

9. The potential of gender (and intersectional) equality indices: the case of Aotearoa New Zealand's public service

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

Global turbulence since the outbreak of the pandemic saw many countries report a disproportionate and negative impact on women's employment. In Aotearoa New Zealand, women's labour market participation has fallen dramatically owing to the pandemic, while their under-utilization rate has risen faster and more than has occurred for men (Stats NZ 2020). As in other nations, women constitute the majority of minimum wage earners in New Zealand. Māori (indigenous people of New Zealand) and Pacific women and girls, already more likely than New Zealand European (ethnic classification for New Zealanders of European descent) women to experience poor employment outcomes, have been particularly negatively impacted by the pandemic (New Zealand Ministry for Women (MfW) 2020).

The primary methods for measuring such gender inequality have involved generic gender indices (GIs), with many developed by international agencies for national-level use. Key among them is the Human Development Index (HDI) developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), on which Aotearoa New Zealand globally ranked 13th in 2021. While this and other indices have been refined over time, little attempt has been made to move towards qualitative, intersectional (overlapping social categorizations such as race and gender) and connected indicators of inequity despite increasing labour market and workplace diversification. Sub-nationally, New Zealand's public sector organizations have used GIs to frame policy initiatives, facilitate sectoral reform, and compare institutional progress (Parker and Donnelly 2021). However, like any summary measure, GIs offer few insights into how

gender inequities are created, perpetuated or nuanced by ‘micro’ and institutional practices (e.g. Acker 2006), including management activity.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a high need for intersectional GIs as Māori and Pacific women are over-represented in equity-challenged areas of the public sector (HRC 2018), and have received prioritized attention from the UN Human Rights Commission (HRC 2019). While a small body of studies identify structural, cultural, and attitudinal barriers to gender equity across the public service, they also flag the need for finer-grained analysis of women’s diversity given Māori and Pacific women’s relative lack of progress across a range of gender equality indicators (Parker et al. 2022). Working with sector experts, and public service employees and managers, this transdisciplinary study draws on in-depth interviews to develop an institution-specific GI model that includes ‘conventional’ quantitative and emergent qualitative indicators of equity for diverse staff groups. This study thus extends the conceptual parameters of GIs used at national levels; provides a framework of equity considerations and indicators for consideration in organizational-level equity policy development in New Zealand and beyond; and briefly assesses the latter regarding the gender responsive/accommodating/transformational or ‘gender-inclusive’ framework used throughout this volume.¹

9.2 GENDER INDICES

Indices devised to assess gender (in)equality, particularly at national and cross-national levels, play a key role in raising attention to the discussion and quantification of gender (in)equality (Bardhan and Klasen 1999). One such index that evolved from the UNDP is their flagship index – the HDI (see Table 9.1). First introduced in 1990, the HDI initially served as a credible alternative to an over-reliance on neoclassical measures of national economic growth. Drawing on Anand and Sen’s (1995) seminal work, it emphasized that people and their capabilities should inform assessments of a country’s development (UNDP 1990) (see Table 9.1). While well respected, many critiqued the HDI for its inability to reveal how gender, race, and social class disparities affect human development, calling for its disaggregation to facilitate assessments of gender inequality (Anand and Sen 1995; Bardhan and Klasen 1999).

The Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) were developed in the mid-1990s (Melikidze, Stancliffe and Tarkhan-Mouravi 1995). Addressing earlier critiques, the original GDI, introduced in 1995 and amended in 2010, sought to assess gender gaps in human development achievements and enable measurement across countries and groups (UNDP n.d.). However, this approach was seen to conflate relative gender equality with absolute levels of human development, to be blind to comparable gender inequality between countries (Dijkstra and Hanmer 2000),

Table 9.1 Gender equality indices

Index	Organization	Domains	Limitations
Human Development Index (HDI)	UNDP (1990)	Measures across wealth and well-being (life expectancy, education, and per-capita income).	Uses income component as a proxy for gender consumption, and does not enable inter-group comparison.
Gender Development Index (GDI)	UNDP (1995, 2010)	Assesses gender gaps in human development achievements, and across countries and groups. Reforms incorporated calculation of separate HDI for men and women, and replacement of per-capita incomes measure with gender gap in labour force participation.	Conflates relative gender equality with level of human development which fails to provide insight into comparative gender inequality across countries. Difficult to calculate uniformly across countries given difficulties in accessing reliable data. GII proposed as alternative.
Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)	UNDP (1995, 2010)	Measures women's empowerment along economic and political participation and decision-making. Reforms use GEM components and calculation of female-male ratios for each dimension, enabling comparison of developments for males and females.	Susceptible to data gaps, often misinterpreted, and biased towards developed countries. Ignores other aspects of women's empowerment (i.e. female control of body and sexuality). More relevant for developed countries. Gender empowerment enabling environment (GEEE) and GII suggested as alternative.
Relative Status of Women (RSW) Index	Dijkstra and Hammer (2000)	Measures socio-economic gender equality, calculating the relative position of women to men using HDI's three dimensions.	Limited validity owing to use of inappropriate gender inequality indicators. Requires country-specific information to contextualize the index.

Index	Organization	Domains	Limitations
Standardized Index of Gender Equality (SIGE)	Dijkstra (2002)	Measure of gender equality, using five indicators: educational attainment, life expectancy, labour market participation, share of higher labour market occupations/positions, and share of parliament. For each country and indicator, the resulting score is the distance (in standard deviations) from the mean of scores of all countries.	Countries scored in accordance with the scores of other countries in a particular year, making comparisons of progress over time difficult.
Women's Empowerment Matrix (WEM)	Charmes and Wieringa (2003)	Measures women's empowerment across six dimensions and different levels of analysis.	Inability to focus on 'relations of class and ethnicity'.
Gender Status Index (GSI)	UNECA (2004)	Measures the achievement of women relative to men based on social, economic, and political power, with these dimensions divided into subcategories.	Combination of components into two indices produces measures that are difficult to interpret and communicate. Data quality issues preclude timely, reliable publication for a large set of countries over time.
African Women's Progress Scoreboard (AWPS)	UNECA (2004)	Assesses government progress in ratifying conventions regarding women's equal treatment and empowerment.	Similar to GSI concerns.
Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI)	WEF (2006)	Ranks countries according to gender gaps. Combines quantitative data with qualitative measures and assesses how countries divide resources among males and females based on economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and wellbeing. Calculated by converting the data into female-male ratios and averaging all four sub-indices.	Complex weighting procedure creates interpretation and comparison problems over time. It caps scores and ignores areas where men score poorly; it also only captures inequality in particular aspects of women's lives.

Index	Organization	Domains	Limitations
Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)	OECD (2009*)	Covers four dimensions (discrimination in the family, restricted physical integrity, restricted access to productive and financial resources, and restricted civil liberties). Official data source for monitoring SDG 5.1.1.	An unweighted average of sub-indices and measures level of gender inequality in social institutions on a scale from 0 to 1. Can yield uniformly high or even perfect scores, given that legal discrimination against women is not present in most member countries. Initially designed as a measure for non-OECD countries.
Gender Inequality Index (GII)	UNDP (2010)	Calculates potential human development loss owing to gender inequality and covers three dimensions (reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market participation).	Complexity makes it difficult to calculate and interpret. Regional and local relevance also questioned. Fails to capture gender disparities as informal work and unpaid domestic or care work not captured.
Gender Equality Index (GEI)	EIGE (2013)	Comprises six domains (power, time, knowledge, health, money and work). Incorporates intersectional approach in inequality and gender-based violence, including basic intersectoral measures of gender in relation to disability, age, level of education, country of birth and family type.	No mandate to monitor individual member states and potential breaches of discrimination legislation renders it a governance tool focused on monitoring and observing.
Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI)	UNDP (2023)	Measures how biased social beliefs obstruct women across four dimensions of political, educational, economic and physical integrity. Replaces the GEM.	Values depend on dimensions of analysis, selection of indicator, sources and aggregation. Constrained by data availability.
Women's Empowerment Index (WEI)	UNDP, UN Women (2023)	Measures women's power and freedom to make choices in life. Includes a measure of violence against women.	–
Global Gender Parity Index (GGPI)	UNDP, UN Women (2023)	Measures gender gaps in health, education, inclusion and decision-making.	–

Note: * This index was developed by Bramisa, Klasen and Ziegler (2009) for the OECD.

and to merely extend the HDI with ‘a gender touch’ (Jütting et al. 2008). Others critiqued the reliance on gender gaps in the earned incomes as a proxy for gender gaps in consumption, pointing to the lack of clarity around individual consumption and arguing that such disparities in earned income are a better proxy of gender gaps in economic empowerment (Klasen 2018). Equally, the GEM, developed to measure women and men’s participation in economic, political and professional areas (Melikidze et al. 1995), was criticized for its smaller country coverage (Jütting et al. 2008), national data gaps, bias towards developed economies, and discounting of aspects of women’s empowerment (Klasen 2006; Cueva Beteta 2006). While the GDI and GEM have been tailored for national-level usage, and made good use of limited cross-national data in the 1990s, their misinterpretations as measures of gender inequality have limited their potential policy impact (Schüler 2006).

To address GDI limitations, Dijkstra and Hanmer (2000) proposed the Relative Status of Women (RSW) Index aimed to show how the abstraction of gender equality measures from levels of development or well-being can result in variable country rankings. However, like the GDI, the RSW is not regarded as an ideal measure of gender inequality owing to its choice of indicators. In response, the Standardized Index of Gender Equality (SIGE) focused on the relative achievement of women to men across five dimensions encompassing well-being and empowerment measures (Dijkstra 2002). Despite initial optimism, it was not seen as transparent because countries are scored in accordance with the scores of other countries in a particular year, making it difficult to compare progress over time (Klasen and Schüler 2011).

Furthermore, Charmes and Wieringa (2003) proposed the Women’s Empowerment Matrix (WEM) to map aspects of women’s empowerment across six dimensions. While the WEM enables multi-level analysis, limitations include its inability to focus on ‘relations of class or ethnicity’ (Charmes and Wieringa 2003: 424). In 2004, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) developed the Gender Status Index (GSI) and the African Women’s Progress Scoreboard (AWPS) as part of the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI). The GSI measures the achievement of women relative to men for social, economic, and political power, with these dimensions divided into subcategories, whereas the AWPS assesses government progress in ratifying conventions regarding women’s equal treatment and empowerment. While the AGDI was designed to provide policymakers with a means for monitoring gender equality progress and the implementation of conventions, the combination of components into two indices, leading to measures seen as hard to interpret and communicate, and data quality issues that preclude timely, reliable publication for a large set of countries over time, raised concerns (Klasen and Schüler 2011).

To capture global gender disparities over time, the World Economic Forum (WEF) thus introduced the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) in 2005, focused on economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005). This composite index ranks countries according to gender-based gaps, combining quantitative data with qualitative measures. However, as Klasen and Schüller (2011) observe, the GGGI creates interpretation and comparison problems over time with its numerous components and complex weighting procedure. Moreover, as Benería and Permanyer (2010) note, it encompasses only certain aspects of women's lives. The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), developed by Branisa, Klasen and Ziegler (2009) and implemented by the OECD, is a cross-country measure of discrimination against women in social institutions across 180 countries. Covering four dimensions, this composite index is an official data source for monitoring SDG 5.1.1 concerning legal support for gender equality and women's empowerment. However, empirical research highlights methodological concerns given disparities in legal discrimination provisions across member countries (Branisa et al. 2014).

Seeking to overcome challenges identified with these indices, in 2010, the UNDP introduced the Gender Inequality Index (GII) to capture women's disadvantages across dimensions not previously considered globally. While offering a novel approach, its constructions and 'functional form' are complex (Permanyer 2013). Following this, Klasen and Schüller (2011) revisited the GDI, suggesting the calculation of a separate HDI for men and women, using the same components of the HDI and some of the methods used to calculate the GDI. In addition, they suggested the reform of the GEM owing to its problematic treatment of earned incomes and complicated process of penalizing gender inequalities. Recognizing variation in women's position along ethnic, religious, educational, and other lines within a given country, in 2020, the UNDP introduced the Subnational Gender Development Index (SGDI) to measure gender differences in human development within countries. In 2013, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) developed a Gender Equality Index (GEI) for EU countries. Scores are based on levels of achievement between men and women in terms of work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health (i.e. work and other contexts are encompassed). Recent refinements include gender-based violence and intersectional approaches to inequalities (encompassing disability, age, family type, educational level, and country of birth). The index is one of a few that include basic intersectional measures of gender (EIGE 2021), made possible by the availability of data in European countries.

Furthermore, recognizing the limitation of single and binary indicators in capturing the many interrelated deprivations affecting women, the UNDP, in collaboration with UN Women, recently introduced several new indices

to complement existing GIs. These include: (i) the Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) to measure biased gendered social norms against women (this replaced the GEM); (ii) the Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) to measure women's power and freedom to make choices (including measurement of violence against women); and (iii) the Global Gender Parity Index (GGPI) to assess gender gaps in health, education, inclusion, and decision-making. It was argued that the 'WEI and the GGPI should thus be considered in the context of a broad dashboard of gender-relevant indicators' (UNDP 2023).

Current and earlier GIs thus focus on macro-level quantitative indicators, conjointly measuring gender (in)equity features pertaining to work sphere and beyond. Adaptations to the HDI, GDI, and GEM, among others, reflect measurement, calculation, and contextual considerations, although a binary categorization of gender is maintained. However, these indices do not include qualitative measures that reflect socio-cultural and other dynamics. This discussion of indices is illustrative rather than exhaustive but draws attention to how many quantitative measures do not address the complexity of how inequities are formulated or perpetuated. It suggests that connections between different features and more context-specific characteristics of inequity need greater emphasis, aligning with a body of scholarship that critiques the scope of these multi-dimensional gender equality indices, and with recent studies that call for complementary qualitative analyses that seek to understand the micro-processes and influences on equity (e.g. Schmid 2022). This research thus explores current and emergent gauges of perceived inequities at an *institutional* level that better expresses gender (in)equalities experienced at work, while recognizing their perpetuation within, and the utility of, national or higher-level index measures that summarize inequities in New Zealand's public service.

9.3 AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Historically, New Zealand led the world on certain measures of gender equality (e.g. political empowerment, with its women the first to gain the right to vote). Today, the country ranks well on the aforementioned GIs (UNDP 2019) but, as McGregor, Bell and Wilson (2015) suggest, such accolades are accompanied with contemporary 'complacency' about advancing women's progress, as evidenced by the pandemic's gendered effects on workplaces.

A closer look reveals that New Zealand's private sector trails public sector performance on various gender equity measures. For example, the public service gender pay gap fell from 16.2 per cent in 2000 to 5.8 per cent in 2020, compared with the national gender pay gap of 9.5 per cent (New Zealand Public Service Commission (PSC) 2020a). The global percentage of women in the top three tiers of management in the private sector stood at 31 per cent

in 2021 (Thornton 2021), while in the New Zealand public service, over half of all senior management roles (53.2 per cent) were filled by women by 2020 (New Zealand PSC 2020a), and women accounted for 50 per cent of public sector chief executives. Their representation on New Zealand state sector boards and committees was at an all-time high (49 per cent) by 2020, securing another explicit government target and contrasting with low representation on equivalent private sector bodies.

Recent public sector improvements on GI dimensions have been attributed to Government-led legislative and policy reforms including a Gender Equity Action Plan (New Zealand PSC 2020b), which seeks to eliminate gender pay gaps by addressing equal pay, flexible work-by-default, non-discriminatory remuneration systems, and gender-balanced leadership, recognizing connections between different forms of gender inequity. Other positive influences include pay equity settlements in the public sector (enshrined in law in the Equal Pay Amendment Act 2020); increases in New Zealand's minimum wage which have mainly benefited women (CEVEP n.d.); and sustained campaigning by unions and women's collectives, and labour market initiatives (Parker and Donnelly 2020).

However, New Zealand's positive performance across GIs, and the use of high-level gender equality indicators in its public sector, has masked significant differences between intersectional employee groups. New Zealand Europeans form the highest proportion (69.2 per cent) of public sector employees (compared with 70.2 per cent nationally), while Māori and Pacific constitute 12.6 and 6.3 per cent, respectively (compared with 16.5 per cent and 8.1 per cent nationally) (Stats NZ 2020). The latter remain under-represented in senior roles and concentrated in lower-level, lower-paying positions, a situation that is amplified for Māori and Pacific women (New Zealand PSC 2020b). Furthermore, while gender pay gaps for Māori, Pacific, Asian, and migrant women have declined, this has occurred more slowly than for other women (Gender Equal NZ n.d.), and Pacific women remain the lowest paid in the sector.

Recognition of the need for deeper understanding of gender-based and intersectional inequities is thus growing. Scholars have started to draw attention to capturing the perceptions and experiences of workplace inequities, and the everyday practices that perpetuate them (Jones and Torrie 2009; Donnelly et al. 2018). Some also highlight the need to better understand the connections between inequities at work and beyond (e.g. Parker et al. 2022; Walby 2020). In this regard, Else-Quest and Grabe (2012) stressed gender equity indicators that explore the influence of psychosocial processes, as well as structural inequities that maintain power imbalances between men and women, while Whitehouse (2003) recommended a multi-disciplinary approach to investigating the factors that reproduce pay inequality in and beyond the labour market.

In New Zealand's public sector, the need to address the cultural and processual aspects of institutional inequities is also emphasized by the current regulatory context. The *Public Service Act 2020* seeks to develop 'the shared identity of public servants' to facilitate a cultural shift towards a unified public service that better serves New Zealanders, and strengthens the Crown's relationship with Māori. It outlines the meaning and scope of being a 'good employer', and requires that departmental chief executives are guided by the principle of workforce diversity, with public service workforces reflecting the make-up of society, and fostering an inclusive workplace through employment policies and practices.

Thus, New Zealand has drawn on several gender equality indicators (including gender pay gaps, gender representation gaps, public service gender diversity targets) to benchmark women's workplace situation to inform policy. However, knowledge about women's qualitative, cultural and processual experience of workplace inequities, and how gender inequities and power relations are perpetuated through daily social, institutional and cultural practices at work, remain limited. Understanding of such in New Zealand is critical, particularly given Māori and Pacific women's comparatively weak work status and ongoing labour market diversification (Diversity Works New Zealand 2020). Such challenges highlight the need for meso- or institutional-level inquiry to comprehensively map the equity challenges that women face at work.

9.4 METHOD

This case-based study involved semi-structured interviews with 21 public service experts and 51 managers and staff (including Māori and Pacific) from three anonymized public service agencies (see Appendix Table 9A.1). The majority of interviews were undertaken from March 2020 to May 2021 on Zoom (owing to pandemic-related lockdowns) and provided rich accounts of perceived and experienced workplace gender inequities.

As a transdisciplinary study, methods of knowledge production went beyond those which occur solely within disciplinary boundaries to address a common, complex problem (Heinzmann, Simonson and Kenyon 2019). One challenge was to co-develop a comprehensive institutional-level model for participating agencies that accommodates gender, intersectional and other (in) equity concerns to help effect change. Our model, derived from qualitative thematic content analysis of the interviews and co-designed with research participants, thus reflects shared and unique strategic and operational 'indicators' of (in)equity and related areas for consideration and discussion by agency stakeholders. Co-development of this institutional-level instrument emphasizes the transdisciplinary study's wider, multi-voice approach to translating

research discoveries into applied ‘solution’ development (Hall et al. 2012; Parker et al. 2021).

9.5 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

9.5.1 Current and Emergent Indices

Varying levels of gender and other inequities captured by gender equality indicators (e.g. gender leadership gaps, ethnic pay gaps) were identified for each agency. However, there was increasing concern for the need to assess ‘shorter’ *intersectional* equity outcomes. As managers noted, for example, ‘We need to grow our numbers of Māori and Pacific women’ (Pākehā [Māori term for New Zealand people of European descent] female manager, A3). Soft targets were emphasized, reflecting reservations about using hard quotas.

Yet conventional indicators were seen as only part of the (in)equality story in the public service. Most informants declared a need to ‘go beyond numbers’ and proportional representation to acknowledge inequities reinforced by processual influences at work and workers’ culturally informed diversity. Some suggested, for instance, that many women, particularly Pacific and Māori, are not confident about promoting themselves at work, and that their cultural competencies are used but under-valued by organizations. One respondent commented, ‘the cultural skills that our Māori and Pasifika women and men have aren’t recognized ... [Their managers are] using a skill from them that is quite unique to what they do’ (Māori female technical advisor, A2).

However, instances of equity-, diversity- and culturally cognizant agency initiatives were noted (e.g. ‘they’re rolling out a new recruitment system and people from a te ao Māori [Māori world view] lens will be a part of it’ – Māori female fieldworker, A2). Furthermore, most indicated that institutional responses reflected a flexible approach within Public Service Commission (PSC) directives and regulatory parameters although the latter generally stress gender binary measures. For example: ‘We’ve been directed [from the centre] to develop regional diversity plans, and to change some of our employment processes so that we’re looking at being more open to employing a greater diversity of people’ (Pākehā female manager, A2).

Most respondents also spoke as much about emergent inequities as current inequity indices. Significantly, while many noted that these qualitative, processual and cultural features would be challenging to index, they also perceived that they need assessment for inequities to be meaningfully addressed.

9.5.2 ‘Increasingly Ambitious’ Measures

Existing equity initiatives across agencies were widely seen to have improved elements of women and other groups’ access to, progress at, and experience of work. However, equity ‘successes’ were often regarded as *departure* points for further change, their specific nature in each agency shaped by particular work goals and roles, units, work locations, and workforces. Informants thus generally emphasized a need for ‘more ambitious’ indicators and initiatives at strategic and operational levels. Amid sector directives, austerity policies, and pandemic demands, this was implicitly endorsed by the focus of agencies’ increasing reviews of and ‘experimentation’ with overall policies and processes to progress equity. One senior HR advisor noted, for instance, ‘The public sector gender pay principles and the wider work that’s led to ... making sure we are paying the same for people regardless of their gender ... – that’s going to be extended to ethnicity ... [and to] gender and ethnicity combined’ (Pākehā female senior HR advisor, A2).

Some jobs also highlighted the need to address gender inequities emanating from gendered bodily functions and differing cultural approaches to such (including taboos), for well-being and other initiatives (e.g. ‘most of the men don’t really want to know if you’ve got your period or you’re having a menopause day. It’s more the education for all people firstly’ – Māori female technical advisor, A2). Related to this, manager and staff knowledge of equity indices, initiatives, and their activity status was considerable overall but varied, suggesting that evaluations of, and better communications on, equity considerations could constitute indicators in the agency-level mode that develop understandings of shared and unique inequities in the agencies; reduce initiative duplication; and inform the development of current initiatives. Particularly for those promoting more nuanced (e.g. culturally informed) equity indices, this could yield meaningful feedback on agency equity progress, and give much-needed information to managers on how to effectively pursue equity.

9.5.3 Equity Progress Over Time

Informants expected agency (gender) equity initiatives to take time to develop and impact, even in a supportive policy context, with implications for the evolution of gender equity indicators. This was partly attributed to each agency’s unique development path. For instance, one director explained that the historical design of particular roles and ways of working in their agency ‘particularly in the operations area, ... was probably with a male in mind’ (Pākehā female director, A2).

While some felt that the natural attrition of older, Pākehā, male colleagues nearing retirement, combined with ambitious equity approaches, would ‘open

doors', others saw entrenched cultures and mindsets as fostering inequities that would take time to change. Additionally, environmental factors (including the ethnic demography of labour pools) were noted as long-term challenges to attaining equity and fuller measures of such. For instance, on higher levels of Māori and Pacific representation and leadership, one manager explained, 'we had so few Māori women to start with. That's where it became a [labour] pool issue ... From a recruitment point-of-view, we've struggled for our SLT [senior leadership team] to understand that this is a long journey' (Pākehā female manager, A3).

9.5.4 Interpreting and Connecting Equity Indicators

Interestingly, even conventional outcome indicators of equity were interpreted differently. To illustrate, for some, advancement at work concerns having access to engaging work rather than upward mobility – '(t)he [Pacific women] I've dealt with have wanted to be really collaboratively involved in project work ... It hasn't been about a linear progression' (Pākehā female manager, A3). Understandings of 'merit' varied. A significant minority also suggested that emergent equity terminology and gauges are variously or yet to be interpreted, stressing a need for further thinking in agencies about how and whether to accommodate diverse equity understandings and measures. Conversely, some felt that *shared* diversity and equity language and definitions were needed to build understanding of perspectives and 'buy-in' to initiatives.

Furthermore, while much equity activity focuses on a single workplace area (e.g. recruitment), aligning with public sector policy, some perceived that representational and other (gender) inequities could be viewed in more connected terms. For instance, an operations manager said: 'It's one thing to hire a person who has various diversity elements but what's the culture you need in order for all of us to thrive in?' (Māori female operations manager, A2). In one agency that interfaces closely with Māori and other communities, calls were made to explore how to include external stakeholders in notions and measures of more ambitious/emergent equity goals. On cultural diversity and inclusion, for instance, one manager explained: 'There's a whole untapped resource ... – traditional practices mātauranga [knowledge, wisdom] Māori. We're trying to ensure that we can bridge into that world and use people of expertise and knowledge outside to complement the work we're doing' (Pākehā male manager, A2). These findings stress that traditional individualistic, de-contextualized, 'monocultural', quantitative indices convey only part of the perceived inequalities at work.

9.5.5 Measures and Managers

While many managers were lauded for their commitment to equity pursuits, overall, their competencies around identifying and addressing inequities were seen to vary. There were calls for them to undertake less technically orientated and more equity-focused training to engage their own and their staff's 'hearts, minds and heads' (PSC senior representative) to ensure that various forms of equity are better understood, valued and pursued. A minority also advocated that managers should see equity challenges as integral rather than additional to their role. However, rather than seeking to 'homogenize' management training, styles and staff relations, some stressed that equity training could emphasize staff diversity and outputs:

A big barrier that managers face is having the skills to manage performance when they can't see someone and managing outcomes. That is heightened in the public sector because of the nature of the work. It has always been very difficult to measure outputs and performance ... We're having to move them to know your outputs, trust your people that they're going to get there – don't try and measure the in-betweens on how they get there. (Pākehā female senior advisor, A3)

The pandemic context was also flagged for increasing managers' development of flexible work arrangements (FWAs), with equity implications for women and others, re-emphasizing the need for related training. Even among managers, few wanted a wholesale return to 'pre-COVID' work practices though some discussed FWA challenges such as keeping line-of-sight of remote teams. Furthermore, a number perceived that leaders and HR's direct experience of the pandemic and, in one agency, new leadership 'blood', encouraged support for work changes and targeted staff and management training, indicating the utility of including gauges of equity development activity in a tailored agency-level model. 'With Māori and Pasifika women ..., [we need managers] actively supporting them to progress ... Treating people uniquely, positively targeting those people for development around programmes, coaching and leadership opportunities' (Pākehā female manager, A3).

The measurement and development of informal efforts by managers to support staff were also stressed: '[For] Māori or Pasifika men or women, ... even the littlest things like encouraging them to negotiate at a certain stage of the process and empowering them ... It comes down to realizing for them what value they can add to the team' (Pacific male Pacific advisor, A3). And targeting women's particular skills and inputs was linked to developing recognition of different groups' competencies and value at work, and associated measures highlighting managers' support of a 'speak-up' and consultative workplace culture. While some felt that managers' pursuit of equality is largely determined by their personal agency and views, most reported that they influence

and are influenced by micro- and wider processes, systems and environmental dynamics.

Furthermore, they pointed to middle managers' intensifying and dual workloads in pursuing substantive outcomes and leading people. As part of a tailored agency-level model, it was suggested that their role's 'fitness for purpose' could be assessed to see if they need 'more space created for them so that they've got more time ... [to help staff] flourish' (Māori female fieldworker, A2). This re-emphasizes the integration of equity considerations into workloads as a priority. However, not all workplace tasks are formalized. Several female staff spoke about the gendered nature of 'tangential' work activities (e.g. it is usually women who clear up a room after a meeting), calling for these activities to be formally assessed and for staff and managers to be educated to question biases at work.

9.5.6 Sub-agency Forms of Equity

As well as managers and the institutional processes with which they interact, informants discerned other sub-organizational features that affect (gender) equity progress, re-emphasizing the need for an agency-level GI to capture organizational nuances at multiple levels. For instance, some described or advocated for identity-based equity initiatives to effect positive change for women, Māori, Pacific, intersectional employee groups, and external stakeholders. Indeed, one agency formally endorses a 'matching' approach so that staff can 'share the cultural points-of-view each person brings with them on their journey'. Moreover, one observed: 'If you want to develop Māori and Pasifika, you've got to have programmes designed for them specifically, even though we work in quite a generic Western model' (General manager, A1). Others felt that the prevalence of role models provided another perceived 'indicator' of equity capacity. However, role modelling has been curbed by low numbers of Māori and Pacific in high-profile roles and few women in certain leadership positions, re-emphasizing the need to coordinate equity initiatives.

Innovatively, collective exemplars were also highlighted for progressing diversity, empowerment and inclusion goals: 'It's important that our senior leaders are walked through a Pasifika programme ... to understand where our cultural and traditional values play a role and how we can actually promote them to get better outcomes for our peoples' (Pacific female senior manager, A1). Other suggested collective approaches include (greater) use of identity-based staff networks as sources of information about staff needs and perspectives for managers. Furthermore, some networks and identity-based role-holders were noted for their ingenuity with equity initiatives as the pandemic stretched staff capacity and some resources away from equity efforts. Network energy was deemed critical – for instance, for giving voice to under-represented staff:

‘From a Pasifika perspective, they feel it’s disrespectful to voice their unhappiness or their dissatisfaction. So, there has to be some medium where we can open up those gates for them’ (Pacific female senior manager, A1).

Some also stressed the need for networks to strategize more; be mindful of the equity of their own operations; and engage more with the organizational mainstream to reconstruct power relations in agencies: ‘To a certain extent, the Māori and Pasifika networks retain that traditional male, hierarchical system that you see in Pacific and Māori communities. Within that, women are quite active, which is also what you see socially in Māori and Pacific communities’ (Pākehā female principal advisor, A3). Others suggested that agency networks are forging stronger connections with and learning from one another and external networks. Also detected was their development of intersectional challenges: ‘[In the women’s network], ... we also invite men to be part of our network because they work alongside us and they have ideas’ (Pākehā female manager, A3).

9.5.7 ‘External’ Initiatives and Indices

Individual and collective role models that progress equity were seen to extend to initiatives involving external parties. For instance, sector-wide initiatives like the Women in Government Network were commended for sharing equity resources and lessons with agencies. Others noted examples involving public sector unions and communities: ‘Our Pasifika leaders, including ministers, parliamentary ministers ... come here ... They talk about how we can explore better options for our people to come in and work’ (Māori female lead service manager, A1); ‘We’ve a lot of Māori staff particularly who are expected to do things outside of their day job because their manager is going onto a marae [Māori meeting house] and they need to assist ... PSA have talked to A2 about some formal recognition [in collective agreements]’ (Pākehā senior HR advisor, A2).

Perceived impacts of identity-based roles and collectives also re-emphasize equity as significantly but not exclusively progressed by managers, and were seen to need trust-based relations: ‘A lot comes down to the manager’s willingness and ... ability to trust the team’ (Pākehā female principal advisor, A3). Furthermore, on cross-agency efforts to help managers effect change, one noted: ‘Workplaces and the state can contribute to that change but ... this is about societal norms ... The work that the public sector are doing ... the private sector as well, is opening up that conversation’ (Pākehā female senior advisor, A3).

Reflecting cultural mores, some stressed that using collective gauges of equity was apt because Pacific and Māori (women) tend to be more confident and agentic in their own group-based activities. Moreover, varying levels of

knowledge among informants about existing identity-based initiatives suggested equity profiling as a useful processual gauge of equity in the agencies.

9.5.8 Equity and Technology

Reflecting the pandemic context and often tied to FWAs was a widespread view that managers and staff could use workplace technology better to advance equity for different employee groups to reflect their circumstances and cultural diversity (e.g. ‘women have all the capability that men do now that it’s more automated’ – Pākehā female manager, A3). Some also indicated that online working helps staff–manager relations by facilitating inclusive conversations around equity. Technology use in progressing equity was seen by some as a useful equity indicator for an agency model of equity, while noting that some work roles involve limited access to work devices, and IT use in jobs has ongoing challenges for (gender) equity.

9.6 INAUGURAL INSTITUTIONAL-LEVEL MODEL

The researchers and agencies co-constructed an agency-level model of key equity considerations and indicators based on thematic analysis of the interviews. The agencies could be described as combining accommodating, responsive, and transformative thinking and actions in response to identified gender and intersectional inequities. For example, intersectionally ‘blind’ features (e.g. a gender binary approach to some equity assessments) informed some equity visions, goals, and suggested practices. Many strategies, tactics, and actions acknowledged gender and some intersectional inequities and have sought to reduce or eliminate them (e.g. with the successful closure across agencies of gender leadership gaps if not gender pay gaps; growing awareness if not adequate action of gender ethnicity pay gaps). Less common but emerging are elements of more gender and intersectionally transformative approaches within existing agency systems (e.g. with the development of gender- and ethnicity-based employee networks that are starting to challenge norms, roles, relations, and related power relations; with increasing efforts to flank an emphasis on technical capacity building with more relational, identity and commitment-based aims).

Table 9.2 outlines a (gender) equity agency-level model that encourages critical thinking of agencies’ equity aims, approaches, strategies, and operational initiatives to progress equity. The second column comprises both conventional (quantified) and emergent (context-specific and qualitative) equity ‘indicators’, with the latter forming an inaugural institutional-level list that will probably evolve over time and have shared and unique elements for each agency. Unlike national GI, not all of the model’s indicators and suggested

Table 9.2 (Gender) equity index for New Zealand public service agencies

Strategic concerns	Broad 'indicators'
Equity approaches/concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal/equivalent opportunities and outcomes • Transformative equality • Diversity/intersectionality • Inclusion • Other equity notions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processual • Culturally informed • Collective
Equity domain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub-organizational/units • Non-workplace <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic • Community • Other
Equity accountability and resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role(s) of leaders, managers, staff and external stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective (e.g. networks) • Individual • Resource types <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgetary • Cultural knowledge • Institutional knowledge • Time • Stakeholder capacity, skills • External expertise and materials • Equity language and rationales
Targeting inequities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inequities for specific groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women • Māori • Pacific • Others (e.g. youth) • Intersectionalities • Prioritization of equity challenges • Visibility and messaging of equity efforts

Strategic concerns	Broad 'indicators'
Existing equity initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims of extant initiatives • Conventional/'shorter' equity • Qualitative/culturally informed • (Linked) processual aims and outcome • Individual and/or collective
Protecting equity achievements	Challenges to equity initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment (e.g. COVID-19) • Economic • Political • Socio-cultural • Stakeholders • Organizational (micro-) processes and policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interaction of challenges • Other
<i>Key workplace features</i>	
Pay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal Pay • Pay equity • Benefits/non-monetary remuneration
Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seniority <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Management • Supervisory • Front-line • Other forms of role status (e.g. engaging work)
Flexible work arrangements (FWAs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulatory • Informal • Types of FWA • Up-take <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By women • By others
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment parties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers • Peers • Whānau [family]/other

Strategic concerns	Broad ‘indicators’
Recruitment (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes used • Individualistic • Collective • Like-for-like • Other
Training, development and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and development • Technical • Interpersonal • Leadership • Equity • Cultural competency • Other
Succession planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency turnover levels • Characteristics of leavers • Characteristics of those in senior roles
Performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuation of capabilities, skills and experience • Technical • Cultural • Interpersonal/soft • Processual • Other
Organizational culture, employee relations and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of trust relations • Managers/leaders and staff • With other stakeholders • Balancing stakeholders’ workloads, task prioritization, well-being, and equity involvement
Workplace technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship between technology and equity progress

considerations are thus quantifiable, meaning that assessments of equity progress cannot be aggregated to calculate a numeric index figure or ratio for an agency or for comparative purposes. Rather, the model’s strength lies in its inclusion of both conventional and newly developed qualitative gauges; an invitation to challenge existing notions and measures of equity in agencies; an expanded list of indicators to capture perceived and experienced inequities more comprehensively in relation to an agency’s ideological, structural, processual and cultural features. Uniquely, it also combines individual, collective and connected processual and outcome indicators and matters for discussion by agency stakeholders.

9.7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our review of GIs revealed their primary utility at the national level in providing summary quantitative indices. Their development points to methodological deficits in earlier assessment of gender (in)equities. To some extent, though, such indices have been applied at sub-national and institutional levels; in New Zealand, public sector policy developments have often been informed by such binary, gender-specific measures. However, full gender parity according to any 'hard' indicator remains elusive, and certain intersectional groups, particularly Māori and Pacific women, still experience comparatively high levels of disadvantage according to occasional GI gauges of their intersectional representation.

Growing labour market diversity; new regulation encouraging deeper public service partnership with Māori; and increasing scholarly attention to micro-practices that influence equity progress within institutions (Acker 2006; Parker et al. 2021) underpinned this examination of equity in several of Aotearoa's public service agencies. Thematic content analysis of interviews with sector experts, agency staff, and managers highlighted their considerable aggregate institutional, historical, and cultural knowledge and experience of agency equity considerations. Their varying perspectives suggest that equity-related activity needs to increasingly reflect plural interests to deepen understanding of and commitment to equity visions and values, underwritten by leaders' commitment, accountability, and adequate resourcing. Moreover, both well-established and emergent notions of (gender) equity were variously interpreted, suggesting a need for inclusive discussions in agencies to share understanding(s) of equity meanings, equity language, and the positioning of equity as central to people's work experience.

Our institutional-level analysis revealed agencies' converging and differing structural, processual, and collective and individual stakeholder influences on equity progress. It also evidenced gender accommodating and responsive initiatives, and emerging elements of gender transformative approaches, albeit largely as initiatives carved out in spaces within existing agency arrangements and strategies often informed by more established equity gauges. Indeed, interviewees stressed growing concern about the perceived need to extend the range of indicators used to assess equity progress in their agency and the wider service via the inclusion of emergent and more ambitious measures of equity progress, as well as reflection on equity notions, approaches and strategies to better reflect organizational and stakeholders' diversity, interests and aspirations. The latter were seen to include qualitative, processual, collective, socio-cultural, intersectional, and context-sensitive gauges. The model's emphasis on contextual specificities relating to individual agencies' work

roles, staff demographics and attributes, culture(s), and other features recognizes that these organizations have both shared and unique characteristics, and that their respective operations reflect levels of internal heterogeneity (e.g. in terms of their gender and intersectional equity ‘starting points’, notions, goals, initiatives (both formal and informal) and perceived impacts). Moreover, our participants stressed that workers need to feel able to bring their diverse ‘full selves’ and skillsets to work to be valued and more engaged. The agency-level model’s additional indicators and elements for consideration could be used effectively in conjunction with national-level summary indicators of gender equity ‘health’ in the public service whose wider sectoral imperatives and regulation frame individual agencies’ operation.

Many influences on and measures of equity factors emphasized in the agency model were conveyed by participants as connected, re-emphasizing the study’s institutional-level analysis of structures, daily processes, attitudes, and behaviours. They also extend recent public sector policies in New Zealand such as the Gender Equity Action Plan that recognize links between conventionally measured inequities. Furthermore, all three agencies exhibit strong connections with the communities that inform their ways of working, re-emphasizing workplace inequities as not solely delimited by the organizational setting (Walby 2020). At the same time, this ‘interactive’ perspective of equity progress underlines the complex and perpetual task of developing and effecting meaningful change initiatives in the sector.

As noted, our co-developed model underscores a focus on a number of institutional and micro-features that contribute to or impede equity progress but have thus far not been subject to ‘indexation’. Indeed, one focus of this study – managers’ role in progressing workplace equity – revealed their varying individual levels of agency and training to engage in such via their organization’s dynamic processes, structures, and cultures. Furthermore, participants emphasized some managers’ informal support to (Māori and Pacific) women and other workers, reflecting understanding of how one micro-practice (e.g. recruitment) informs others (e.g. career development) in perpetuating (in)equities. Managers are thus potentially very well placed to inform equity initiatives designed to circuit-break discrimination.

However, the pandemic has intensified managers’ already high workloads, curtailed their time and capacity to progress equity, and exacerbated a ‘competing interests’ mindset. Clearly, their task prioritization itself needs scrutiny to help align their vocational orientation, technical competence and performance with adequate engagement on equity matters. The agency model also emphasizes that organizations seek support from and listen to managers and other collective and individual workforce and external voices. This aligns with an ‘opportunity structure’ approach – a multi-level and -stakeholder framework to support the development and effectiveness of (gender) equity,

and encompasses environmental factors, national and other level policy, union collective bargaining relationships, and organizational characteristics (Gregory and Milner 2009).

Most respondents also recognized that equity-related changes take time owing to the embedded nature of cultures, processes, and norms at institutional and sub-institutional levels. Furthermore, as COVID-triggered FWAs demonstrate, equity 'gains' can be pared back as agency, workforce, and wider circumstances evolve. Thus, 'ring-fencing' managers' time for, and wider resourcing, of equity initiatives might be facilitated by implementing an institutional/agency-level model which stresses the need for equity accountability, premised on public service stakeholders' perspectives and experiences. Integrating equity concerns into wider agency policies, regulations and strategy could also protect equity progress as a 'business case' argument though respondents indicated that agencies' austerity responses to COVID were not consciously imbued with equity notions.

By reporting on emergent and culturally sensitive forms of inequity, and highlighting varying understandings of even conventional equity notions, this study also suggests the need for subsequent inquiry that deepens institutional knowledge of the dynamics of equity challenges over time to refine our model. Furthermore, organizations may not have the resources or capacity to review or apply all of our model's considerations, or at least not simultaneously, making an incrementalist approach even more likely. However, as wider momentum for change builds, greater will and agency may be exhibited with which to pursue more cohesive gender and intersectional transformative approaches to equity, informed by a multi-faceted, multi-voice, institutional-level tool.

The model will remain a work-in-progress as conceptions of gender equity and contextual conditions evolve. Its co-design will extend to its implementation in the case agencies, underscoring the ongoing nature of transdisciplinary inquiry. Future research could thus centre on researchers' and participants' co-assessment of equity discussions and initiative outcomes, with findings fed into subsequent equity strategy operationalization. The model could also resonate as a mechanism for measuring institutional-level equities in other countries, particularly where workforce and cultural diversities are growing, and meaningful, trust-based employee inclusion is sought.

Finally, New Zealand's public sector's recent progress with gender equity, particularly in terms of gender responsive initiatives, connects to a comparatively supportive political environment for change. National and sector-level initiatives have discernibly 'ramped up' since 2018 under a Labour administration. Furthermore, in line with Frances and Nolan's (2008) thesis that more collectivized arrangements benefit women in equity terms, and by further operationalizing its 'good employer' role, greater equity progress may transpire in New Zealand's public service and reinforce trail-blazing work on

equity by some leading organizations in the private sector. In addition, it was widely anticipated that New Zealand's *Fair Pay Agreements Act 2022* would elevate bargaining in certain private sectors such as retail from individual and enterprise levels to sectoral/industry and occupational levels, particularly affecting women and minorities who form a disproportionately high number of those in lower-paying tranches of targeted private sector industries. However, one of the first acts of New Zealand's new National Party-led government (elected in November 2023) was to repeal this Act. This, alongside ongoing institutional-level responses to equity, will likely complicate trends in New Zealand's workplace equity development.

NOTE

1. Without reiterating their more detailed coverage elsewhere in the book, we interpret gender accommodation approaches (gender-inclusive) as those which work around gender differences and inequalities to achieve project objectives; gender response (gender-sensitive) approaches as those which include specific initiatives or actions to reduce gender inequalities; and gender transformation (gender-transformative) approaches as those designed to address the root causes of gender inequities in the workplace context (e.g. by challenging gender norms, roles and relations while seeking redistribution of power and resources).

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APPENDIX

Table 9A.1 Anonymized interviewee profiles

Organization	Position	Gender	Ethnicity
Agency 1 (A1)	1 Director	15 Women	6 Pacific
	1 Regional director	4 Men	4 Māori
	1 Senior manager		5 Pākehā
	1 General manager		4 Unknown
	6 Managers		
	1 Senior advisor		
	2 Officers		
	3 Principal advisors		
	1 Regional support advisor		
	2 Senior research advisors		
	Agency 2 (A2)	2 Directors	12 Women
1 Technical advisor		4 Men	6 Māori
1 Employment Relations manager		1 Other	9 Pākehā
1 Senior HR advisor			2 Unknown
6 Managers			
1 Principal advisor			
1 Senior project advisor			
1 Senior officer			
2 Officers			
1 Personal Assistant			
Agency 3 (A3)	1 Senior manager	12 Women	5 Pacific
	2 Managers	4 Men	3 Māori
	3 Principal Advisors		6 Pākehā
	1 Senior Advisor		2 Unknown
	5 Advisors		
	1 Senior Officer		
	3 Support Officers		
PSA	2 National officials	2 Women	3 Pākehā
	1 Senior representative	1 Man	
CTU	1 National official	1 Woman	1 Pākehā
HRC	2 Senior representatives	3 Women	1 Pacific
	1 Researcher		2 Pākehā
PSC	4 Senior representatives	3 Women	3 Pākehā
		1 Man	1 Unknown
MPP	2 Senior representatives	5 Women	5 Pacific
	2 Managers		
	1 Researcher		

Organization	Position	Gender	Ethnicity
MfW	1 Senior manager	4 Women	2 Pākehā
	1 Principal analyst		1 Pacific
	1 Senior representative		1 Unknown
	1 Representative		
MBIE	1 Senior manager	1 Woman	1 Pākehā
TOTAL (n = 72)			