiated within institutional and organisational contexts.

My professional background in media and communications further informed the rationale for focusing this study on media organisations. Having worked within media production environments, I approached media institutions as influential networks where intercultural meanings are constructed, legitimised, and circulated through organisational practices, editorial decisions, and representational frameworks. This professional experience shaped the selection of media organisations as research data and guided attention toward organisational intent, institutional culture, and the operationalisation of diversity, equity, and inclusion within media settings.

In qualitative research, particularly when employing thematic analysis, the researcher functions as an interpretive instrument rather than a detached observer. My cultural background, professional experience, and theoretical orientation inevitably shaped decisions related to data selection, coding, and theme development. Explicit acknowledgement of positionality enhances transparency by making visible the interpretive lenses through which data is examined and by enabling readers to assess how meaning is constructed within the analysis (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Reflexivity — understood as the continuous and critical examination of one's assumptions, values, and interpretive choices — is widely recognised as central to rigour and ethical practice in qualitative inquiry, particularly in research examining culturally situated phenomena such as diversity, equity, and inclusion (Corlett & Mavin, 2018; Yip, 2024). Accordingly,

throughout this study, I engaged in ongoing reflexive practice, documenting interpretive decisions and theoretical assumptions such as while identifying a data item as negative or positive, to strengthen the credibility, transparency, and trustworthiness of the findings.

3.2 Data Description

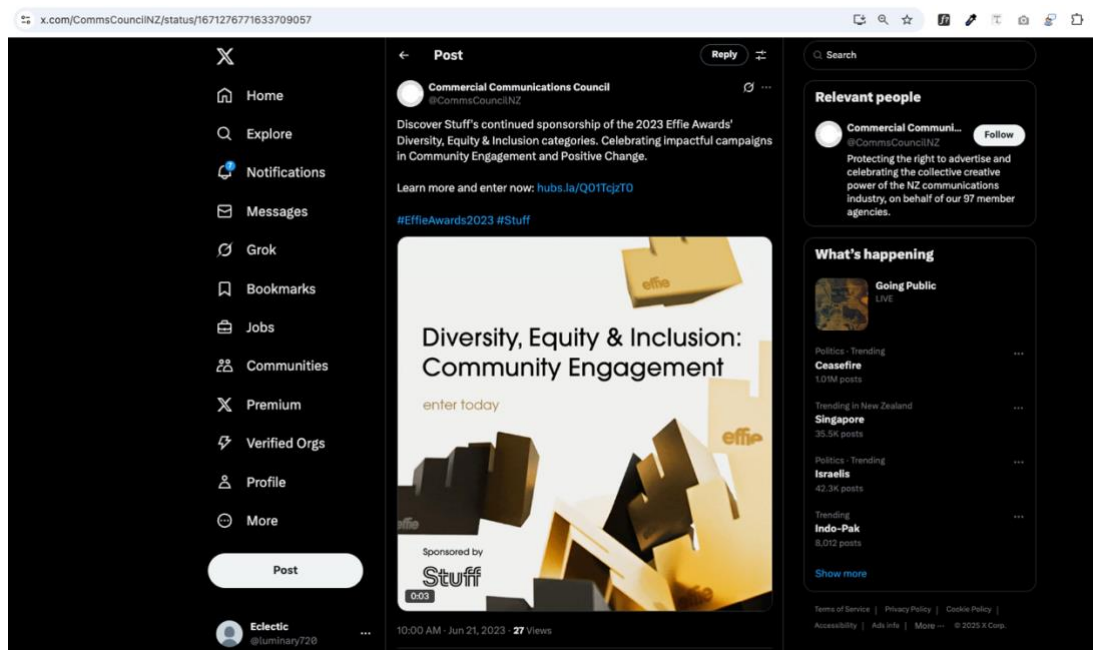
This section outlines the type, scope and rationale of the data used. Secondary data, sourced from publicly available organisational communication material, is a recognised and valuable approach in qualitative inquiry when studying institutions, particularly where access to internal processes is limited (Smith, 2008). This document-based research has been widely used in organisational, media, and intercultural communication studies where discourse and representation are key areas of analysis. It allows for unobtrusive and insightful understanding of how organisations present themselves to the public and frame their internal values (Corti et al., 2005; Mogalakwe, 2006). This is particularly important in studies that seek to interpret institutional narratives, as it offers a window into how organisations publicly represent their internal commitments.

Despite the limitations in the use of secondary data, such as the absence of first-hand contextual understanding, reduced control over how the data was originally collected, and the inability to seek clarification from data producers (Corti et al., 2005; Hammersley, 1997; Heaton, 2004), the communication materials analysed are strategically created to target public readership. This makes them reliable and credible sources for qualitative analysis that is focussed on inferring organisational DEI values from their public narratives. Additionally, as these sources are publicly accessible, their inclusion in the research does not raise any ethical concerns regarding data usage or consent.

Paid media is the sponsored content on external or third-party platforms that an organisation invests in financially, to communicate its message. This could include social media posts, posters or banners, news articles, or blogs.

Figure 2 shows an example of paid media as it refers to Stuff's sponsorship of the DEI category at the 2023 Effie Awards. The post is published by the Commercial Communications Council, on its social media account on X, who is also the organiser of the event. Therefore, this post forms part of the sponsorship deliverables by Stuff.

Figure 2: X (formerly Twitter) post by Commercial Communications Council on Stuff's sponsorship



(Commercial Communications Council [@CommsCouncilNZ], 2023)

Earned media (Figure 3) refers to exposure gained through third-party endorsements without direct payment. This includes media coverage, influencer mentions, positive reviews and user-generated content. It is achieved by building relationships and delivering compelling narratives that others find worthy of sharing.

Figure 3: Article by StopPress on Stuff's sponsorship at Effie awards

Stuff sponsors 2023 Effie Awards Diversity, Equity and Inclusion categories

S By STOPPRESS TEAM — June 21, 2023



The Comms Council has announced Stuff's continued sponsorship of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion categories at the 2023 Effie Awards.

To better recognise work in this important area, two awards will be given in 2023: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion – Community Engagement and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion – Positive Change.

The Diversity, Equity & Inclusion – Community Engagement category celebrates campaigns that have successfully and authentically connected with specific cultural, ethnic, or underrepresented groups and communities. This category celebrates campaigns that have forged meaningful connections and achieved outstanding results by engaging targeted audiences. Entrants are encouraged to highlight the outcomes for the specific community and showcase the creative elements and strategic approaches tailored to engage the community authentically.

The Diversity, Equity & Inclusion – Positive Change category recognises campaigns with objectives designed to have a positive impact on society, people, and the planet. This category welcomes initiatives and campaigns that tackle issues such as inequality, poverty, prejudice, or disabilities. Successful entries will demonstrate measurable shifts in audience behaviour towards better choices and the integration of relevant socially-aware messaging into marketing communications.

Stuff's sponsorship of both the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion – Community Engagement and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion – Positive Change categories reflects the company's unwavering commitment to driving positive change within the industry. By recognising and honouring campaigns that authentically engage with diverse communities and address critical social issues, Stuff contributes to fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

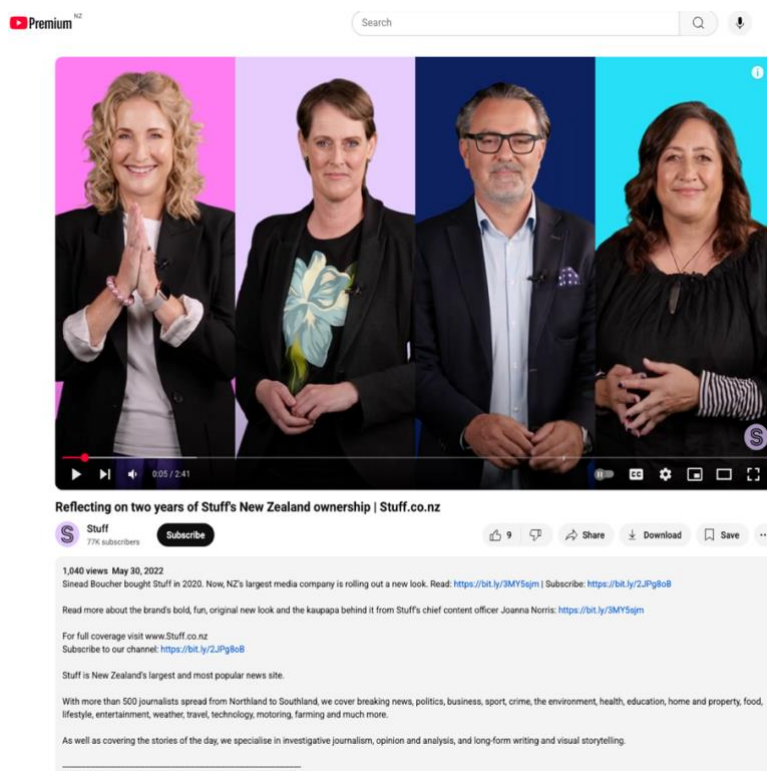
(StopPress Team, 2023)

This earned media example in Figure 3 relates to the same topic as the paid media data in Figure 3. However, this article published by StopPress is categorised as earned media since it originates from an independent industry outlet providing editorial

coverage on its own website without Stuff's direct control, reflecting third-party recognition.

Shared media is the content distributed by an organisation through its social platforms and community engagement. This type of media thrives on audience participation and incorporates a two-way communication channel. This includes platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, X, LinkedIn, Seek and Reddit. The shared media item in Figure 4 is a corporate video published by Stuff on its YouTube account, which is a third-party social platform that allows public engagement.

Figure 4: Stuff's corporate video on its YouTube channel



(Stuff, 2022b)

Owned media consists of content and platforms that the organisation fully controls. It includes the company's website and owned communication channels. The types of content include annual reports, DEI related documents, blogs, news articles, press releases and corporate videos. It serves as the foundation for the brand's

messaging and allows for consistent and direct communication with its audience. However, this content is a one-way communication and does not allow public engagement. Stuff's annual Impact Report falls under owned media (see Figure 5) as it is produced and distributed directly by the organisation through its official website, representing the organisation's voice, values, and strategic communication without external mediation.

Figure 5: Stuff's annual Impact Report



(Stuff, 2023a)

The data collection period for this study spans from January 2021 to March 2025. While the Aotearoa Inclusivity Matrix (AIM) was officially launched in May 2021 (Diversity Works New Zealand, 2022), the communications from early 2021 are considered relevant for analysis as DEI had already gained traction as a recognised and urgent workplace priority. For instance, in January 2021, Stuff published an

opinion piece, on its own news website, by one of its journalists narrating personal challenges of ethnic diversity (see Figure 6). This is a clear reflection of workplace DEI values of Stuff and suggests efforts being made by media organisations in New Zealand, in early 2021, to generate conversations around DEI issues.

Figure 6: Opinion piece on ethnic diversity by a Stuff journalist

Do we really want 'diversity' if we expect ethnic Kiwis to lose their culture?

Jehan Casinader

January 31, 2021 · 5:00am

→ Share



Jehan Casinader.
MIKE HEYDON / SUPPLIED

There's no point promoting diversity if we expect people to sacrifice their cultural identity, writes Jehan Casinader.

The other day, a woman approached me on the street and started chatting about a story I had written. It was a delightful conversation. As she walked away, she said, "By the way, you speak such good English. Where were you born?"

I'm pretty sure my brown eyes turned jet black. But I offered a weak smile and said, "Oh, thank you. I was born in Lower Hutt!"

That simple exchange has been repeated throughout my life. Each time, I wonder: "But what if I didn't speak such good English? What if I didn't speak English at all? Would you still like me? Would I still be welcome?"

Note. Owned media on Stuff's news website (Casinader, 2021)

Setting the outer limit for data collection to March 2025 ensures inclusion of the most recent and relevant data available at the time of writing this thesis. This time frame, from 2021 to 2025, allows the study to observe how DEI and intercultural communication-related practices have evolved across the selected media organisations.

3.3 Data Collection

The primary method of data collection involves sourcing content from publicly accessible platforms. The data collected for this study span a variety of channels that reflect how organisations communicate with their stakeholders. The term 'dataset' is used for the complete collection of communication material identified for a single organisation, relating to the seven DEI components as outlined by the AIM framework. A collection of individual 'data items' comprising press releases, news articles, advertisements, website content etc. form a dataset.

The final dataset for Stuff consists of 65 data items, while NZME has 184, and TVNZ has 99. These include annual reports, survey summaries, and job advertisements, which provide insights into organisational priorities and staffing practices. News articles and corporate videos, including employee interviews and leadership messages, demonstrate how inclusion is communicated through visual and spoken formats. Social media posts offer examples of public engagement and cultural messaging, while official website content, such as 'About Us' sections, blogs and DEI statements, help capture each organisation's expressed identity and values.

In identifying all the DEI practices and intercultural communication-related content for the three chosen media organisations, the data collection process involves several steps which are replicated for each organisation.

Since PESO involved all communication channels, in the first part of the data collection Google was used as a convenient search tool. The following list of search phrases was first used for Stuff, and the same search words were applied to the other two media outlets:

Stuff NZ – diversity equity inclusion DEI

Stuff NZ – leadership/management/CEO on diversity and inclusion

Stuff NZ – events/campaigns on DEI diversity inclusion

Stuff NZ – press release on diversity inclusion DEI

Stuff NZ – intercultural communication

Stuff NZ – recruitment diversity inclusion DEI

Stuff NZ – inclusive/diverse career development

Stuff NZ – bi-culturalism/Māori inclusion

Stuff NZ – inclusive diversity collaboration

Stuff NZ – diversity collaboration

Stuff NZ – social impact of diversity inclusion

This search included keywords for all the AIM components. However, in order to limit the scope of items found under each search, only items in the first 10 pages of the search were collected.

Next, to maximise search results, the name of each organisation was typed along with the potential indicators for each DEI component as given in the AIM framework (see Appendices 1-4). For example, the search words keyed in were “Stuff – strategic approach to diversity management,” “Stuff – cultural celebrations” etc.

To ensure that no media coverage (earned media) is overlooked, the Newztext database was additionally used. As part of ‘The Knowledge Basket’ databases, Newztext represents New Zealand’s largest digital repository of print news (Phillips, 2023; The Knowledge Basket, n.d.). For the study, a combined search called Newztext Plus was used to search for relevant content across newspapers, magazines, TNS reports, indexes and newswires. On the Newztext search page, under the heading named ‘first search’ the words ‘DEI, diversity, equity, inclusion’ were entered. ‘Stuff NZ’

was added as a required term under 'additional search terms'. The date for the search was limited to '1 Jan 2021 to 31 Mar 2025' and the preference for sorting the results was selected to 'score.' This meant that the closer the match of the search words in a document, the higher the score of the document, making it most relevant to the research. Therefore, the document with the maximum matches to the search words appeared at the top of the search list. Based on these search parameters, Stuff matched 35397 documents, NZME matched 510 documents and TVNZ matched 695 documents in the Newztext database. However, to make the scope feasible for a master's thesis, only the top 100 matches were taken into consideration. On average, the topmost articles for each organisation presented a score of 46, and the hundredth article was at a score of 23, ensuring the relevance of the selected data for analysis.

In the results found on the Newztext database, there were many duplication of articles. For instance, out of the top 100 results for Stuff there were 25 duplicate items. This was a result of syndication across publications where a single article was published in multiple newspapers or regional editions owned by the same parent company without a change in content, and each instance was indexed separately. Secondly, many of the top 100 articles held no relevance to the study. Although such studies included elements of DEI, Stuff's DEI principles were not found in them. For example, an article in the Sunday Star Times on a coalition of US civil rights groups urging Fortune 1000 companies to uphold their DEI commitments amid legal challenges (Stuff Limited, 2024), or an article by The Press about the appointment of new district court judges in New Zealand reflecting an increase in the diversity of the District Court (Stuff Limited, 2021) are not relevant to the study. Even though the articles are published by Stuff Ltd, through its owned news channels, and mention elements of DEI, they are contextually irrelevant to the study.

While most of the relevant results from the Newztext search matched the data collected by the researcher through Google search, there were instances of new

articles found. For example, an article published by NZME's regional newspaper – Whanganui Chronicle – about the organisation's Te Rito Journalism Project winning the International News Media Association (INMA) Award was a new article found in the Newztext database. Google search did identify data relating to this initiative aimed at increasing diversity in the newsrooms of Aotearoa, but this specific data item from the Whanganui Chronicle did not appear in the top 10 pages of the search.

In contrast, there were instances where Google search yielded data not present in the Newztext database. For example, an article published by StopPress about Stuff's sponsorship of the DEI category at the 2023 Effie Awards (StopPress, 2023) appeared in Google search but was missing from Newztext. This discrepancy was the result of StopPress being a digital-only platform operating independently of the mainstream news sources covered by Newztext.

Overall, Google and Newztext have been used in combination to enhance the thoroughness of the data collection process. While the Newztext database returned several duplicate and irrelevant results, it also revealed some unique items that were not captured through Google. Conversely, certain relevant articles found via Google were missing from the Newztext database. The data overlap between both the search tools confirmed the reliability of the data, while their unique data resource enabled the discovery of additional relevant sources. Together, this dual search strategy ensured a comprehensive and inclusive dataset for analysis.

During the data identification and collection process, each relevant item was categorised according to one of the four PESO media types. Up to this point in the search process, all data collected fell within the categories of paid, earned or owned media. To ensure a comprehensive inclusion of owned media, additional searches were conducted to access the company's annual reports, careers page, blogs, mission statement, press releases and other DEI-related organisational statements and

policies. These were accessed primarily through the official websites of the media organisations under study. While the corporate websites of NZME (<https://www.nzme.co.nz/>) and TVNZ (<https://corporate.tvnz.co.nz/>) provided direct access to the required content, Stuff's official website (<https://www.stuff.co.nz/>) did not include its annual reports. Consequently, a separate Google search for 'Stuff – annual report' was conducted and the reports were found on a microsite hosted by Stuff.

As the Newztext database does not include data from social media, data collection for shared media was conducted directly through the organisations' social media accounts by manually reviewing individual posts. The most widely used and publicly accessible platforms were selected – Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) – as these serve as primary channels for organisational outreach and public engagement. Additionally, LinkedIn and Seek were incorporated to capture job-related communications, which reflect how the organisation presents itself as an inclusive employer and attracts diverse talent.

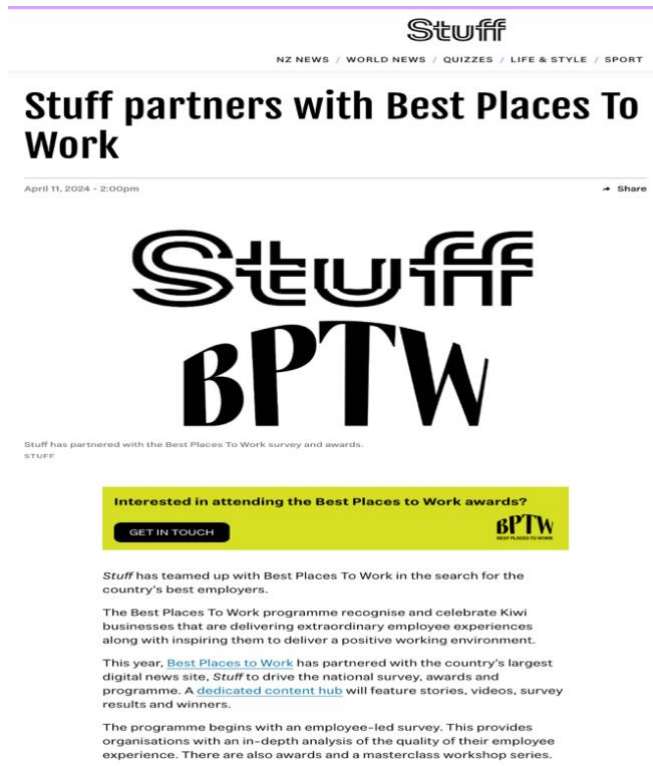
Initial access to these social media platforms was gained through hyperlinks provided on each organisation's official website. However, in cases where the links predominantly led to editorial content or programming promotion rather than communication reflecting organisational values, a manual search was conducted within the relevant platforms to identify DEI-relevant material. For instance, although Stuff's website provided links to its Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, the content found there focussed primarily on news, lifestyle features, and podcast content, which fell outside the scope of this study. A supplementary search on Facebook yielded similar results, with posts largely comprising news stories and limited organisational communication beyond 2023. X was also reviewed but the content there similarly centred on news updates. Moreover, Stuff formally announced its withdrawal from X in 2023 (Stuff Reporters, 2023), rendering the platform no longer relevant for the purposes of this study. In contrast, LinkedIn proved to be the most active and informative platform for

Stuff, providing regular updates on internal developments, employee engagement, and organisational milestones. Seek was also a key source, comprising the company's most recent job advertisements. Accordingly, all DEI-relevant shared media content for Stuff was sourced from LinkedIn and Seek.

During data categorisation under the PESO model, one clear distinction is made with regard to DEI or intercultural communication-related content mentioned in organisational summaries and job ads between external job portals and the organisation's own official website. The external job portals such as LinkedIn and Seek are categorised as shared media as they are open to public interaction, while the 'careers' page of the organisations' official website is marked as owned media as it allows only one-way communication.

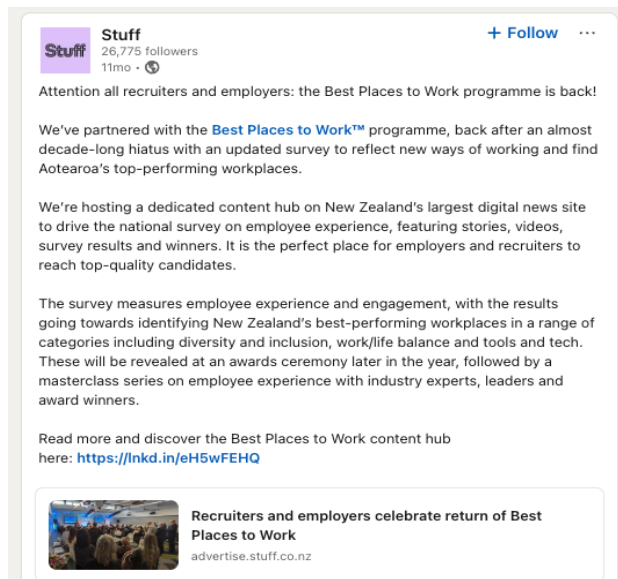
Additionally, during data collection when the same organisational initiative or topic appears across multiple platforms, such as a DEI-related initiative mentioned on a social media platform and on the organisation's own website, each occurrence is treated as a distinct data item. For example, Figure 7 presents content sourced from Stuff's news website, classifying it as owned media. The content refers to Stuff's partnership with the Best Places To Work programme, which recognises organisations that foster extraordinary employee experience and positive workplace environments. In contrast, Figure 8 presents the same initiative but is drawn from Stuff's LinkedIn account, and therefore is categorised as shared media.

Figure 7: Owned media of Stuff's partnership with Best Places to Work



(Stuff, 2024b).

Figure 8: Shared media of Stuff's partnership with Best Places To Work



(Stuff, 2024a).

In cases where the same event recurs over multiple years, like annual cultural celebrations or annual reports, each year's mention is included as a distinct entry to

allow for tracking over time. This aligns with the understanding that documents are context-dependent and can convey different meanings across platforms or time periods (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2008).

Overall, these sources collectively offer a window into how intercultural communication and DEI practices may be inferred through the organisations' public communication across diverse platforms.

3.3.1 Limitations in data collection

Despite a structured approach employed for data collection, the researcher acknowledges certain practical limitations that may affect the scope of the dataset. Firstly, this study focuses on publicly available communication outputs. Internal communication materials of the selected organisations, such as staff emails, intranet posts or internal newsletters, are excluded from the scope of the research. This restriction may exclude some internal intercultural communication practices not reflected in the organisational external content.

Secondly, although a structured framework guides data selection, there remains a possibility of human oversight in identifying all relevant material, especially across dynamic platforms like the social media. Thirdly, access to job advertisements is constrained by the short visibility window typically available on platforms such as Seek, LinkedIn and the careers page on the organisations' official websites. As a result, only the job postings available during the final month of the data collection period are included, across all three organisations.

Although these limitations narrow the scope of data collection, they do not diminish the overall value of the findings. A substantial number of data items was collected, showing the efforts of all three media organisations to publicly communicate

their DEI commitments, and thereby their inferred intercultural communication practices.

3.4 Research Design and Demonstration of Coding

To evaluate the intercultural communication practices of the three selected media organisations, this study adopts thematic analysis as its primary analytical method. Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative technique used to identify, analyse and interpret patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Its adaptability makes it particularly well suited for analysing publicly available media texts, where meanings are often implicit, strategically framed, or embedded within organisational narratives. By enabling the researcher to move beyond surface observations and engage with underlying meanings, thematic analysis is especially suitable for examining the publicly available communication related to intercultural communication of the three media outlets.

This study follows a theory-driven approach to thematic analysis, guided by the seven components of the AIM framework and their corresponding intercultural communication theories. Rather than generating themes inductively from the data alone, the analysis uses these established components as pre-defined thematic categories, allowing for a structured examination of media content across the PESO model. The components function as thematic codes, providing a consistent framework for assessing how DEI and intercultural communication values are articulated through paid, earned, shared and owned media (PESO) channels.

While thematic analysis has been critiqued for its flexibility and potential lack of rigour if not systematically applied (Holloway & Todres, 2003; Vaismoradi et al., 2013), this study addresses such concerns through a transparent, theory-informed coding process and the use of an established framework (AIM) to guide interpretation. The

application of thematic analysis in this context enables the researcher to interpret not only the presence or absence of DEI components but also the depth and cultural nuance of how they are communicated.

As thematic analysis follows a six-phase process (Braun & Clarke, 2006) for interpreting data, this study uses a sample data item as a case example in order to draw a clear correlation between the six phases and the process of coding. This helps illustrate the rationale behind the coding decisions and reinforces methodological consistency.

The first phase of thematic analysis is familiarisation with the data. This is done by thoroughly reading and re-reading the data to ensure data accuracy and to avoid missing out on relevant content.

The second phase is generating initial codes. This is achieved by assigning an alphabetical code for each of the seven DEI components: Leadership – L, Diversity Infrastructure – DI, Diverse Recruitment – DR, Inclusive Career Development – ICD, Bi-Culturalism – BC, Inclusive Collaboration – IC and Social Impact – SI.

Phase three of thematic analysis is the searching for themes. In this study, the seven components are the seven themes. To identify these themes in the data items, the indicators (see Appendices 1 - 4) for each component are used as reference, and the identified content is then highlighted using a colour code corresponding to its assigned colour (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Colour codes assigned to each DEI component

- L -
- DI -
- DR -
- ICD -
- BC -
- IC -
- SI -

This phase is applied to a sample data from Stuff to demonstrate the application of the coding process using thematic analysis. The item being analysed is a corporate article published on Stuff's news site in 2023. The title of the article is, 'New leadership group for the next generation of Stuff announced' (see Figure 10). The story is a corporate update of leadership succession, but a nuanced reading of this unpacks several implicit DEI components.

Figure 10: Data item for sample data coding

New leadership group for the next generation of Stuff announced

June 1, 2023 - 2:51pm



Stuff's new leadership team: Nadia Tolich, Laura Maxwell, Matt Headland, Sinead Boucher and Joanna Morris.
DAVID WHITE / STUFF

New Zealand's largest media organisation has announced a new CEO and three new Managing Director roles for its major businesses.

Laura Maxwell has been appointed as Chief Executive of Stuff Group, while current owner and publisher **Sinead Boucher** will become the Executive Chair and Publisher of the company.

In this new role, Boucher says she is looking forward to **focusing on the strategic future** of the business, its products and journalism as it shifts to prepare for the next big disruptive force of the digital era - the advent of new generative AI technologies.

It is three years to the day since **Boucher acquired Stuff Limited**, which reaches nearly 3.4 million Kiwis each month through number one news site stuff.co.nz, 45 newspapers across Aotearoa, three magazines, community network Neighbourly and the Stuff Events business.

"We've done a huge amount of **valuable transformation** over the past three years since buying the business: **building our technology and capability** to ensure we are fit to meet the challenges of the future in a time of profound disruption," Boucher says.

"**Now feels like the perfect time to hand over the daily leadership of the business to a fantastic new CEO, who will bring her own talents, experience and perspectives** for the next chapter of the company."

Maxwell is an experienced executive leader and digital CEO with significant experience in the media industry, having worked for NZME for many years as Chief Digital Officer and Chief Commercial Officer as well as Chief Executive of OneRoof, DRIVEN and GrabOne. She also has prior experience in Outdoor media and as GM Yahoo!NZ.



Stuff Ltd has a new management line up.
AIMAN AMERUL MUNIR / STUFF

"Laura has significant experience in building and scaling businesses, and has a proven track record of crafting and delivering strategies that result in accelerated revenue and profit growth in large-scale businesses," Boucher says.

"**As well as her huge professional experience and success, she is also someone I have a lot of admiration and respect for, whom I personally enjoy working with and who I know is committed to building success for Stuff and its people.**"

Maxwell says she is **looking forward to building on Stuff's 160-year legacy and commitment to making Aotearoa a better place through quality journalism and the difference it makes in communities** across the nation.

"**I'm passionate about the role of media in upholding democracy and presenting a range of perspectives to help New Zealand continue to be a nation of independent thinkers. I thrive at building and leading high-performing teams and businesses** and am honoured to take over the mantle from Sinead to continue to build a sustainable company for the future," says Maxwell.

(Stuff, 2023b)

The data item reflects three DEI components, each identified through colour-coded highlighting – leadership (L) in yellow, inclusive career development (ICD) in orange and social impact (SI) in blue. However, for the purpose of sampling clarity and to provide a cohesive demonstration of the coding process, the leadership component has been selected for detailed explanation in this instance.

The article prominently highlights Stuff's strategic leadership transitions, signalling strong alignment with the leadership component of the AIM framework. Statements such as "Now feels like the perfect time to hand over...to a fantastic new CEO, who will bring her own talents, experience and perspectives..." and "She is... committed to building success for Stuff and its people," demonstrate visible leadership commitment to inclusive succession planning. The former CEO, Sinead Boucher, transitions to Executive Chair, which also reflects a progressive leadership strategy. The consistent reference to long-term goals and organisational direction support the AIM leadership indicators of 'strategic approach to diversity management' and 'visible commitment in initiatives.'

While the coding is guided by a pre-established AIM framework, the process also reflects the researcher's interpretive role in recognising how meanings are expressed, muted or strategically framed in organisational communication. As Braun and Clarke (2019) note, reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges that researchers play an active role in shaping analysis, and that transparency in interpretive choices strengthens the credibility of the findings.

Phase four of the thematic analysis process is reviewing the themes for validity and reliability. This is accomplished by first creating a clear visual reference of the findings thus far. This is done by taking the colour-coded content and compiling it into a table (see Table 2).

Table 2: A table collating all the findings

Item No.	Item Description	Extracts	DEI Component	Interpretation & indicators	Year	PESO Category	Organisation	Type of item	Platform
1	Title - New leadership group for the next generation of Stuff announced	"Now feels like the perfect time to hand over the daily leadership of the business to a fantastic new CEO, who will bring her own talents, experience and perspectives...". "She is also someone I know is committed to building success for Stuff and its people", publisher Sinead Boucher will become the Executive Chair and Publisher of the company.	L	Reflects visible commitment to inclusive leadership transition, and signals role modelling of expected behaviours by elevating a female leader. The emphasis on individual "talents, experience and perspectives" aligns with valuing organisational values, inclusive strategic approach and visible commitment.	2023	Owned	Stuff	Article	stuff.co.nz

This table has columns for the item number, description of the item or its title, the colour-coded extracts from the item, the identified DEI component (L), the rationale for the choice of component and its corresponding indicators. Additional columns document the year of publication of the item, the PESO category, the name of the media organisation being researched, the type of data item, and the platform it has been sourced from. These additional columns allow for consistent tracking of communication patterns over time and across different communication channels.

Table 2 consolidates both the raw content and the coded interpretation in a structured format making it easier to identify patterns, gaps and organisational leanings in relation to the seven components. This method reflects what Gale et al. (2013) describe as the Framework Method, which is an approach that supports thematic analysis by organising data into matrices that facilitate comparison, pattern recognition and analytical depth across cases.

Phase five of the process is defining and naming the themes. This is the phase in the study where a correlation of the DEI component with its corresponding intercultural communication theory is established (as seen in Table 3), based on Table 1 (see Chapter Two, Section 2.5.8).

Table 3: Intercultural communication (IC) theory underpinning leadership

DEI Component	IC Theory
Leadership	Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory

In the context of the sample data item, the intercultural communication theory underpinning leadership is Hofstede's theory of Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010), as reflected in Table 3. Stuff's deliberate handover of leadership to a new CEO who brings distinct perspectives reflects a low power distance orientation, where hierarchical transitions are inclusive, transparent and intentional. According to Hofstede, cultures with low power distance favour flatter hierarchies and participative decision-making, which is visible in Stuff's open approach to leadership renewal. This is further supported by the decision to appoint a new CEO while retaining the former CEO in a strategic role, which reflects shared authority and collaborative governance. Additionally, the expressed respect for the incoming leader's "talents, experience and perspectives" signifies an appreciation of diverse leadership traits rather than enforcement into a single dominant leadership culture. This aligns with Hofstede's individualism dimension, which promotes recognition of personal merit and values the integration of varied capabilities within leadership structures.

The sixth and final phase of thematic analysis is writing the report. In this step, Table 2 is further expanded to include the underpinning intercultural communication theory and assigning numerical codes to the DEI component in order to map the frequency of its occurrence in the dataset. This is demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4: Demonstration of coding and the underpinning IC theory

Item No.	Item Description	Extracts	DEI Component	Interpretation & indicators	IC Theory	Year	PESO Category	Organisation	Type of item	Platform	L	DI	DR	ICD	BC	IC	SI
1	Title - New leadership group for the next generation of Stuff announced	"Now feels like the perfect time to hand over the daily leadership of the business to a fantastic new CEO, who will bring her own talents, experience and perspectives...". "She is also someone I know is committed to building success for Stuff and its people", publisher Sinead Boucher will become the Executive Chair and Publisher of the company.	L	Reflects visible commitment to inclusive leadership transition, and signals role modelling of expected behaviours by elevating a female leader. The emphasis on individual "talents, experience and perspectives" aligns with valuing organisational values, inclusive strategic approach and visible commitment.	Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions	2023	Owned	Stuff	Article	stuff.co.nz	1						

This table has an added column for intercultural communication theory, identifying Hofstede's theory of Cultural Dimensions. Another addition to the table are columns for the DEI components. As the sample data item aligns with the leadership component, a numerical value of '1' assigned to it. All the components are assigned a numerical value '1' for each occurrence in a data item to support frequency tracking across data items and for thematic comparison. For each data item, the occurrence of a component is recorded only once, even if multiple occurrences of the same component appear within that item. This ensures that no single data item disproportionately influences the thematic weight of a component while still allowing patterns to emerge across the wider dataset.

While frequency counts help identify recurring themes, Braun and Clarke (2019) emphasise that what matters more is how clearly and meaningfully a theme is communicated in the data. In this way, the analysis begins to reveal which components are most emphatically communicated by each organisation and which aspects of intercultural communication may be less emphasised or absent altogether.

The numerical values under each of the seven themes are added individually, across the dataset of each organisation, to arrive at the total number of mentions for each DEI component. Based on this calculation a clear insight into the most frequently occurring component, as claimed by the organisation, is arrived at. This is then analysed in terms of the corresponding intercultural communication knowledge that underpins the DEI practices and the most used intercultural communication knowledge is identified as the best practice for the respective and collective media organisations.

3.5. Data Presentation

Following the completion of coding and frequency analysis, the next step involves presenting the findings in a clear and structured format for further analytical interpretation. For each organisation the findings are presented in the form of a table (see Table 6) representing the numerical distribution of occurrences across the dataset. As an example, Table 5 illustrates the findings for Stuff.

Table 5: Presentation of the findings from the Stuff dataset of 65

DEI Component	Positive Evidence	Negative Evidence	IC Theories
Social Impact	52	4	Oetzel's Social Ecological Framework (SEF)
Inclusive Career Development	35	0	Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM)
Bi-culturalism	33	0	Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)
Leadership	32	3	Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions
Diversity Infrastructure	26	0	Hall's High and Low Context Communication & Linda Beamer's Intercultural Communication Process Model
Diverse Recruitment	20	0	Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Inclusive Collaboration	10	5	Hall's High and Low Context Communication & Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory (FNT)
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The table outlines the number of positive and negative evidences from the total dataset of Stuff, which includes 65 data items. Positive evidences include data items which show the presence of a DEI practice in the organisation, whereas negative evidences are items reflecting a shortfall or a gap in DEI values. The negative evidences are earned media articles reporting on certain initiatives by the studied organisations that do not align with the DEI components. The stories have a negative tone or content in the earned media. These have been included in the dataset as they offer another perspective of the DEI claims by the organisations, reported through media and stakeholder perceptions of their actions. This helps avoid a skewed representation or interpretation.

This table indicates a clear emphasis on social impact by the organisation, with 52 positive evidences, which is the highest among the seven DEI components. From the same dataset of 65, inclusive collaboration reflects the maximum number of negative instances. The table also includes a column for intercultural communication theories underpinning the DEI components. Therefore, this column represents the descending order of importance of intercultural communication practices at Stuff, where Oetzel's SEF theory is the most prioritised.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

The credibility of this study is achieved through a systematic and replicable coding process. All data items are analysed using a uniform coding framework derived

from the AIM (Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.), with clearly defined indicators and a consistent application of intercultural communication theories. Each data item is documented in a master table where the rationale for coding, extracts, interpretations and corresponding intercultural communication theories are recorded transparently. Iterative reviews of the coding decisions, along with supervisory discussions, further strengthen the consistency and stability of the findings across all three media organisations.

The use of diverse data sources across the PESO model (Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned media) demonstrates methodological triangulation, allowing thematic insights from different formats and platforms of communication (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This supports the validity of its findings. Additionally, Section 3.4 transparently demonstrates how codes are assigned, thereby enhancing analytical credibility.

In instances where data items or extracts were interpreted as reflecting negative intercultural communication practices, the assessment was not based solely on personal judgement. Rather, negativity was determined through a theory-informed interpretive process guided by the AIM framework and its associated intercultural communication indicators. Content was considered negative when it demonstrated the absence, marginalisation, or contradiction of stated DEI principles, such as lack of cultural recognition, exclusionary framing, symbolic omission of diverse voices, or misalignment between organisational claims and communicative practice. While interpretation is inherent to reflexive thematic analysis and shaped by the researcher's positionality, the identification of negative cases was anchored in these pre-established parameters and applied consistently across the dataset to enhance analytical transparency and credibility.

Finally, transferability is built into the study through clarity of the methodological design and detailed description of the coding process. This allows future applications of the same framework to different industries.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological foundations of the study, detailing the sampling method, description of data, data collection, research design and analytical procedures used to investigate intercultural communication practices within New Zealand media organisations. The research uses thematic analysis to decode the data collected from across paid, earned, shared and owned media. The Aotearoa Inclusivity Matrix (AIM), combined with relevant intercultural communication theories, provides a structured framework for thematic analysis. This chapter has also demonstrated the coding process and visually presented the findings. Measures taken to ensure reliability and validity of the analysis were also explained. The following chapter will present the critical findings of the analysis across the three chosen media outlets.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.0 Overview

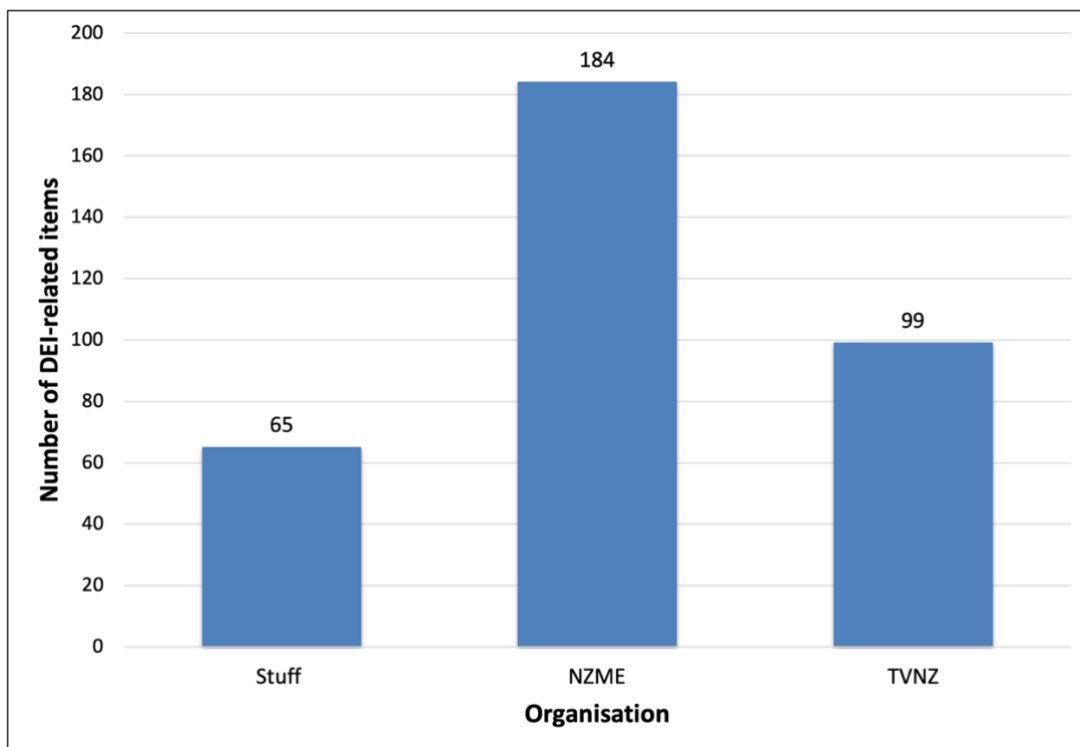
This chapter presents the findings of the study, based on thematic analysis of publicly available media content sourced for three media outlets – Stuff, NZME and TVNZ. It assesses the data collected on DEI practices, for each organisation, and assigns a corresponding intercultural communication theory. This correlation between DEI practices and intercultural communication theory is then evaluated in detail in the subsequent chapter (see Chapter Five: Discussion). The objective of this chapter is to identify the best practices in intercultural communication across the three media organisations, guided by the DEI framework of the Aotearoa Inclusivity Matrix (AIM).

To maintain clarity and organisational coherence, the findings are presented in three parts – one for each media organisation. Under each organisation, a clear table summarising the dataset is presented. The table provides the total number of positive and negative evidences for each DEI component, from the total dataset, and assigns the corresponding intercultural communication theory underpinning each component in alignment with Table 1 (see Chapter Two, Section 2.5.8). Next is a section for the seven DEI components with examples from data items showing positive evidences. Subsequently, a common section shows the negative evidences combining examples of data items from across the seven components in each organisation. The chapter closes with a summary of the findings from the three media outlets. This structure allows for a detailed presentation of each organisation's DEI commitments, highlighting the nature, frequency, and thematic patterns of the practices observed across the dataset.

Figure 11 presents a visual overview of the number of DEI-related items identified for each of the three organisations during the defined period, from January

2021 to March 2025. The dataset for Stuff stands at 65, 184 for NZME, and 99 for TVNZ.

Figure 11: DEI-related dataset between January 2021 to March 2025



4.1 TVNZ

The dataset for TVNZ comprises 99 data items reflecting the organisation's DEI values. These items span multiple formats and media types. In the total dataset, 46 items are shared, 35 are earned, and 18 are owned media. On social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and X, the organisation only has accounts for its news channels with news updates and programme promotions, and therefore, the content does not relate to this study. However, for the shared media category TVNZ presents DEI-related posts on its LinkedIn and Seek accounts, and these have been included in the dataset. In addition, while in the time span of the data collection for this study, there is data available for earned, shared and owned media, no data was found for paid media.

The total dataset demonstrates an uneven distribution of AIM components, with bi-culturalism (BC) emerging as the most prominently featured theme across the organisation’s media outputs. A total of 50 items reflect indicators aligned with BC, most frequently reflected through shared media such as job advertisements that incorporate te reo Māori or references to bi-cultural values. Cultural celebration posts and reports from owned media further contribute to this strong representation.

Table 6 shows the number of items for the DEI components from the highest to the lowest count across TVNZ’s dataset. Bi-culturalism has the highest count. This is followed by social impact (SI), leadership (L) and diversity infrastructure (DI), each appearing in over 20 items. Inclusive career development (ICD) at 14 and inclusive collaboration (IC) at 8 are less consistent in their presence, while diverse recruitment (DR) is least represented, with an appearance in only 5 data items.

Table 6: Frequency of each AIM component across TVNZ’s dataset of 99 items

DEI Component	Positive Evidence	Negative Evidence	Intercultural Communication Theories
Bi-culturalism	50 (28 job ads*)	1	Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)
Social Impact	27 (5 job ads*)	1	Oetzel’s Social Ecological Framework (SEF)
Leadership	24	32	Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions
Diversity Infrastructure	22	32	Hall’s High and Low Context Communication & Linda Beamer’s Intercultural Communication Process Model

Inclusive Career Development	14	1	Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM)
Inclusive Collaboration	8 (3 job ads*)	11	Hall's High and Low Context Communication & Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory (FNT)
Diverse Recruitment	5	0	Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Note. *ads indicate advertisements

A closer look at the distribution of the DEI components reveals that job advertisements contribute significantly to certain components. Of the 50 instances of BC, 28 are reflected through job posts. Similarly, job posts account for 5 of the 27 SI occurrences and 3 of the 8 instances of inclusive collaboration. This indicates a significant concentration of DEI messaging within recruitment communications, particularly for BC.

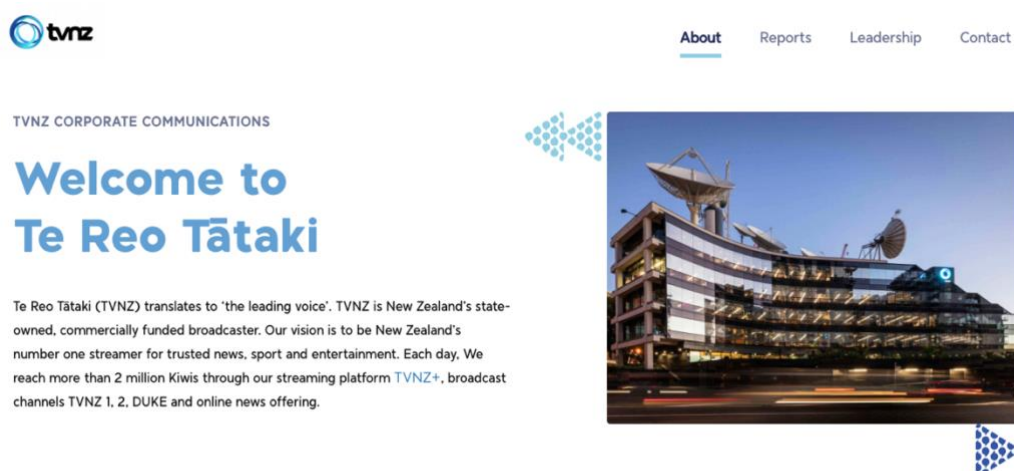
Notably, in the column with negative evidences, three AIM components – leadership, diversity infrastructure and inclusive collaboration, show higher negative appearances than positive mentions.

Lastly, the column on IC theories underpinning the DEI components shows Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1986) as the most frequently inferred intercultural communication practice in TVNZ, based on its association with the most recurring DEI component of bi-culturalism.

4.1.1 Positive Evidences of the Seven DEI Components

The first DEI component, bi-culturalism, is reflected across a broad range of TVNZ communication and initiatives. All job advertisements, which form a majority of the total data items for BC, include te reo Māori expressions integrated alongside English, such as “te tūranga” for ‘the opportunity’ and “tā mātou e kimi nei” for ‘what we’re looking for’. The organisation’s official Māori name, Te Reo Tātaki, is used consistently on digital job portals and corporate platforms (see Figure 12). This consistent visibility of its Māori name across public-facing platforms signals a deliberate bi-cultural framing of the organisation’s brand.

Figure 12: Landing page of TVNZ’s corporate website



(TVNZ, n.d.-a)

Celebration of occasions such as Matariki (TVNZ, 2023c, 2024d), Cook Islands Language Week (TVNZ, 2024b), and Mother's Day (TVNZ, 2022a) are acknowledged through bilingual greetings, with visuals and captions reflecting a commitment to bi-cultural integration and celebrations. The internal Rautaki Māori strategy, introduced in FY2021, is frequently cited across Statements of Intent (Television New Zealand

Limited, 2024), Performance Expectations (TVNZ, 2024c), and Annual Reports (TVNZ, 2023a, 2024a), outlining TVNZ's framework for incorporating te ao and te reo Māori into mainstream operations and content.

Other mentions of BC include the promotion of Cultural Integrity Strategies in the content proposals for production partners (TVNZ, 2024a), the presence of a Māori Board member with Māori genealogy and Treaty connections (TVNZ, n.d.-b), and an internship programme for the Māori and Pacific community in partnership with TupuToa (TVNZ, 2023b).

Within TVNZ's workforce, 9% identify as New Zealand Māori, in contrast to 68% identifying as New Zealand European/Pākehā (TVNZ, 2024a). While Māori representation is relatively low, the explicit acknowledgment of this figure signals an institutional awareness of bi-cultural representation. Additionally, the annual report highlights the average salary for Māori employees being 12.9% higher than that of non-Māori, noting an organisational initiative for the upward mobility of Māori staff. These disclosures show TVNZ's monitoring and reporting on Māori participation and outcomes across its organisational tiers.

4.1.2 Negative Evidences

While the previous section outlined areas where TVNZ demonstrates alignment with all seven DEI components, several components in the dataset also reflect notable negative instances. As shown in Table 7, leadership, diversity infrastructure and inclusive collaboration register more negative than positive evidences. A total of 32 data items reflect negative appearances in these three components and over two-thirds of these are linked to the 2024 restructuring process, making it a critical lens through which the shortfall in DEI practices can be studied.

Multiple earned media sources reported on TVNZ's 2024 proposal to cancel various shows from its platform and introduce job cuts (Business Central, 2024; Dundas Street, 2024; Harris, 2024a; RNZ, 2024). The issue stemmed from differing interpretations of clause 10.1.1 in the collective agreement between TVNZ and **E Tū**, New Zealand's largest private-sector union representing media workers. This clause required genuine consultation with employees before restructuring proposals were finalised. TVNZ cited its Te Paerangi programme – an internal transformation initiative designed to support TVNZ's transition to a digital-first media organisation by 2030 (TVNZ, 2024a) – as evidence of staff engagement from its end. However, E Tū argued that Te Paerangi was a general programme which neither met the legal requirements for staff consultation, nor addressed redundancies. This position was upheld in the Employment Court ruling which stated that consultation must precede final proposals and be substantive, not symbolic. The Court eventually ordered TVNZ to comply with the clause within 20 working days (Business Central, 2024; Dundas Street, 2024; Otago Daily Times, 2024; RNZ, 2024).

This case reflects a negative reflection on leadership indicators related to visible commitment and role modelling behaviours. It also underscores a breakdown in culturally competent and inclusive communication from senior leadership during organisational transformation. Notably, TVNZ's own coverage of the ruling via its 1News platform (Wilson, 2024) indicates a willingness to acknowledge critical legal outcomes, which is an act of editorial transparency that suggests partial alignment with leadership values of accountability, but this was not paired with any executive commentary or public reflection.

The same case also highlights a gap in diversity infrastructure. There was no formal mention of internal DEI councils, staff networks, or consultative committees supporting inclusive decision-making or offering support to affected employees at this critical time. This indicates the absence of inclusive practices in the change process.

Finally, the component of inclusive collaboration is negatively reflected in the breakdown of reciprocal communication between leadership and the staff. Earned media (Business Central, 2024; Dundas Street, 2024; Wilson, 2024) revealed that staff were informed of decisions rather than engaged in dialogue about them. There is no evidence of the organisation using staff feedback or inclusive tools to guide the restructuring. This suggests a lack of equity awareness and initiatives on communication styles, to inform the process. As a result, this instance reflects a missed opportunity to apply truly collaborative practices that support inclusive decision-making, as outlined in the AIM framework.

Together, these findings suggest that while TVNZ agreed, on paper, to involve its workforce during developmental organisational changes, its restructuring process revealed significant implementation gaps. These gaps, concentrated across leadership visibility, infrastructure for accountability, and collaborative responsiveness, represent a critical misalignment between strategic DEI goals and operational practices.

4.2 NZME

The dataset for NZME comprises 184 DEI-related items. Of these, 130 are from shared media sources, 26 from owned media and 28 from earned media. It is noteworthy that among the shared media items 55 are job advertisements, showing their strong usage as a medium for communicating organisational DEI values.

The highest number of data items have come from NZME's social media accounts such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Seek. Although NZME also maintains accounts on YouTube, TikTok, and X, these are primarily used for news updates by its news channels such as the New Zealand Herald and Newstalk ZB. As the content on these accounts does not reflect organisational DEI values or internal

practices, they have been excluded from the dataset. Additionally, no paid media data was found during the defined period for data collection, a pattern consistent with the findings for TVNZ.

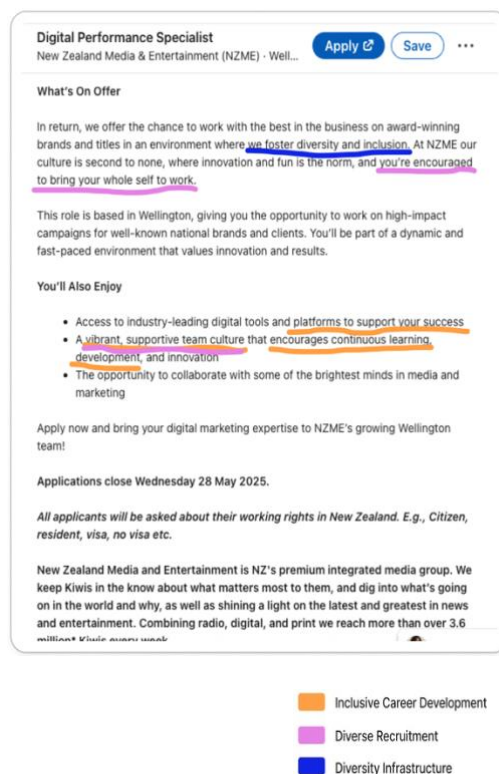
Table 7: Distribution of each DEI component across NZME’s dataset of 184 items

DEI Component	Positive Evidence	Negative Evidence	Intercultural Communication Theories
Inclusive Career Development	74 (40 job ads*)	0	Gudykunst’s Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM)
Diverse Recruitment	70 (55 job ads*)	2	Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions
Diversity Infrastructure	62 (12 job ads*)	5	Hall’s High and Low Context Communication & Linda Beamer’s Intercultural Communication Process Model
Social Impact	40	18	Oetzel’s Social Ecological Framework (SEF)
Leadership	28	19	Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions
Bi-culturalism	25	16	Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)
Inclusive Collaboration	11	0	Hall’s High and Low Context Communication & Ting-Toomey’s Face Negotiation Theory (FNT)

Note. *ads indicate advertisements

An overview of the distribution of each DEI component across NZME’s dataset is presented in Table 7. As the table illustrates, inclusive career development has the highest positive evidence with 74 items. From these, 40 evidences appear in job advertisements across the media outlet’s LinkedIn and Seek accounts, and also on its corporate careers page. These advertisements repeatedly mention a culture “that encourages learning, development, and innovation,” displaying the indicator of an organisational culture of development programmes (see Figure 13). Based on the intercultural communication theory underpinning ICD, Gudykunst’s Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory is the most applied in the NZME workplace.

Figure 13: NZME’s job advertisement with the DEI components highlighted



(New Zealand Media & Entertainment (NZME), 2025)

Diverse recruitment follows closely with 70 evidences, the majority of which, that is 55, are from job advertisements that emphasise “vibrant, supportive team culture” and encourage applicants to “bring your whole self to work”. This reflects an intentional inclusive employer branding to attract a diverse talent pool. Diversity infrastructure also features prominently in the dataset with 62 evidences. Out of these,

12 are from job advertisements highlighting NZME's workplace environment "where we foster diversity and inclusion."

An argument could be made that the concentration of DEI evidences in job advertisements, which are clustered within a short period and are repetitive in content, may skew the frequency of certain components. However, these items are formal expressions of how the organisation positions itself to potential employees. They communicate HR policies and organisational values, making them a relevant source for analysing DEI practices in this study.

4.2.1 Positive Evidences of the Seven DEI Components

The first DEI component, inclusive career development, appears in the maximum number of items in NZME's dataset. NZME's annual reports mention government grants being received for creating greater cultural awareness in the workplace, and also the rolling out of the "Understanding Unconscious Bias" training for leaders to support initiatives in gender pay gap reduction and the elimination of gender inequities across the organisation (NZME, 2022, 2023a, 2024). The 2021 annual report mentions the NZME staff having undertaken a total of over 136,000 hours of training which included people training for leadership and effective communication (NZME, 2021). All these instances align with the indicators of ICD from the AIM framework, such as organisational culture development programmes, pay gap reduction interventions and equitable access to training.

The Te Rito journalism project, introduced in 2022, provides training and mentoring to aspiring journalists from underrepresented communities with the aim of increasing diversity in the newsrooms of New Zealand (NZME, 2022, 2023a, 2024).

This initiative demonstrates diverse mentoring programmes and NZME’s long-term approach to fostering inclusion across the industry.

The in-house ‘This Could Lead Anywhere’ video series features the staff sharing real-life career journeys and experiences across departments at NZME, highlighting internal growth, support, and inclusive mentorship. The videos include statements such as, “I am proud to have had 3 kids while working at NZME” (New Zealand Media & Entertainment, 2023c), “I’m grateful to be in a place which wants to see me excel” (New Zealand Media & Entertainment, 2023b), and “Started as a promo person, then intern...and finally breakfast show host” (New Zealand Media & Entertainment, 2023a), indicate an organisational culture focussed on career growth.

The intercultural communication theory underpinning inclusive career development is Gudykunst’s AUM theory (1998). As ICD shows the maximum occurrence across the NZME dataset, it also reflects the importance of this particular knowledge underpinning NZME’s internal DEI practices.

Diverse recruitment, the second DEI component, shows the second highest occurrence in NZME’s dataset. In addition to the use of inclusive language in job advertisements, NZME reinforces its inclusive recruitment approach across multiple platforms. The organisation’s ‘Life at NZME’, in the culture section of its corporate webpage, communicates clear employee inclusion and a diverse talent pool by stating, “We pride ourselves on being a safe, inclusive and diverse workplace where everyone is valued” (NZME, n.d.-c). The NZME corporate video (NZME, n.d.-a) of the NZME workplace further affirms this messaging by showcasing visible gender balance and LGBTQIA+ representation, supporting the AIM framework indicators of bias prevention and candidate experience design.

In its Diversity and Inclusion Policy, the media outlet mentions programmes and practices in place to support an environment of diversity and inclusion for all. This includes talent acquisition and management, employment terms and flexible work arrangements (NZME, 2023b). In addition to this, NZME states that “a diverse and inclusive workforce is essential” to be able to fulfil its responsibilities and objectives as an organisation (NZME, 2024).

The third component is diversity infrastructure, which is reflected in the current workforce composition statistics of NZME indicating a strong representation of women, who comprise 55% of the overall staff, 51% of people leaders, and 60% of the Board. Ethnic diversity is also acknowledged with 9% Māori representation and 24% identifying with ethnicities other than European (NZME, 2024). These figures reflect organisational transparency and periodic monitoring of internal diversity.

Cultural celebrations such as Diwali (New Zealand Media & Entertainment, 2024b) and Lunar New Year (New Zealand Media & Entertainment, n.d., 2024b), organised by an internal committee of NZME called the Diversity and Inclusion Committee (NZME, 2022, 2023a), reflect a targeted policy for fostering a workplace climate that is conducive for all.

The fourth DEI component is social impact. NZME’s most prominent contribution to this component has been the Te Rito journalism project, designed to diversify the journalism workforce in New Zealand. It has resulted in employment placements of underrepresented groups at NZME and partner organisations (NZME, 2022). This initiative clearly reflects the indicators of educational diversity and inclusion programmes with external stakeholders, and diversity partners.

Participation in events like the Auckland Pride Parade in support for the Rainbow community (New Zealand Media & Entertainment [nzme_nz], 2023), and Pink

Shirt Day Aotearoa, which is an annual movement by the Mental Health Foundation against bullying (see Figure 14), demonstrate NZME’s visible support of initiatives that build diversity from a societal sustainable perspective.

Figure 14: Facebook post on NZME’s support of Pink Shirt Day



(New Zealand Media & Entertainment, 2024a)

Leadership is the fifth DEI component of NZME based on number of items it has occurred in. The 2024 annual report (NZME, 2024) outlines how relevant data points are closely monitored across the business, and leaders are held accountable for ensuring progress in pay parity and reduction in gender inequities. This shows visible commitment, participation in initiatives, and accountability.

Additionally, the same report mentions the composition of leadership roles. In 2024, women comprised 60% of the Board, 25% of the Executive team, and 51% of People Leaders. Ethnic diversity at the People Leaders level included 8.1% European, 8.1% Māori, 4.9% Indian, 0.9% Chinese and 3% identified as other ethnicities.

However, the Board remained 100% European in 2023 and 2024. These statistics demonstrate transparency in its reporting but it also highlights a gap in diversity management.

NZME's win at the Deloitte Top 200 Awards for Diversity and Inclusion Leadership (Deloitte New Zealand [@DeloitteNZ], 2023) provides external validation of its leadership's strategic approach to diversity management and participation in initiatives.

An article titled "Corporate NZ is 'doubling down' on diversity, equity and inclusion," published on International Women's Day on NZME's primary news platform, The NZ Herald (NZ Herald, 2025), highlights how corporate leaders across Aotearoa continue to prioritise DEI. The article includes a quote from the CEO of Global Women noting that the rollback in the US is not seeing companies in New Zealand stepping back, "I actually see them doubling down." NZME editorial's strategic placement and publication of this article demonstrates leadership commitment, strategic participation in DEI initiatives, and the encouragement of public dialogue around equity and inclusion.

NZME's commitment to the sixth component, bi-culturalism, is demonstrated through visible engagement with Māori cultural events and celebrations such as Matariki and the Māori language week (NZ Herald, 2021). Additionally, NZME's Christchurch office launch with a cultural blessing led by Ngāi Tahu, reflects the integration of tikanga Māori in formal milestones and a commitment to iwi relationships.

The launch of dedicated platforms like NZ Herald Kāhu, which features Māori perspectives, and the Kōrero podcast, an educational series about Māori culture (NZME, 2024), align with indicators of Māori cultural competence programmes and engagement with Māori.

The seventh DEI component, inclusive collaboration, is the least represented in NZME's dataset, with only 13 positive evidences. However, there are data items that indicate emerging efforts to foster inclusive relationships through collaborative partnerships. This is demonstrated by NZME's Diversity and Inclusion Committee's coordination of employee-led initiatives, such as an indigenous journalism workshop hosted by the Te Rito programme in collaboration with Google, Whakaata Māori, Pacific Media Network, and other media partners (New Zealand Media & Entertainment, 2023d). Events such as these highlight the indicators of inclusive collaboration, as mentioned in the AIM framework, such as diverse collaboration, equity awareness, and relational bridge-building across cultural groups.

4.2.2 Negative Evidences

Leadership records the highest number of negative evidences with 19 items, followed by social impact with 18 and bi-culturalism at 16 negative instances. Diversity infrastructure and diverse recruitment show much lesser instances with 5 and 2 respectively. No negative mentions are recorded for inclusive career development or inclusive collaboration.

A total of 15 data items, all linked to the Hobson's Pledge advertising controversy, reflect simultaneous shortfalls across the three components of L, SI and BC. Therefore, the findings from the items on this topic present an important perspective in the assessment of the media outlet's DEI values.

In August 2024, NZME attracted public criticism after publishing a front-page paid advertisement by Hobson's Pledge in the NZ Herald, prompting 672 complaints (Rātana, 2024; Smith, 2024). The ad's headline "Restore the foreshore and seabed to

public ownership” was widely condemned by Māori legal experts and advocacy groups as misleading and racially divisive, undermining Treaty principles and misrepresenting Māori land rights. Critics, including the Māori Journalists’ Association and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), labelled the ad “socially irresponsible” and harmful to Māori communities (1News, 2024; Bailey-McDowell, 2024; Smith, 2024). In response, NZME removed the ad and committed to reviewing its policies to ensure future advocacy advertisements are substantiated (NZ Herald, 2024). Notably, the incident and response were reported on NZME-owned platforms NZ Herald (Currie, 2024a, 2024b) and Newstalk ZB (NZ Herald, 2024), signalling internal acknowledgment of public concern. This episode reflects negative evidences of leadership through lack of accountability and value alignment, bi-culturalism due to failure of Treaty literacy and engagement, and social impact as it undermined societal inclusion.

Despite positive DEI evidences, some data items are included under this section due to their broader impact on diversity and representation. In early 2024, NZME announced plans to cut approximately 40 editorial roles, primarily in regional teams, following a November 2023 profit downgrade (Pointon, 2025). The staff were informed through a combination of in-person and virtual meetings, supported by follow-up sessions offering role clarity and voluntary redundancy options (Lynch, 2025; Pullar-Strecker, 2025). Statements by the leadership such as “Our current focus is our people” reflect leadership via visible commitment and accountability. Similarly, inclusive career development is evident in the structured communication and transition support provided. However, the loss of regional newsroom roles has prompted public concern over diminished access to local news, impact on democracy and weakened public interest journalism (Edmunds, 2025). This indicates a gap in social impact as the loss of regional reporting weakens NZME’s societal responsibility to provide inclusive, representative news coverage, thereby limiting its contribution to public knowledge and engagement, especially in underserved communities.

Another negative evidence is presented in the 'About NZME' section of NZME's corporate website which shows a corporate video with the tagline "Everyone's Here" (NZME, n.d.-b). However, the visual representation of its people in the video is in contrast with the tagline, as it predominantly features white representation and lacks ethnic diversity. This inconsistency presents a negative evidence of the diverse recruitment component, especially for its indicators of recruitment diversity and DEI in onboarding, as outlined in the AIM framework.

4.3 Stuff

Stuff's dataset consists of 65 items. From these, 1 is from a paid media source, 15 are from earned media, 30 from shared media, and 19 from owned media. Out of the 65 items, 15 include DEI content from job advertisements.

For shared media sources, Stuff's website (<https://www.stuff.co.nz>) gives hyperlinks to its Instagram, TikTok and YouTube accounts. However, these accounts focus on daily news and do not reflect the organisation's internal DEI updates. Therefore, these platforms are not included in the data collection for Stuff. Its Facebook account also focuses on news rather than workplace updates. Hence, in the shared media category all the data items have been sourced from Stuff's LinkedIn and Seek accounts. This highlights the organisation's strong leaning on job portals to communicate its DEI practices.

An overview of the distribution of the DEI components from Stuff's dataset, is presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Distribution of each DEI component across Stuff’s dataset of 65 items

DEI Component	Positive Evidence	Negative Evidence	Intercultural Communication Theories
Social Impact	52 (15 job ads*)	4	Oetzel’s Social Ecological Framework (SEF)
Inclusive Career Development	35 (15 job ads*)	0	Gudykunst’s Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM)
Bi-culturalism	33 (15 job ads*)	0	Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)
Leadership	32	3	Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions
Diversity Infrastructure	26 (15 job ads*)	0	Hall’s High and Low Context Communication & Linda Beamer’s Intercultural Communication Process Model
Diverse Recruitment	20 (15 job ads*)	0	Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions
Inclusive Collaboration	10	5	Hall’s High and Low Context Communication & Ting-Toomey’s Face Negotiation

Note. *ads indicate advertisements

Social impact has the highest presence with 52 positive evidences, including 15 job advertisements from job portals and Stuff’s careers page. Its commitment to taking initiatives to build diversity from a societal sustainable perspective is visible through statements such as “we believe in making Aotearoa a better place

through...meaningful connections...” and “we are committed to creating a workplace that reflects the diverse communities in New Zealand” (see Figure 15), in its job advertisements. As social impact sees the highest occurrence across Stuff’s dataset, it also reflects the importance of its underpinning intercultural communication theory, Oetzel’s SEF, in the organisation’s DEI practices.

Figure 15: Stuff’s job advertisement with DEI components highlighted

Financial Accountant Share job [Apply](#)

Finance · Wellington · Brandon · Fixed Term employee · On site

- Strong knowledge of IFRS/NZ GAAP/AASB standards.
- Proficiency with ERP systems (Microsoft Dynamics 365 a plus) and advanced Excel skills.
- Excellent problem-solving abilities, attention to detail, and a collaborative approach to work.

At Stuff, we believe in making Aotearoa a better place through great journalism and meaningful connections with our audiences. We offer a flexible, supportive working environment where you'll be encouraged to bring your best self to work.

Think you can do the job? Then apply now and start your journey with Stuff today.

Ka oti rānei i a koe tēnei mahi? Kāti, tonu mai ināianei kia timata ai tō haerenga me Stuff i tēnei rā.

Stuff champions inclusion. Be it gender, ethnicity, beliefs, abilities or experiences - we know that diversity brings another lens through which we all learn, connect and grow.

E kōkiri nei a Stuff i te whāinga kia whai wāhi ai te katoa. Hāunga te ira, te iwi, ngā whakapono, ngā āheinga, ngā wheako rānei o te tangata - e mōhio nei tātou mā te kanorau e whai tirohanga hou ai, e ako ai, e tūhono ai, e whanake anō ai tātou katoa.

As we are committed to creating a workplace that reflects the diverse communities in New Zealand, we will always invite and encourage applications from people of all genders, ethnicities, disabilities and ages. We are committed to providing equal employment opportunities for all.

Nā runga i tā mātou ū ki tētahi taiao mahi e whakaatu ana i te kanorau o ngā hapori i Aotearoa, i te ao, i te pō, ka pōhiringia, ka ākina anō ngā tono mahi a te marea whānui, hāunga te ira, te iwi, te hauātanga, te pakeke rānei. E ū nei mātou ki te whai kia wātea ai ā mātou ara whai mahi ki te katoa i runga i te mana taurite.

Legend:

- Inclusive Career Development
- Social Impact
- Diverse Recruitment
- Bi-culturalism
- Diversity Infrastructure

(Stuff, 2025)

Inclusive career development is the second highest component with 35 positive evidences, including 15 job advertisements which mention a work environment that offers “opportunities to grow your career.” This reflects an organisational culture of development programmes for its employees.

Bi-culturalism has 33 mentions in the dataset and includes 15 job advertisements. A substantial use of te reo Māori in its job advertisements (see Figure 20) clearly reflects an alignment with this component.

The leadership component has 32 evidences in the dataset, diversity infrastructure has 26, diverse recruitment has 20, and inclusive collaboration has 10 evidences. Both, a diversity infrastructure and diverse recruitment also include 15 job advertisements each, with messaging such as “Stuff champions inclusion,” and “we will always invite and encourage applications from people of all genders, ethnicities, disabilities and ages.”

The dataset reflects a low number of negative evidences with 4 items for social impact, 3 for leadership and 5 for inclusive collaboration. No negative evidences for any of the other components were found.

4.3.1 Positive Evidences of the Seven DEI Components

The first DEI component of Stuff is social impact, as it occurs in the maximum number of items in its dataset. Since becoming independently owned in 2020, Stuff shifted from traditional annual reporting to releasing Impact Reports, which highlights how the organisation contributes to the wellbeing of diverse communities across Aotearoa. This was corroborated by the Chief Executive Sinead Boucher’s statement, “We’d rather be judged on the impact we’ve made on people and the planet” (Stuff, 2022a). This purpose-led direction was further reinforced when Stuff became a certified B Corporation in 2022, a certification recognising high standards of social and environmental performance. The annual B Corp Reports provide additional insight into how the organisation upholds inclusive values through measurable social impact.

Together, these reporting mechanisms demonstrate Stuff's proactive efforts to identify and manage its social impact.

Additionally, at the New Zealand Disability Employers' Network conference (New Zealand Disability Employers' Network, 2025), Stuff showcased its role in national employment pathways for people with disabilities, confirming its function as a stakeholder in public equity outcomes. This was demonstrated by the active participation of Stuff's leadership as the co-presenter at the conference.

Programmes such as Creative Spirit that employs young adults with intellectual disabilities, and the Coffee Co-op which offers immersive training and employment for the deaf community (Jamieson, 2023), exemplify Stuff's commitment to external inclusion through action.

Inclusive career development is the second component of Stuff. Its 2023 B Corp report (Jamieson, 2023) mentions its goal to make its employees "grow, thrive and be successful." Additionally, the report notes that Stuff's fixed remuneration gender pay gap narrowed by 0.8% from FY21 to FY22, indicating traction in DEI-aligned remuneration policy. It also mentions that the overall pay gap of 6.9% in FY22 is largely due to higher representation of women in the workforce.

The third component, bi-culturalism, is most powerfully reflected in the creation and purpose of Pou Tiaki, which is a news section (<https://www.stuff.co.nz/pou-tiaki>) on the Stuff website, and is a body for equitable and fair representation of underserved communities in New Zealand (Parahi, 2022). The initiative is rooted in the Treaty principles and represents a tangible commitment to Māori representation and Treaty literacy. The editorial independence of the Pou Tiaki team and the visibility of their platform show that Stuff is not only amplifying the voices of these communities, but

actively shifting narrative control toward them. This reflects a deeper effort to embed te ao Māori within the organisation's values and practices.

In addition, Stuff offers te reo Māori language courses for all staff (Jamieson, 2023) highlighting efforts to integrate bi-culturalism into the workplace.

Leadership, the fourth component, is evidenced in Stuff's public acknowledgment of its institutional role in shaping equitable media practices. Although its formal editorial apology to Māori, for past failures in representation was issued in 2020, its relevance persists through the ongoing commitments in the Pou Tiaki platform. The article by Carmen Parahi (2022), who led the investigation that resulted in the eventual apology, reaffirms that the leadership continues to uphold the values articulated in the apology through Pou Tiaki which is now one of the four core business priorities of the organisation.

The B Corp Report (Jamieson, 2023) mentions Stuff's leadership commitment to being a socially responsible organisation, governed by transparency and accountability. This exhibits a strategic DEI orientation driven from the top.

The fifth component, diversity infrastructure, is apparent in Stuff's transparent reporting and a clear commitment to inclusive representation. The organisation highlights strong gender equity, with women comprising 56.5% of the total workforce, 100% of the newsroom executive leadership, and 54% Stuff's executive leadership. Ethnic diversity, while improving, shows room for growth with 78.5% of the workforce staff identifying as European, 11.2% as Asian, and 10.4% as Māori, with Pacific Peoples and MELAA groups significantly underrepresented, particularly in leadership. With 81.5% European ethnicity in the leadership roles and 83.9% in the newsroom, there is a clear imbalance in ethnic representation within the workplace structure. Acknowledging this, the organisation notes that while gender targets have been met,

further progress is needed to ensure that the workforce becomes a better reflection of New Zealand's ethnic diversity. This shows key DEI indicators such as targeted DEI policies, periodic diversity checks, internal benchmarking, accountability and accessible infrastructure.

Diverse recruitment is the sixth DEI component for Stuff. In its 2023 report (Jamieson, 2023), Stuff commits to workplace equity, practised through the hiring and development of its people, so that everyone has equal access to opportunities. By identifying current ethnic gaps and publicly stating its goal to address them, Stuff displays a deliberate and transparent approach to recruiting from underrepresented groups, affirming its long-term commitment to workforce inclusion.

Stuff's seventh component is diversity infrastructure. 'Te Matarau Wānanga', a media industry event hosted by Stuff, won the 2024 NZEA award for Best Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiative. The event created a platform for open dialogue between media professionals and community groups, on equity, representation, and cultural inclusion (NZ Events Association, 2024). Similarly, Stuff's sponsorship of the Comms Council's DEI Awards in 2022 highlighted its role in advancing industry-wide change by supporting a formal recognition platform for inclusive practice in advertising and communications (Green, 2022). These actions demonstrate the creation of inclusive spaces for diverse collaboration, support for communication initiatives that bridge relational bridges, and a commitment to sector-wide equity-building partnerships.

4.3.2 Negative Evidences

An article published in 2023 (Chapman, 2023) reported on the proposed downsizing of the Pou Tiaki team by Stuff. Out of the 5 remaining journalists, 3 were to lose their jobs and the other 2 were to return to their previous roles. The decision raised questions about Stuff's sustained commitment to its own bi-cultural initiatives.

Stuff's leadership responded saying that with the appointment of a dedicated Pou Tiaki editor and Pou Tiaki representation on the executive team, "our commitment to Pou Tiaki remains a core strategic priority." However, the article conveyed significant disillusionment among employees, as they were always told by Stuff that Pou Tiaki was a core pillar and therefore their jobs were safe. This represents a shortfall in leadership, given the lack of clear accountability from the management. The article also mentions a recent HR survey showing the job satisfaction level of the staff at Stuff was -27%, indicating a strong failure in inclusive collaboration and a lack of a workplace culture empowering employees.

A series of data items from 2022 to 2024 reveal recurring job cuts and newsroom restructures at Stuff that impacted internal morale and inclusive practices (Currie, 2023; Donnell, 2022; Harris, 2024b). In 2022, proposed reductions in regional publications were framed by management as a step to bolster local journalism. However, affected journalists reported increased workloads and diminished ability to cover community stories, indicating a negative evidence of social impact where local connection and societal value were compromised. In 2023, further changes required senior staff to reapply for their jobs under another restructure within days of notification (Peacock, 2023). This demonstrates a lack of inclusive internal dialogue and transparency, marking a gap in inclusive collaboration, especially in employee-led engagement and consultative decision-making processes.

These issues persisted in later restructures. In August 2023, the E tū union accused Stuff of initiating an "illegal" redundancy proposal without appropriate consultation, prompting threats of legal action from staff (Currie, 2023). This denotes a leadership gap, marked by the absence of transparent and accountable restructuring practices. In 2024, internal frustration was again made public through a leaked letter opposing fresh job cuts, especially in the audio-visual division (Harris, 2024b). The letter highlighted emotional strain and dissatisfaction with ongoing management

decisions, further highlighting gaps in inclusive collaboration. Across these instances, the data points to organisational breakdowns in staff communication, inclusive engagement, and societal responsibility, during a period of organisational change.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the DEI findings from Stuff, NZME and TVNZ using the seven DEI components of the Aotearoa Inclusivity Matrix (AIM) to evaluate publicly available organisational communication across PESO media channels. All the seven components – leadership, diversity infrastructure, diverse recruitment, inclusive career development, bi-culturalism, inclusive collaboration, and social impact – were found present in all the three organisations. The DEI practices of each organisation were assessed through clearly defined indicators and underpinned by intercultural communication theories.

Among the three organisations, TVNZ demonstrated the strongest commitment to bi-culturalism, reflected in its visible integration of te ao Māori, te reo Māori, and cultural celebrations. The Māori staff were seen to be paid higher than non-Māori. These practices align closely with Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1986), which supports progressive awareness and adaptation to cultural difference in workplace communication. At NZME, the most prominent area was inclusive career development, evident in initiatives that promoted employee growth, skills development, and access to career mobility. These align with Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory, which emphasises supportive communication environments to reduce uncertainty in diverse organisational settings (Gudykunst, 1995, 1998). Stuff's strongest DEI focus was on social impact (SI), which was demonstrated through external campaigns, partnerships, and editorial choices. These practices are supported by the Social Ecological Framework (Oetzel et al., 2007) which explains how communication and behaviour are influenced by four

connected levels. These are individual interactions, organisational values, community relationships, and wider global contexts. This layered perspective helps explain how Stuff's internal DEI values translate into social actions and public engagement.

The findings revealed a consistent commitment to gender equity and inclusion across the three media organisations. In all cases, the proportion of women in the workforce either matched or exceeded that of men. Notably, TVNZ reported an absence of gender pay disparities and even highlighted higher average pay for women in leadership roles. NZME and Stuff, while not fully closing the gender pay gap, demonstrated regular monitoring and incremental progress towards equity.

Despite advances in gender representation, ethnic diversity remained a shared challenge. Across all three organisations, over 65% of the workforce identified as European, with Māori and other ethnic groups making up less than 12% each. Even at TVNZ, where bi-culturalism emerged as the strongest DEI component, Māori staff comprised only 9% of the workforce. Another cross-organisational issue was the impact of job re-structures. Between 2022 and 2024, all three media companies implemented newsroom changes that triggered significant internal disruption.

Overall, the findings show that while public-facing DEI messaging remains consistent, the internalisation of DEI principles varies. The strength and sustainability of these practices depend not only on leadership vision, but also on internal accountability, policy integration, and intercultural communication mechanisms that allow all voices to be heard. These patterns will be further analysed in the following Discussion chapter to identify best practices grounded in theory.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.0 Overview

This chapter does not merely affirm the presence of best practices but also evaluates whether these practices are substantially internalised or symbolically performed, in order to answer the study's central research question:

RQ. What are the best practices in intercultural communication that support DEI in the three New Zealand media organisations being studied?

The chapter is broadly divided into five parts. The first three parts focus individually on TVNZ, NZME, and Stuff. Each organisational section begins with a pie chart, showing the distribution of all seven DEI components within that organisation's dataset. This is followed by a close examination of the use of intercultural communication in the most significantly represented DEI components, illustrated with examples from the findings.

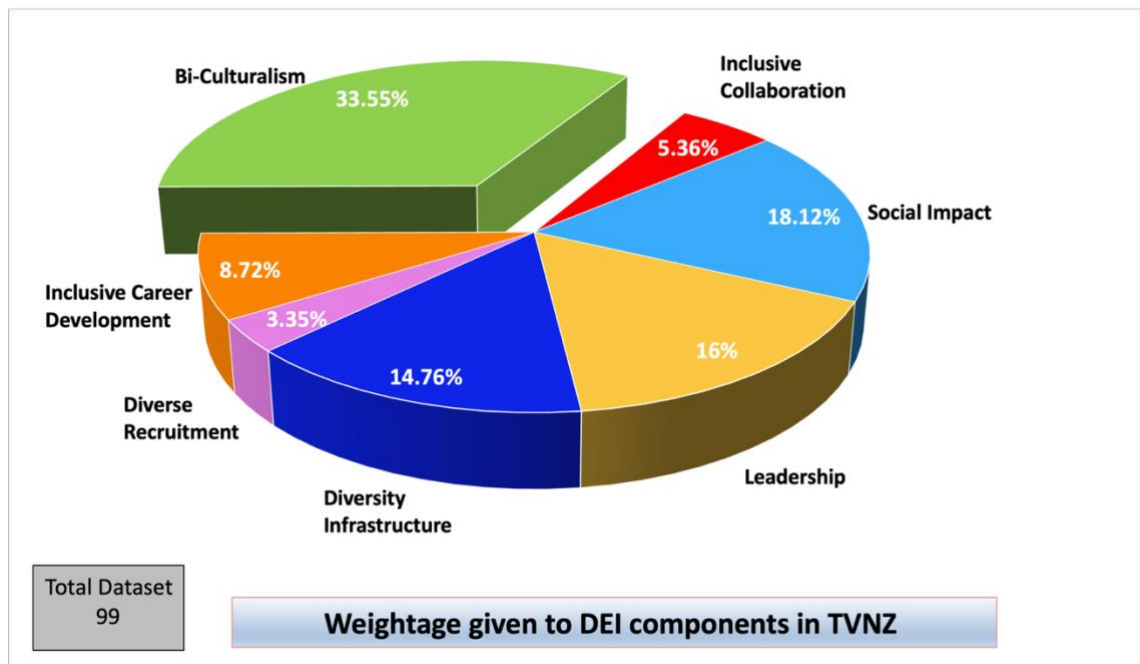
The fourth part of the chapter presents a comparative study across the three organisations. This section identifies key similarities and differences in DEI practices. By this cross-organisational comparison of the leading DEI practices and their theoretical underpinnings, the chapter highlights both exemplary practices and gaps in implementation, with the aim of contributing to a broader understanding of what effective, theory-aligned intercultural communication looks like in media workplaces.

The final part of the chapter is the conclusion, which summarises the key insights from the organisational analyses and comparative study. It highlights the most prioritised DEI components of each organisation and how their issues are managed, with a specific focus on identifying the best intercultural communication practices.

5.1 TVNZ

The percentage-based distribution shown in Figure 16 illustrates TVNZ's prioritisation of the seven DEI components.

Figure 16: Pie chart showing distribution of DEI components at TVNZ



Bi-culturalism stands out as the most prioritised component by a significant margin, at 33.55%, indicating a strong and deliberate organisational focus on Māori representation and integration. This is followed by three components clustered around similar proportions – social impact at 18.12%, leadership at 16%, and diversity infrastructure at 14.76%. This reflects a moderate but balanced emphasis on societal engagement, strategic leadership, and structural support for DEI. In contrast, inclusive career development, inclusive collaboration and diverse recruitment appear at notably lower levels, each comprising less than 10% of the dataset. This marked disparity suggests that while TVNZ foregrounds cultural and social narratives, less emphasis is

placed on individual professional inclusion, team collaboration and recruitment diversity.

The following section examines the most prioritised component, through the lens of intercultural communication theories to explore how these components are enacted and embedded in practice. As bi-culturalism represents over one-third of all components, it makes it the most significant for TVNZ.

Across the seven DEI components, TVNZ had the greatest number of positive data items showing high utilisation of intercultural communication theories particularly within the component of bi-culturalism. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1986) provides a useful lens for understanding TVNZ's bi-cultural practices, especially in terms of how cultural difference is recognised, respected, and operationalised. The model outlines six stages of intercultural sensitivity, progressing from ethnocentric orientations (denial, defence, minimisation) to ethnorelative ones (acceptance, adaptation, integration). Much of TVNZ's practice aligns with the acceptance and adaptation stages, but there is little evidence to suggest a complete fulfilment of the final stage of integration.

TVNZ's official adoption of a bilingual identity 'Te Reo Tātaki' (TVNZ, n.d.-a) reflects a clear movement into the acceptance stage, where cultural differences are acknowledged as valid and important. This is reinforced by the consistent and widespread use of te reo Māori in recruitment advertisements (TVNZ, 2025), internal messaging, and corporate branding. Of all data items coded under bi-culturalism, 18.79% were job advertisements featuring Māori language, indicating a deliberate effort to normalise te reo in everyday organisational discourse. Such linguistic inclusion demonstrates respect for cultural difference, a core feature of the acceptance stage (Bennett, 1986).

Beyond symbolic inclusion through external messaging, TVNZ also shows signs of adaptation where cultural awareness is accompanied by behavioural change. One clear example is the organisation's reported salary structure wherein Māori employees earn on average 12.9% more than non-Māori (TVNZ, 2024a), a policy suggesting targeted equity intervention. Additionally, the organisation offers a specialised internship programme for Māori candidates (TVNZ, 2023b), indicating efforts to strengthen pathways into the media industry for underrepresented groups. These practices suggest that TVNZ is not only recognising Māori perspectives but also adapting internal systems to support them.

However, despite these progressive steps, the organisation appears to fall short of integration, the highest stage in Bennett's model. Integration requires an internalised multicultural worldview and structural embedding of intercultural competence across all levels. In contrast to this requirement, Māori representation within the workforce at TVNZ remains low at 9%, and no transparent data is available on the presence of Māori leadership. The lack of visible accountability structures or Māori advancement indicates that cultural inclusion remains unevenly distributed within the organisation. Symbolic diversity without systemic change often functions as a non-performative gesture, appearing to commit to inclusion without fully institutionalising it (Ahmed, 2012).

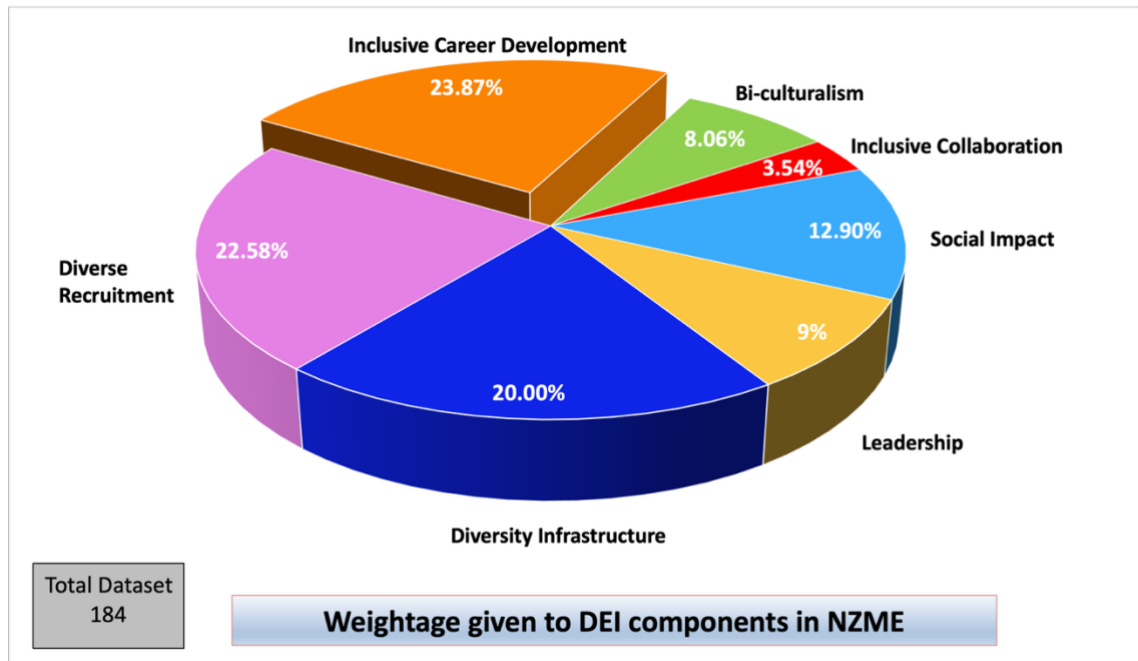
The concentration of bi-cultural references in job advertisements also raises questions. While the high visibility of te reo in recruitment may signal inclusive intent, its overrepresentation in relation to other forms of bi-cultural engagement could point to a surface-level gesture rather than deep structural change. As Sissons (2005) notes, bi-culturalism in Aotearoa often risks being reduced to symbolic gestures unless supported by mechanisms of material empowerment and co-governance.

Negative data items indicate a misalignment of claims and show a gap in intercultural communication knowledge that underpins practice. For example, the 2024 restructuring process reveals gaps in the knowledge informing TVNZ's leadership and organisational practices. The absence of employee consultation prior to proposed job cuts reflects a breakdown in leadership. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (Hofstede, 1980) stresses the role of power distance in shaping communication between leaders and employees. In low power distance cultures, like New Zealand's (Hofstede, 2001), effective leaders are expected to promote transparency and shared input. This lack of inclusive collaboration with the employees also reflects a lack in implementing Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory (1988), which emphasises the importance of mutual respect and facework strategies during high conflict and high-stakes exchanges. Application of this knowledge could have guided leadership to engage in more culturally sensitive and respectful dialogue.

The lack of visible, formalised structures to facilitate inclusive input shows an absence of Beamer's Intercultural Communication Process Model (1992). Beamer's model stresses the need for tailored encoding and decoding of messages across cultural contexts. In a restructuring context, this would mean proactively anticipating and adjusting to how different employee groups perceive and interpret organisational intent.

5.2 NZME

Figure 17: Pie chart showing the distribution of DEI components at NZME



The pie chart shown in Figure 17 presents the distribution of DEI components across NZME’s dataset of 184 data items. The most prominently represented component is inclusive career development, accounting for 23.87% of all components. This is closely followed by diverse recruitment at 22.58% and diversity infrastructure at 20%. Together, these three components dominate the organisation’s DEI focus, suggesting a concentrated emphasis on fostering individual professional growth, expanding recruitment pipelines, and establishing structural mechanisms to support diversity.

Social impact follows at 12.90%, indicating moderate engagement with societal and community-based DEI efforts. Leadership at 9% shows a comparatively smaller proportion, suggesting that while strategic direction and senior accountability for DEI exist, they are less foregrounded in the organisation’s public communications. The

remaining two components, bi-culturalism at 8.06% and inclusive collaboration at 3.54%, appear less central to NZME's current DEI status. This distribution reflects NZME's attention on the systems and processes that support individual employees, rather than a cultural or collaborative framing of the organisation's DEI ethos.

The following section explores the two highest-ranking components – inclusive career development and diverse recruitment, as they share only a 1.29% difference, to examine how these are enacted internally and how they utilise intercultural communication theories in practice.

NZME's consistent messaging around a "culture that encourages continuous learning, development, and innovation" in job ads (as seen in Figure 13) creates a communication pattern that minimises uncertainty for incoming candidates. Furthermore, the organisation's investment in employee training including over 136,000 hours of staff development (NZME, 2021) indicates an intentional strategy to reduce interpersonal and cultural anxiety by improving competence, confidence, and communication efficacy across the workforce. Gudykunst's AUM theory (1993, 1995, 1998) provides a strong conceptual lens for interpreting these practices, as it posits that effective intercultural communication in organisational settings requires managing the anxiety and uncertainty that arise from interactions across diverse identities.

A compelling illustration of the AUM theory in practice is NZME's Te Rito journalism project, a long-term initiative aimed at mentoring aspiring journalists from underrepresented communities (NZME, 2022, 2023a, 2024). By providing structured mentorship, guided learning, and a peer-supported entry into the media sector, this programme reduces both cultural and professional uncertainty for its participants. Research shows that mentoring programmes are effective tools for inclusive growth and psychological support, creating a sense of competence and belongingness in workplaces (Baranik et al., 2010). Such a training programme serves as a mechanism

to reduce anxiety by increasing self-esteem, which is a key tenet of the AUM theory (Gudykunst, 1998).

NZME's video series 'This Could Lead Anywhere' (New Zealand Media & Entertainment, 2023a, 2023c) further illustrates the AUM framework. Featuring staff members sharing personal stories of progression across roles, these videos normalise diverse career paths and reduce ambiguity about success trajectories. Although the series is a narrative created by NZME for public consumption, the detailed career trajectories shared by the employees, including popular anchors, makes the narrative credible.

NZME's recruitment practices strongly align with Hofstede's dimension of individualism versus collectivism where individualist cultures prioritise personal achievements, self-reliance and direct communication (Hofstede et al., 2010) in which individuals are encouraged to speak their minds openly. Its job advertisements consistently use language that highlights individual potential, encouraging candidates to "bring your whole self to work." The organisation's corporate website supports this narrative by describing NZME as a workplace "where everyone is valued" (NZME, n.d.-c), and by highlighting professional development opportunities. Similarly, the NZME Diversity and Inclusion Policy emphasises inclusive talent acquisition and flexible work arrangements (NZME, 2023b). These examples suggest a recruitment culture that prioritises individual merit, authentic self-expression, and growth-oriented values. However, the simultaneous emphasis on a "vibrant, supportive team culture" also aligns with the collectivist dimension in its overall work culture, suggesting a hybrid organisational ethos that blends both values in the broader workplace setting.

Some negative data items for NZME indicate a gap in intercultural communication knowledge that underpins DEI practice in the organisation, particularly

in the context of the social impact component. For example, the Hobson's Pledge advertisement controversy demonstrates a failure to apply Oetzel's SEF (2007), which emphasises multi-level engagement – interpersonal, organisational, community and international – when assessing communication outcomes. By publishing a racially divisive advertisement that undermined Treaty principles and misrepresented Māori land rights, NZME neglected the broader societal consequences of its editorial decisions, particularly its effect on Māori well-being and inclusion. A socially responsive approach would have required consulting affected communities or applying culturally adaptive checks before publication.

A second instance of a gap in the knowledge of SEF is visible in NZME's 2024 regional job cuts. While internal processes such as redundancy support and follow-up meetings reflected leadership and career development values, the broader community impact of a loss of local news coverage and reduced democratic engagement, was overlooked. The implementation of the knowledge of SEF would have required the media outlet to anticipate how these cuts would affect access to inclusive, community-level journalism, especially in underserved regions. This reveals a lack in understanding how structural decisions shape social inclusion.

Although other intercultural communication theories like Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Beamer's Intercultural Communication Process Model were also absent, the consistent disregard for SEF across both incidents indicate an organisational gap in recognising the importance of considering the multiple ecological levels of communication to avoid affecting vulnerable populations disproportionately (Oetzel, 2009).

5.3 Stuff

Figure 18: Pie chart showing the distribution of DEI components at Stuff

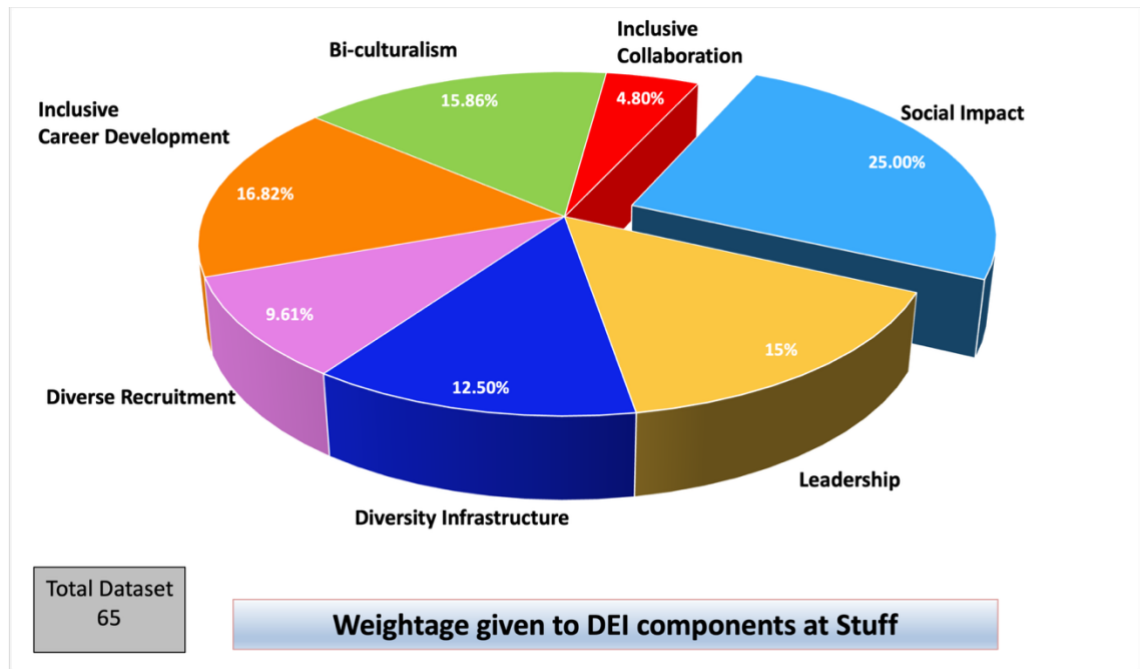


Figure 18 shows the distribution of DEI components in Stuff's dataset. The most prominent component is social impact at 25%, followed by inclusive career development at 16.82% and bi-culturalism at 15.86%. These three categories collectively account for over half the total dataset, indicating Stuff's emphasis on external societal responsibility, employee development, and Treaty-based engagement. A mid-level representation is seen in leadership at 15% and diversity infrastructure at 12.5%, while diverse recruitment at 9.61% and inclusive collaboration at 4.8% appear as lower priority areas.

Across the seven components, Stuff demonstrated the highest utilisation of intercultural communication knowledge in the area of social impact, aligning with

Oetzel's SEF theory (Oetzel et al., 2007). The following discussion explores this underpinning in detail through examples from Stuff's dataset.

Stuff's Creative Spirit partnership that supports the employment of neurodiverse youth (Jamieson, 2023), operates across the interpersonal, organisational, community and international levels by creating inclusive employment pathways while embedding those practices within Stuff's operational culture. Similarly, the Coffee Co-op programme which provides training and job opportunities for deaf youth (Jamieson, 2023), extends itself to the organisational and larger societal levels by promoting inclusive engagement between participants, employers, and the wider public. These programmes showcase Stuff's ability to design socially impactful initiatives that extend beyond the organisation.

Stuff also models change at the community and international levels through public-facing mechanisms like its B Corp certification and annual Impact Reports. These tools enhance its visibility and public accountability as a value-driven organisation. The report's use of storytelling, inclusive language, and visibility of community programmes foster community belonging and create cultural momentum for broader inclusion practices.

However, the downsizing of the core Pou Tiaki team (Chapman, 2023) reflects a disruption in organisational continuity and weakens the structural layer required for sustainable change, across the four levels. The knowledge of the SEF model would suggest that withdrawing institutional support would disrupt the interaction between layers, compromising the cumulative social impact and risking fragmentation of prior progress. While Stuff does show a strong presence of social impact in its overall DEI practices, sustaining it would require maintaining coherence across all SEF levels to prevent disruption of long-term trust and inclusion.

The negative data items reveal gaps across four DEI components – leadership, inclusive collaboration, social impact, and bi-culturalism. While leadership gaps relate to the absence of transparent decision-making and accountability, and bi-culturalism shortcomings stem from the downsizing of Pou Tiaki, the most significant gap appears in inclusive collaboration. Repeated restructures (Currie, 2023; Donnell, 2022; Harris, 2024b), poor consultation, and staff disillusionment (Chapman, 2023) point to a failure in fostering psychological safety and inclusive dialogue. This reflects a critical absence of intercultural competence as framed by Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory, which underscores the need for mutual respect, facework, and cultural sensitivity during conflict and change (Ting-Toomey, 1988). Stuff's oversight in this area shows a need to strengthen relational communication in its organisational culture.

5.4 Comparative Study of Intercultural Communication Practices Across the Three Media Outlets

A theory-informed comparison of DEI practices across the three organisations reveals varying degrees of integration of intercultural communication knowledge. This section examines these patterns.

Across the three organisations, TVNZ demonstrates the strongest cumulative application of intercultural communication theories within its top two DEI components. Bi-culturalism at 33.55% and social impact at 18.12%, together constitute 51.67% of TVNZ's dataset, indicating a pronounced commitment to intercultural communication knowledge rooted in Bennett's DMIS (1986) and Oetzel's SEF theory (2007). DMIS facilitates the progression from ethnocentric to ethnorelative perspectives in organisational culture which is reflected in TVNZ's visible incorporation of te reo Māori, te ao Māori values, Treaty literacy and bi-cultural celebrations. SEF, in turn,

emphasises a multi-level view of social responsibility incorporating interpersonal, organisational, community, and societal engagement, evident in TVNZ's collaborative outreach initiatives (TVNZ, 2022b, 2023c) and its structural commitment to diverse public programming (TVNZ, 2024a). These high proportions suggest that TVNZ's communication practices reflect conceptual intercultural awareness at both the symbolic and systemic levels.

When considering the component that is given the highest priority in each organisation, TVNZ again stands out. Its 33.55% emphasis on bi-culturalism is higher than NZME's most prioritised component, inclusive career development at 23.87%, and Stuff's social impact at 25%. This shows TVNZ's focus on the intercultural communication knowledge of the DMIS, which supports sustained intercultural adaptation within institutional settings. In contrast, NZME's ICD draws on Gudykunst's AUM theory (1995), which supports confidence-building, clarity, and low anxiety in diverse interactions. These are reflected in NZME's structured career progression, mentoring, and employee storytelling initiatives. In addition, Stuff's priority on social impact is grounded in SEF, and is highlighted in its use of journalism and partnerships to address societal inequalities and champion inclusion. These distinctions highlight how each organisation demonstrates a different emphasis in its intercultural communication knowledge. TVNZ reflects ethnorelativism through cultural integration, NZME fosters supportive transition environments to reduce intercultural uncertainty and promote mutual understanding, while Stuff focuses on outward-facing narratives that amplify community engagement and social responsibility.

It is observed that both NZME and Stuff place inclusive career development among their top two DEI components, highlighting its organisational significance and theoretical grounding in Gudykunst's AUM theory (1995). This alignment suggests that both organisations have prioritised the reduction of intercultural anxiety and uncertainty to support equitable growth for diverse employees. While NZME emphasises structured

mentoring, career tracking, and support systems, Stuff demonstrates this component through its focus on reducing the gender pay gap and reporting its commitment to help in the growth of its employees (Jamieson, 2023). These examples support the concept of the AUM theory, which advocates that when individuals experience moderate levels of uncertainty and are supported by inclusive systems they develop trust which in turn reduces anxiety and uncertainty (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997).

Another component that stands out as a shared DEI strength across two of the three organisations, is social Impact. It emerges as a top DEI priority for both Stuff and TVNZ, underscoring the relevance of Oetzel's SEF theory (2007) in shaping intercultural communication practices across media workplaces. At Stuff, social impact is the most prioritised component, reflected in its public-facing initiatives, community partnerships, and annual Impact Reports which document lived outcomes for the community. At TVNZ, social impact is placed second among the seven components, and is demonstrated through inclusive programming and messaging, and through initiatives promoting representation of marginalised communities. These practices align with SEF's emphasis on multi-level engagement which extends from interpersonal dynamics to broader societal influence. The presence of this component in both a state-owned broadcaster and an independently-owned outlet suggests that, despite differing mandates, both organisations view external social responsibility as central to their DEI goals. This indicates a trend within New Zealand's media sector to use communication platforms to not only reflect but also to shape inclusive societal values.

A notable commonality is seen in the persistent under-representation of the component of inclusive collaboration across all three organisations. This component, underpinned by Hall's High and Low Context Communication theory (1976) and Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory (1988), reflects practices that encourage culturally sensitive teamwork, employee-led initiatives, dialogic negotiation and diverse communication styles. Its consistent appearance among the bottom two components

across the three organisations, and under 10% in each, suggests a significant gap in the implementation collaborative practices. This finding also gives a clear reasoning to the challenges in change communication, during restructuring processes, faced by all the three organisations. Although New Zealand's low-context culture favours direct communication, this alone is insufficient during organisational change. Without face-sensitive strategies such as empathy, dialogue, and identity affirmation, even clear communication can feel unwelcoming and dismissive. Applying the intercultural communication knowledge from both the theories together can ensure that information is delivered transparently while also protecting interpersonal harmony and psychological safety in diverse workplaces.

Another finding reveals that while the component of diverse recruitment is the second in priority at NZME, it falls to the bottom two components at both TVNZ and Stuff. This suggests a fundamental difference in the importance given to the intercultural communication knowledge of Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 1980) which underpins this component. At NZME, there is greater emphasis on fostering equity through proactive hiring practices, suggesting an internal intercultural communication maturity that prioritises representational diversity. In contrast, Stuff and TVNZ appear to de-emphasise recruitment-based strategies. This lack of emphasis may indicate a weaker engagement with systemic inclusion and structural equity, in employment processes.

In addition, these findings show a partial alignment to the Workplace Diversity Survey conducted by Diversity Works New Zealand (2024) (see Chapter Two, Section 2.1). While all three organisations demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusive practices, bi-culturalism appears to be a lower priority for two of them, namely NZME and Stuff. TVNZ stands out as the only organisation where bi-culturalism is the highest in its DEI focus, an emphasis that may be shaped by its status as a state-owned broadcaster with formal Treaty obligations.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how intercultural communication knowledge informs DEI practices across the three media organisations in New Zealand. The analysis highlights that while each organisation applies intercultural communication concepts differently, their strongest practices align with specific theoretical frameworks that support their DEI intent.

TVNZ reflects the strongest integration of intercultural communication values, with bi-culturalism and social impact making up over half of its DEI focus. This reflects deep engagement with Bennett's DMIS and Oetzel's SEF models. As a state-owned entity, TVNZ demonstrates a visible commitment to Treaty-based responsibilities and inclusive storytelling. While its cultural symbolism and societal impact are evident, the representation of intercultural communication knowledge in areas like recruitment and collaborative practices appears less developed.

As a publicly listed media company, NZME operates within a commercial ownership model, which prioritises performance, brand reputation, and talent retention. Its DEI focus on inclusive career development and diverse recruitment reflects this. These components signal a strategic use of intercultural communication to reduce uncertainty through Gudykunst AUM, and manage power distance through Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory, in order to support staff stability and workplace performance. However, cultural and relational intercultural communication dimensions such as bi-cultural responsiveness and collaborative structures are less frequently represented.

Stuff's private ownership structure has allowed it to frame itself as a socially conscious media platform. Its DEI strength lies in community engagement, public

initiatives and partnerships, aligned with Oetzel's SEF model, which supports multi-level intercultural communication engagement. This orientation reflects a value-driven model where intercultural communication practices are focused more on societal inclusion than internal structural reform. The prioritisation of social impact over internally embedded intercultural communication processes like inclusive collaboration or diverse recruitment, may thus reflect its identity as a socially responsive, independent platform.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.0 Overview

This chapter concludes by reflecting on its key contributions and reaffirming the best intercultural communication practices for effective DEI. It outlines the key implications of the study across the three media organisations, the limitations, and recommendations for future research and organisational application of this study.

6.1 Implications of the Study

In the case of TVNZ, the study highlights the tangible influence of organisational structure on DEI implementation, particularly in the prioritisation of bi-culturalism and social impact. As a state-owned entity, TVNZ holds obligations under the Treaty, which are reflected in its integration of Māori values and language into recruitment, internal messaging and policies (Chua, 2015). These practices indicate a deep institutional commitment to bi-culturalism that goes beyond symbolic gestures. There is progression into ethnorelative stages of Bennett's DMIS (1986), where Māori worldviews are actively embedded into the organisation's operations and identity. For other media organisations looking to improve bi-cultural practices, TVNZ offers a model for how institutional mandates can be translated into genuine organisational practices through deliberate cultural integration and policy design. This is highly relevant to the New Zealand context as blending bi-cultural and multicultural values is essential to improving cultural competency in workplaces (Ward & Liu, 2012).

TVNZ also demonstrates a multi-level understanding of social impact, through its structural commitment to diverse narratives and social outreach initiatives. By promoting social cohesion and cultural equity, it exemplifies the application of Oetzel's SEF theory (2007). Its practices show how internal values can cascade outward to

create meaningful engagement at interpersonal, organisational, and societal levels. This is supported by Purdie-Greenaway and Turetsky (2020) who note that inclusive practices are most effective when environmental and structural levels reinforce one another.

TVNZ's 2024 restructure exposed a key weakness in inclusive collaboration. The misalignment between symbolic consultation efforts and meaningful staff engagement suggested a limited application of culturally sensitive communication, as outlined by the Face Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988). This highlights the need for deeper intercultural communication knowledge when navigating organisational change to avoid undermining DEI goals.

As a shareholder-owned company, NZME's DEI approach appears oriented toward operational efficiency and internal progression, rather than public accountability. This structure informs its strong focus on inclusive career development, which reflects a practical understanding of anxiety and uncertainty management in diverse workforces (Gudykunst, 1995). The presence of career progression pathways and internal mobility initiatives aligns with research highlighting the importance of low-anxiety environments for intercultural competence and retention (Ismail, 2015). NZME's recruitment practices show deliberate attention to inclusive language, and accessible job design. These strategies reflect the organisation's alignment with Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory (1980), particularly low power distance and individualism, by promoting equity, transparency, and individual merit in hiring processes. Such culturally sensitive recruitment processes can improve perceived fairness and attract a more diverse talent pool (Allen & Vardaman, 2017b).

Despite its internal DEI strengths, NZME shows weak implementation of community-facing intercultural communication, especially in the components of social Impact and inclusive collaboration. Its hosting of the Hobson's Pledge advertisement

(Rātana, 2024; Smith, 2024), and regional newsroom cuts (Edmunds, 2025; C. Lynch, 2025) reflected a limited application of the Social Ecological Framework (Oetzel et al., 2007) and the Face Negotiation Theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988), which stress multi-level engagement and culturally sensitive dialogue. Additionally, underdeveloped leadership visibility and diverse infrastructure suggest gaps in strategic inclusivity.

As an independently-owned media outlet, Stuff shows greater editorial autonomy which appears to support its strong emphasis on social impact. This is most evident through initiatives like its neurodiversity partnerships and annual Impact Reports, demonstrating multi-level engagement consistent with the SEF model (Oetzel et al., 2007). Internally, its focus on career progression reflects the application of the AUM theory (Gudykunst, 1995), which fosters low-anxiety, adaptive communication environments supporting long-term workforce inclusion and retention.

Despite its strengths, Stuff's social impact practices face internal inconsistencies. The downsizing of the Pou Tiaki team (Chapman, 2023), which was created to give a voice and fair representation to underrepresented groups, points to a possible breakdown in the internal mechanisms that ensure Stuff's external DEI commitments are upheld. Furthermore, its restructuring decisions (Currie, 2023; Donnell, 2022; Harris, 2024b) showed limited evidence of inclusive collaboration, with no clear indicators of staff involvement or culturally sensitive negotiation processes, suggesting a lack of applied knowledge of Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory (1988), which emphasises mutual respect and communication during organisational change.

Overall, the study shows that each organisation demonstrates both strengths and gaps in its use of intercultural communication knowledge to support DEI. TVNZ shows strong bi-cultural practices supported by its public ownership obligations, but falls short in inclusive collaboration during internal change. NZME reflects a clear focus

on inclusive career development and internal progression, yet lacks broader community engagement. Staff prioritises social impact through partnerships and public-facing initiatives, but face challenges in maintaining structural continuity and staff engagement, especially during restructuring. These patterns highlight that while DEI is visibly present across the three media organisations, its depth and consistency varies depending on organisational structure, leadership commitment and internal processes.

Taking into account these implications, the study suggests that successful DEI requires more than isolated actions. It depends on embedding intercultural communication knowledge into daily practices, especially during organisational change. As trusted public communicators, New Zealand's media organisations have a responsibility to model inclusive, culturally aware practices that are both internally consistent and externally credible.

6.2 Limitations

While this study presents a structured framework-based analysis of intercultural communication practices supporting DEI in three New Zealand's media organisation, there are limitations that must be acknowledged.

One limitation is that the research relied exclusively on publicly available data across the PESO media format. This implies that if an organisation chose not to publish its DEI-related efforts whether on its owned media, in news coverage, or on social platforms, then such practices remained inaccessible for analysis. As a result, the findings are constrained to what each organisation was willing to share in the public domain, and may not fully capture internal initiatives or informal communication dynamics.

Another limitation is that the data collection was time-bound, covering the period between January 2021 and March 2025. Consequently, the study reflects DEI practices during this period and does not account for earlier organisational developments or future trajectories that may re-shape each organisation's intercultural communication approach.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, the researcher proposes three key recommendations for future organisational practice and academic inquiry.

One recommendation is that organisations should invest in cultivating intercultural communication competence rooted in established theoretical frameworks to implement DEI practices. Intercultural communication theories, such as Gudykunst's AUM (1995) and Bennett's DMIS (1986), offer practical guidance on managing cultural differences, building psychological safety for employees, and progressing from ethnocentric to ethnorelative mindsets. Their application enhances staff engagement, inclusion, and long-term cultural responsiveness. Therefore, the development of intercultural sensitivity must be deliberate and theory-driven to avoid stagnation or regression (Hammer, 2011).

The second recommendation is that while this research focused on media organisations, this same intercultural communication-based DEI framework can be applied in other sectors. Replicating this methodology can reveal sector-specific insights while advancing the comparative utility of intercultural communication theories across industries. To understand whether publicly communicated DEI values align with internal organisational culture future studies could consider mixed methods or primary data collection. This would require interviews with employees across all levels of the organisational hierarchy, from frontline staff to executive leadership. The extensive

scope of such a study may not be feasible for a master's thesis. It might require the involvement of more than one researcher, depending on the ethical considerations and whether the researchers are working within the organisation or are external stakeholders with permission to research.

Lastly, organisations may be hesitant to engage with external researchers on matters related to DEI, particularly if the inquiries are perceived as intrusive or if there is a lack of internal transparency. Therefore, it is recommended that internal communications or public relations professionals within the organisations undertake this research as part of ongoing internal reviews. These assessments need not be made public but can offer invaluable insights to help refine intercultural communication strategies and strengthen DEI implementation for long-term organisational sustainability.

6.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the DEI priorities and weaknesses of each outlet – TVNZ, NZME, Stuff - based on the publicly accessed communication of their DEI practices demonstrated their key differences in the best intercultural communication practices and indicate some areas for improvements. The media organisations' priorities reflected their unique organisational structures. However, across these media organisations, there were shared focus on some DEI components such as social impact and inclusive career development. The repeated occurrences of these components point to their significance as top DEI priorities for media workplaces.

Areas needing improvements such as the inclusive collaboration and diverse recruitment components showed that media organisations fell short in their DEI implementation efforts. An understanding of the intercultural communication knowledge through focused intercultural communication-training workshops for leaders and

managers can support a better understanding of practice. With increased migration, DEI and intercultural communication will continue to be a growing area of research. This study confirms the importance of intercultural communication best practices for DEI in New Zealand media workplaces and recommends an understanding of the knowledge to inform successful practice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Indicators for the Seven AIM Components

THE AOTEAROA INCLUSIVITY MATRIX

This is an evidence-based framework developed specifically for New Zealand workplaces that allows organisations to identify the maturity of their diversity, equity and inclusion measures across seven components. It will provide a basis for workplaces to understand their current capabilities, identify areas for improvement and create a roadmap for transformation.



1 STARTER	2 EMERGING	3 DEVELOPER	4 INTEGRATED	5 ADVANCED	
LEADERSHIP					LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL INDICATORS Rationale for diversity and inclusion; organisational values; location and type of accountability; visible commitment and participation in initiatives; the ability and willingness to role model expected behaviours; the overall strategic approach to diversity management.
Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) not seen as a top priority	DEI is relevant but approached through informal and sporadic action at the top	DEI is a priority supported through formal and continuous action at the top	DEI is formally practiced through a set of holistic systems supported from the top	DEI is embedded in the culture and proactively and exemplarily supported from an accountable top	
DIVERSITY INFRASTRUCTURE					
Overall absence of initiatives beyond legal requirements	Basic ad hoc initiatives, requiring a formal, informed and coordinated response	Core components of DEI achieved and basic support systems are formally in place	Diversity infrastructure is continuously practiced, measured and improved	Stable levels of success in an embedded infrastructure are continuously met	
DIVERSE RECRUITMENT					
Overall absence of initiatives beyond legal requirements	Ad hoc, informal initiatives to remove barriers to DEI to access the pipeline	Formal processes enable access of diversity into the pipeline	Practiced systems enable a proactive search to onboard talent from a DEI lens	Systems are strategically embedded to bring DEI into the organisation.	
INCLUSIVE CAREER DEVELOPMENT					
Overall absence of initiatives beyond legal requirements	Informal and sporadic initiatives to bring DEI into career development exist	Career development is formally enabled through initiatives mindful of DEI	Integrated systems to grow talent from a DEI perspective are continuously practiced	DEI is embedded in culturally supportive career development systems	
BI-CULTURALISM					BI-CULTURALISM POTENTIAL INDICATORS Māori representation in leadership positions; Māori representation across the structure; Tikanga/kawa/tao Māori integrated systems; Treaty of Waitangi literacy; te reo Māori competence; bi-cultural celebrations; Māori cultural competence programmes; engagement with Māori; iwi relationships; Treaty of Waitangi responsibility initiatives.
Overall absence of the foundations needed to develop bi-cultural awareness	Informal and/or unstructured initiatives of bi-cultural openness, awareness and relationships are in place	Formal bi-cultural competence, systems, relationships and representation are enabled through specific and monitored processes	Formal bi-cultural competence, systems, relationships and representation are continuously practiced, evaluated and improved	Bi-cultural systems and relationships are successfully and strategically embedded in the organisational culture	
INCLUSIVE COLLABORATION					
Overall absence of initiatives	Informal and ad hoc approach	Formally enabled, strategically addressed and informed approach	Inclusive collaboration strategically addressed, continuously practiced, valued and evaluated.	Inclusive collaboration is strategically embedded in the culture and continuously improved	
SOCIAL IMPACT					SOCIAL IMPACT POTENTIAL INDICATORS Diversity partners; educational diversity and inclusion programmes with external stakeholders; supply chain diversity; any other sort of initiatives to build diversity from a societal sustainable perspective.
Overall absence of initiatives	Aware, concerned but no real action planned or fully developed	Initial baseline initiatives enable societal work	Systemic and practiced societal-oriented DEI initiatives	Embedded DEI practice formally and regularly connected with external networks	

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Appendix 2: AIM Indicators for Leadership and Diversity Infrastructure Components

THE AOTEAROA INCLUSIVITY MATRIX

This is an evidence-based framework developed specifically for New Zealand workplaces that allows organisations to identify the maturity of their diversity, equity and inclusion measures across seven components. It will provide a basis for workplaces to understand their current capabilities, identify areas for improvement and create a roadmap for transformation.



1 STARTER	2 EMERGING	3 DEVELOPER	4 INTEGRATED	5 ADVANCED
LEADERSHIP				
Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) not seen as a top priority	DEI is relevant but approached through informal and sporadic action at the top	DEI is a priority supported through formal and continuous action at the top	DEI is formally practiced through a set of holistic systems supported from the top	DEI is embedded in the culture and proactively and exemplarily supported from an accountable top
DIVERSITY INFRASTRUCTURE				
Overall absence of initiatives beyond legal requirements	Basic ad hoc initiatives, requiring a formal, informed and coordinated response	Core components of DEI achieved and basic support systems are formally in place	Diversity infrastructure is continuously practiced, measured and improved	Stable levels of success in an embedded infrastructure are continuously met

LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL INDICATORS
Rationale for diversity and inclusion; organisational values; location and type of accountability; visible commitment and participation in initiatives; the ability and willingness to role model expected behaviours; the overall strategic approach to diversity management.

DIVERSITY INFRASTRUCTURE POTENTIAL INDICATORS
Five core elements achieved; cornerstone and targeted policies; specific interventions to support employees from a DEI perspective; perceived diversity climate or similar periodically measured; employee networks; cultural celebrations; accessible facilities.

(Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.)

Appendix 3: AIM Indicators for Diverse Recruitment, Inclusive Career Developments and Bi-culturalism Components

DIVERSE RECRUITMENT					DIVERSE RECRUITMENT POTENTIAL INDICATORS Bias prevention; talent and recruitment diversity metrics; bias and barrier removal practices; overall candidate experience design; methods for a proactive search; diverse talent pools; job design and organisational architecture; DEI in onboarding.
Overall absence of initiatives beyond legal requirements	Ad hoc, informal initiatives to remove barriers to DEI to access the pipeline	Formal processes enable access of diversity into the pipeline	Practiced systems enable a proactive search to onboard talent from a DEI lens	Systems are strategically embedded to bring DEI into the organisation.	
INCLUSIVE CAREER DEVELOPMENT					
Overall absence of initiatives beyond legal requirements	Informal and sporadic initiatives to bring DEI into career development exist	Career development is formally enabled through initiatives mindful of DEI	Integrated systems to grow talent from a DEI perspective are continuously practiced	DEI is embedded in culturally supportive career development systems	
BI-CULTURALISM					
Overall absence of the foundations needed to develop bi-cultural awareness	Informal and/or unstructured initiatives of bi-cultural openness, awareness and relationships are in place	Formal bi-cultural competence, systems, relationships and representation are enabled through specific and monitored processes	Formal bi-cultural competence, systems, relationships and representation are continuously practiced, evaluated and improved	Bi-cultural systems and relationships are successfully and strategically embedded in the organisational culture	
BI-CULTURALISM POTENTIAL INDICATORS Māori representation in leadership positions; Māori representation across the structure; Tikanga/kawa/te ao Māori integrated systems; Treaty of Waitangi literacy; te reo Māori competence; bi-cultural celebrations; Māori cultural competence programmes; engagement with Māori; iwi relationships; Treaty of Waitangi responsibility initiatives.					

(Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.)

Appendix 4: AIM Indicators for Inclusive Collaboration and Social Impact Components

INCLUSIVE COLLABORATION					INCLUSIVE COLLABORATION POTENTIAL INDICATORS Diversity and inclusion inventory of skills (continuously mapped and evaluated); existence of employee-led initiatives; initiatives on communication styles; diverse collaboration; diversity intelligence; equity awareness; relational bridges interventions.
Overall absence of initiatives	Informal and ad hoc approach	Formally enabled, strategically addressed and informed approach	Inclusive collaboration strategically addressed, continuously practiced, valued and evaluated.	Inclusive collaboration is strategically embedded in the culture and continuously improved	
SOCIAL IMPACT					SOCIAL IMPACT POTENTIAL INDICATORS Diversity partners; educational diversity and inclusion programmes with external stakeholders; supply chain diversity; any other sort of initiatives to build diversity from a societal sustainable perspective.
Overall absence of initiatives	Aware, concerned but no real action planned or fully developed	Initial baseline initiatives enable societal work	Systemic and practiced societal-oriented DEI initiatives	Embedded DEI practice formally and regularly connected with external networks	

(Diversity Works New Zealand, n.d.)