**Introduction**

Understanding the Drivers is a research project that helps us to understand what the drivers of satisfaction and trust mean to New Zealanders.

Forty focus groups were held across the country in 2008 with the general public, Māori, Asian, Pacific and young people (aged 15 – 30 years). Groups were held in main centres and provincial areas. The views of these New Zealanders have provided us with a wealth of information to assist public service agencies to improve satisfaction with and trust in public services.

This fact sheet provides a summary of one of the six drivers of satisfaction (see the For more information section at the end of the fact sheet for further details about the programme).

---

**What does the driver ‘you were treated fairly’ mean?**

Participants generally assumed that public servants are fair and that they treat people fairly. What mattered most was the actual service experience rather than the outcome. Most participants interpreted being treated fairly as everyone being treated the same in the same circumstances. However, participants also recognised that each individual’s needs and circumstances may be different and this needs to be taken into account. One way in which treating people fairly could be achieved was through providing a quality service where people’s expectations were met. What was particularly important was to be listened to and not treated like a number.

Participants tended to be forgiving of staff that had tried their best but were let down by the system through, for example, lack of resources. In these circumstances participants still thought they had been treated fairly as long as they understood the reasons for the decision.

**Unique interpretations from different population groups**

Māori, Asian and younger people stressed the importance of staff being non-judgmental and treating people with respect as key elements of fair treatment.

“Sometimes when you have face-to-face contact, you see a change in attitude. Or over the phone, when you say your last name which is an Asian name.”

“People who can’t speak good English, they’re very impatient with them and they get real frustrated, but if you’re going to have customers like that obviously you have to understand. I sometimes have to go with my parents and I always have to help them. I think it’s quite rude when they’re real impatient.”

Being treated fairly was the most important driver for Māori. When asked why this might be the case Māori participants raised issues relating to honouring the Treaty of Waitangi.
How can managers improve satisfaction for this driver?

- Ensure staff are adequately trained in how to deal with customers. This would include training on how to find out what people’s needs are and how to treat each customer as new.
- Explaining the rationale for decisions in a reasonable manner is an important aspect of demonstrating fairness. If it is not possible to meet a customer’s expectations, then care is required to explain why this cannot be done.
- Ensure staff treat all customers with respect, are non judgemental and have a reasonable degree of flexibility, in order to meet an individual’s needs and different circumstances.

For more information

- To read the full Understanding the Drivers report, visit: [www.ssc.govt.nz/understanding-drivers-report](http://www.ssc.govt.nz/understanding-drivers-report)
- For more information about Understanding the Drivers email: [newzealanders.experience@ssc.govt.nz](mailto:newzealanders.experience@ssc.govt.nz)
- To read the Kiwis Count 2007 report visit: [www.ssc.govt.nz/kiwis-count-research-survey](http://www.ssc.govt.nz/kiwis-count-research-survey)
- To find out more about the New Zealanders’ Experience research programme and read other research reports visit: [www.ssc.govt.nz/nzers-experience](http://www.ssc.govt.nz/nzers-experience)