

# Disrupting respectfully:

Talanoa Consulting's Roadmap for Inspiring Change



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# Introduction

We came together throughout 2023 and 2024 in a series of talanoa sessions to look at where we are headed as a team, the way we see our role in shaping our own future and that of our region.

We've worked together as a team to get to know each other better, knowing that we can't support others on their journeys unless we are also supporting each other - with compassion, empathy and understanding. We don't always get it right, but we are always striving to learn and improve ourselves so that we can contribute to improving the world around us.

We looked at ways to ensure that our values as an organisation align with our values as human beings. As consultants working across a variety of spaces, we often have the privilege of choosing the types of work we do, ensuring that they match our values and bring us joy.

As we all strive to ensure that our lives have purpose and meaning we had fun with a bit of life crafting, looking at what we want to be doing more of in life and how work can contribute.

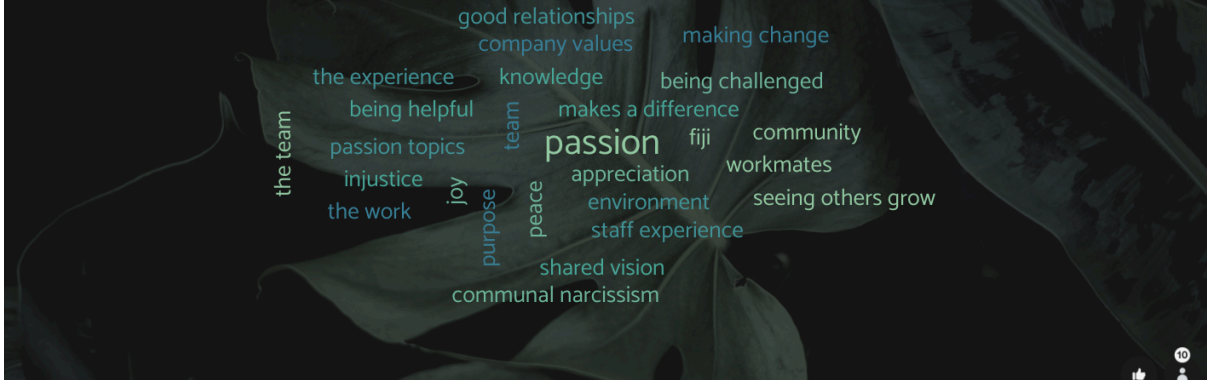


We took time to acknowledge the deep sense of grief and injustice that we all feel for things often beyond our control - climate change, the biodiversity crisis, inequalities, ongoing violence within families and globally. We work on subjects that are challenging and we took more time in 2023 and 2024 to practise techniques that help us remain positive and open to change.

What motivates us to continue to do the work might overlap with what motivates us in life, but not always.

# What motivates you to continue to do the work?

27 responses



In pulling together this guiding, 'living' document that sets out our vision for our region and our contribution as a small (but vocal!) consulting firm, we've deliberately kept it short and concise. We played around with different language - and it is really hard to land on something that doesn't sound disingenuous and free of development-speak. But we know how important it is to have a collective vision and shared goals and priorities. So, here it is. :-)

# What we do: Our team and areas of expertise

Talanoa Consulting is a Fiji-based and Pacific-focussed consultancy firm that exists to connect Pacific experts to opportunities to shape the region through the design, implementation and evaluation of development and research projects. We are multidisciplinary, proud of our culture and context, and will always seek to provide these perspectives alongside caring, professional advice and expertise.

We are small and intentionally so. This enables us to have meaningful relationships with our partners that extend beyond an individual contract. It also allows us to connect the work that we do across our team. Our super power in the Pacific is our connectedness and this runs through the work we do too.

Talanoa Consulting provides services in the following areas:

- Climate change, climate finance, disaster risk reduction and resilience;
- Agriculture, fisheries and food security;
- Gender equality, social inclusion and women's economic empowerment;
- Environmental conservation, natural resource management and sustainability;
- Small business and social enterprise development, particularly tourism; and agribusiness.

We provide support for a variety of different processes, always embedding ownership and co-creation as fundamental values of the way we work.

This often takes longer but is far more sustainable.

- Strategic planning, policy analysis and development
- Programme design, analysis, management and evaluation
- Creation of Pacific-centric tools, guides and knowledge products
- Facilitation of talanoa sessions, communities of practice, consultation processes and training
- Biological and socio-economic research and analysis
- Gender and human rights analysis
- Enterprise development, incubation and facilitation support
- Coaching, mentoring and career pathway development
- Advice to drive genuine and meaningful localisation
- Financial advice and grant management

As part of our core values, when bidding for work we always look for and push for opportunities for emerging consultants to join our team and support on-the-job learning. Our associate network of consultants around the region are partners and friends - and we will seek to grow this network and provide additional mentoring support where we can.



## Our strategy



## Our guiding vision

Pacific solutions steer our collective journey and ensure opportunities for all.

## Our mission

We deliver Pacific-led, quality and impactful analysis and research, co-create and share knowledge, facilitate connections, convene spaces, and generate learning to promote Pacific-led development.

In trying to capture what should be part of our vision and mission the words resonated with us are:





# Our values

Our work is guided and informed by our ethos, our character, our conduct, our beliefs and our commitment to:

**INCLUSIVENESS.** We respect people. We value diversity and are committed to equality and fairness. We are open to all those who wish to contribute and actively listen to differing voices. We will always strive to improve and enhance our cross cultural communication skills.

**QUALITY.** We set high standards and expect them to be maintained. We pursue excellence through continuous learning and improvement. We strongly believe that as we better ourselves, those around us are bettered. We take pride in what we do, and we are accountable for our actions.

**OPENNESS.** We are committed to a culture of sharing, teamwork and collaboration. We trust each other and those around us. We recognise the trust that others place in us. We listen to understand. We act with honesty and integrity and we will try our best to stay genuine, to be real!

**SUSTAINABILITY.** We will build resilience in our business, in each other, and with our partners. We commit to economic, social, cultural, and environmental sustainable practices in all that we do. We are part of and proud of our Pacific community. We care about the past, present and the future.

## Our approach: when we talanoa

**[ta-la-no-aa]**. verb. “a conversation, chat, sharing of ideas and talking with someone... formal, as between chiefs and his or her people, [or] informal, as between friends in a kava circle.... used to teach a skill, to share ideas, to preach, to resolve problems, to build and maintain relationships, and to gather information.”

– *The Kakala Research Framework, Seu'ula Johansson Fua*

When we talanoa....

....we listen. We don't assume that we know. We listen to better understand your needs. We listen and build on your ideas for solutions.

....we care. We're idealistic and realistic - and we believe you can be both. We believe in humanity. We only take on work that we are passionate about. We work on problems that we have the expertise to help solve. We don't assume that we're the right people and will always recommend others.

....we reflect. We look back and learn from our past. In an age of having information at our fingertips we tend to forget that many solutions already exist and can be refined and adapted to help solve today's problems.

....we question in culturally respectful ways. Asking why can be powerful in understanding the root causes of an issue. But there are different ways of asking why. We also know when not to ask.

.....we translate. We do not use development jargon that serves to alienate the very people it is supposed to support.

.....we laugh. Because everything has a funny side and seeing it helps!

## What this means for the way we work and grow

We know that if we want to create meaningful change through respectful disruption we need to grow. As a small firm seeking to shift power and resources to the region we will unashamedly advocate for small Pacific firms and independent consultants within the development space.

We know that disruption will require partnerships and we actively look for partners that are aligned on values, including within larger corporate development consulting firms. We know that most people are working there because they care.

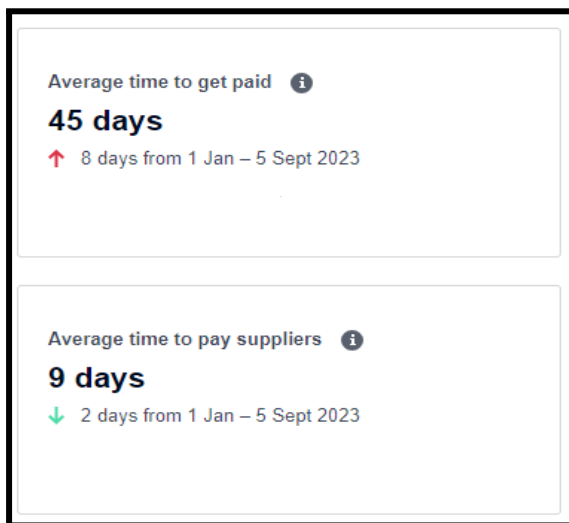
Our desire for growth is not for growth's sake - it is so we can provide services to partner governments, civil society organisations and small businesses and social enterprises and to provide career opportunities for Pacific development professionals.

We want to grow in a sustainable way such that our systems and processes match that growth, and we maintain the quality of our work. We want to grow to sustain appropriate and equitable salaries, a creative and productive office environment, and holistic training and support for our team.

As we expand we will retain the dynamism, responsiveness and agility of a small business and not become burdened by the bureaucracy required of larger companies.

We have close, mutually respectful, relationships with all of our associate consultants - they are not a CV - and it is not a business transaction. We invest in these relationships, provide mentoring and coaching support and take on the financial risk and commitment to pay our associates in a timely manner, usually ahead of being paid ourselves.

We don't want to be so big that it takes us 30 days to pay invoices. Our small and powerful finance team is committed to ensuring we pay our associates and suppliers as fast as we can, even if our partners often take much longer than 30 days to pay us.



*From our Xero accounting software showing how long it takes us after we submit an invoice to be paid, and how long it takes us to pay our partners and suppliers. September 2024*

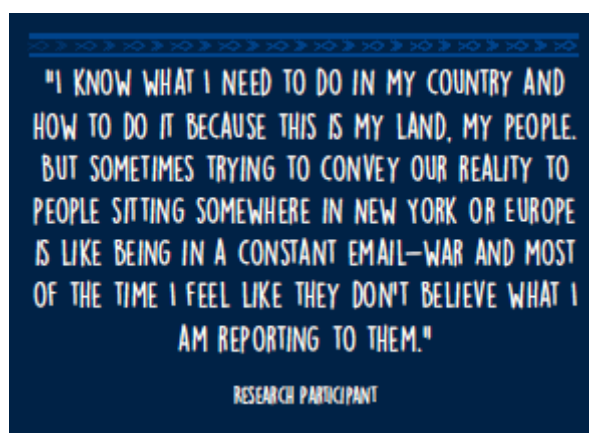
## Strategic goals and priorities

Our priorities are our people and our relationships. Our knowledge comes from the *talanoa* we have shared with diverse groups and communities. From our friends working to push boundaries within climate change, environmental and gender spaces, to our highland community tourism partners, and coastal communities that have welcomed us into *vanua* and *qoliqoli*, government partners across many ministries, civil society organisations, researchers and academics with whom we have collaborated, our friends and fellow practitioners, and our diverse Pacific families.

As a group of environmental and social scientists, researchers, economists, analysts and advocates we care deeply about our environment and our people and work to ensure they are centred in all the work that we do.

Over the next 5 years, we will prioritise delivering quality and impactful work:

- With a Fiji focus or a regional focus in an area of our core competence and expertise
- That includes opportunities for mentoring and capacity strengthening for our team and our network of associates to grow the number of Pacific consultants
- That advances climate, ecological and gender justice and reduces structural inequality and power imbalances
- That contributes to achieving meaningful change with a clear line of sight to the change we want to see in the future
- That includes partners that have aligned values, that we respect and enjoy working with
- That makes us joyful and excited about our work



Guttenbeil-Likiliki, 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka (2020), Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Vā and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean Together, Melbourne: IWDA.

# Actions to get us there

PRIORITIES	ACTIONS
<b>Goal 1: Informed decision makers and decision making</b>	
Accessible research and analysis is available to support evidence-based decision makers	Support a team of diverse professionals to ensure we can meet partner needs
	Balance 'doing the work' with 'engagement' with decision makers to share our knowledge
	Advocate for work to be openly shared and available to others
Contribute to the pool of knowledge to inform decision makers at all levels	Ensure our work gets out into the world - technical reports, policy briefs, blogs, journal articles
	Regularly update our own website with completed research, papers, toolkits and other outputs from our work
	Advocate for strategic communication components to all our work - reject work that isn't going to be made accessible to those that need it
Deliver quality, impactful work through strong partnerships	Screen work and tender strategically - ensure we are the right people to do the work, and we have the right partners involved for it to generate outcomes
	Deliver contractual commitments
Support learning opportunities throughout our work	Build in awareness and knowledge sessions to contracts to promote outreach
	Promote regular internal learning sessions
	Connect people and organisations together
<b>Goal 2: Skilled and motivated leaders and professionals</b>	
Develop and deliver engaging training and skills development	Utilise engaging facilitation tools and training methods
	Support professional facilitation skills development for team members and our network
Adopt coaching and mentoring approaches within our work and with our partners	Improving mentoring approaches and provide professional development to team members as coaches and mentors
	Incorporate standard language in responses to partners and proposals that advocates for associates, interns and emerging professionals to receive mentoring and coaching from our team

**Goal 3: Strong, trusted networks**

Co-create with partners that are aligned on values	Create channels for regular and transparent communication and share our values with all partners
	Clearly articulate the desired outcomes of collaboration from the outset
	Share our vision to inspire and motivate all partners to work towards a common purpose
Connect Pacific experts to opportunities and each other	Grow our associate network and ensure they receive value from our partnership
	Develop referral processes for trusted partners
	Work with partners who are willing to help themselves and not totally reliant on us

**Goal 4: Just systems and institutions that underpin the development sector**

Identify opportunities and partnerships to do development better	Clearer boundaries on work we don't do or those we don't want to work with
	Strategically sharing information and company values internally within the team
Advocate for change and champion Pacific voices	Promote a deeper understanding of Pacific values, knowledge and ways of working
	Professional development - read more, learning network, exposure, capacity building, mentor

**Goal 5: Respected, recognised and sustainable business**

Maintain creativity, productivity and credibility	Strengthen identity of Talanoa Consulting and keep website updated
	Constantly revisit and refresh our purpose
Develop and maintain systems that support our team to do their best work	Create space for team bonding and support systems
	Understand and capitalise on our team dynamics
Maintain strong financial processes and a financial buffer to be able to take on risk for others	Develop detailed budgets that accurately forecast income, expenses and cash flow
	Monitor financial performance against budget and adjust as needed
	Create contingency plans to address financial setbacks or unexpected expenses.

## Measuring our success

Success is difficult to measure and we will attempt to ensure we are moving towards our goals using light-touch approaches and regular team and partner check-ins. We know that indicators are important, and we know that you can't measure everything.

Our coffee catch-ups in the kitchen, talanoa sessions, wellness sessions, our various WhatsApp and Viber groups are as important as any of the formal processes listed below.

<b>Success</b>	<b>Our attempt to measure</b>
Partner recognition of ethical, high quality of work	Annual surveys, informal talanoa
A harmonious and fulfilled team, who are constantly learning and growing	Pulse checks/stay interviews Learning series
Recognised as a trusted partner	Annual surveys, informal talanoa
Influencing, inspiring and supporting others to disrupt and claim space	# of associate consultants and # years as part of our network Associate consultant and partner surveys
Financially sustainable	Contracts, accounts, forecasts
Fair employment packages, bonuses and staff retention	Benchmarking to other organisations, annual bonuses, secure contracts
Diversity of partners we work with	Partner list
Work boundaries and weekends	# of times we say no to work that we don't have time for or isn't values-aligned Use of screening and response template Weekend adventures
A harmonious, healthy, happy and fulfilled team	Low blood pressure, plenty of leftover sick leave, and smiley faces