

Quick facts

- Paul Tikoicolo Vatakale had worked as a fitter and turner for the Ministry of Works, Transport and Public Utilities since 1989. Then, as a result of completing his Certificate III in Engineering at the Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC) in 2010, Tiko received numerous promotions and in 2013, was appointed Acting Senior Mechanical Engineer for Water and Energy at the Ministry.
- As a direct result of his APTC training, Paul Tikoicolo Vatakale has implemented international workplace safety standards and improved environmental work practices, such as proper disposal of waste (oils, chemicals and general pollutants) and better management of Fiji's fragile coral reefs.
- Also as a result of his APTC training, Paul Tikoicolo Vatakale is responsible for the Ministry increasing its commitment to workplace safety in the past 12 months, with stricter standards for safety attire for employees, such as reflective vests, and a ruling that it is now compulsory for worksite visitors and staff to wear safety boots.
- In his new position, Paul Tikoicolo Vatakale has assisted in supervising the multimillion dollar rehabilitation of schools and government quarters following destruction by Cyclone Evan, including the construction of two hospitals in Cuvu and Keyasi; two government offices in Korolevu and Nayavu-i-Ra; the Vitogo Bridge and six lighthouses installed between Momi Bay and Lautoka. He is currently supervising the highly-complex construction of six new lighthouses in Labasa.
- Fiji Government reforms for 'Enhancing Public Sector Efficiency, Effectiveness and Service Delivery' is a key priority in the Fiji Government's Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development 2010-2014 – A Better Fiji for All (December 2009).



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

CREATING SKILLS FOR LIFE

IMPACT Case Study

A Beacon of Light



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Rising star is raising standards in Fiji

After graduating from the Australia-Pacific Technical College, Paul Tikoicolo Vatakale is now responsible for coordinating multimillion-dollar construction projects for the Ministry of Works, Transport and Public Utilities in Fiji.



Paul Tikoicolo at work at the Ministry of Works, Transport and Public Utilities



APTC students during a workshop

Paul Tikoicolo Vatakale (known as Tiko) is from Batiki - a tiny volcanic island with a land area of 12 square kilometres and a population of approximately 300 Fijian people.

Tiko had been working as a fitter and turner for the Ministry of Works, Transport and Public Utilities for 21 years, when in 2010 his career took a new direction.

After completing his Certificate III in Engineering at the Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC), Tiko received numerous promotions and then in 2013, he was appointed Acting Senior Mechanical Engineer for Water and Energy at the Ministry.

This took Tiko from supervising basic workshop maintenance to managing national public works.

In his new role, Tiko is responsible for assisting the Ministry to become a semi-commercial and income-generating entity, as well as developing and improving the quality and skills of the next generation of government employees.

These responsibilities are an important part of the Fijian Government's reforms to make its ministries more effective and efficient¹.

To contribute towards achieving these outcomes, Tiko is directly harnessing his engineering and time-management training from his APTC studies to "change the mindset" of the 100-plus staff that he now supervises.

"I try to make staff more accountable for their expenditure and actions - to realise that time is money - and think of ways to bring about efficiencies to their operations," says Tiko.

Tiko says it is a "real challenge" to try to shift people's attitudes to desire more efficiency on a daily basis, as well as encouraging them to approach business with a view to generating income. This work has seen him contribute to costing works commercially in other government departments.

Previously, the Fijian Government has employed overseas experts in this area, in its water and roads sectors. With more qualified local people, such as Tiko, they can now look closer to home, improving the long-term capacity for local, executive employment.

Tiko has also introduced other fundamental changes at the Ministry as a result of his APTC studies, including implementing international workplace safety standards and improved environmental work practices, such as proper disposal of waste (oils, chemicals and general pollutants) and better management of Fiji's fragile coral reefs.

So far, Tiko has supervised the construction of two hospitals in Cuvu and Keyasi, two government offices in Korolevu and Nayavu-i-Ra, and the Vitogo Bridge in Lautoka. He is also overseeing the highly complex construction of six new lighthouses between Momi Bay and Lautoka.

All this new construction follows the multimillion-dollar rehabilitation of schools and government buildings following the Cyclone Evan floods, with a focus on coordinating mechanical logistics support.

One of Tiko's teachers at APTC, Taro Morrison, Diesel Fitting Trainer, says Tiko was a mature and active student who was always humble, but also keen to improve his level of knowledge and skills.

"[APTC] has given him confidence in what he does and what he can do," says Taro.

"After completing his studies he was initially going to become one of our [APTC] tutors, however, the Ministry realised what a valuable asset he was and offered him the Acting Senior Mechanical Engineer position."

Taro goes on to say that Tiko's "passion for his trade has clearly shone through in his work as they continue to promote him".

Tiko is still coming to terms with the changes in his life since attending APTC and starting in his new position.

"I used to be down there on the floor with the boys and in just three years I am up here at the management level," he says. "It's a really big change."

Tiko believes that it was the competency-based training at APTC - with the emphasis on experience and international standards - that made both him and the Ministry reconsider his career prospects.

Because this new position is generally held by people with degrees in mechanical engineering, the Ministry is keen to support Tiko with any further study that is necessary to meet the eligibility criteria for a permanent position.

Manasa Lesuma, Deputy Secretary at the Ministry, noticed that even before he completed his APTC studies, Tiko showed strong leadership skills, especially with trainees.

"This has put him in a much better position. Now he is in a supervising role looking after both trades, and he is very instrumental in most of our major projects that are a combination of civil and mechanical works," says Manasa.

¹'Enhancing Public Sector Efficiency, Effectiveness and Service Delivery' is a key priority in the Fiji Government's Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development 2010-2014: A Better Fiji for All, December 2009, <http://www.fiji.gov.fj/getattachment/Govt--Publications/Peoples-Charter/RSSSED.pdf.aspx>

Shining a light on local tourism

The construction of six new lighthouses between Momi Bay and Lautoka in Fiji is set to boost tourism and improve safety for seafarers.

These new lighthouses will assist professional and leisure seafarers to navigate local waters and prevent damage to Fiji's pristine marine environment. They also have the potential to attract more cruise ships and super yachts into local ports, which is an effective way to inject considerable tourism dollars into local businesses.

Central to the lighthouse project has been APTC graduate and Acting Senior Mechanical Engineer for Water and Energy at the Ministry of Works, Transport and Public Utilities, Paul Tikoicolo Vatakale (Tiko). He is overseeing initial surveying, construction practices and techniques, specification and procurement, and managing the schedule of this highly complex construction.

Tiko was previously involved in the construction of another six new lighthouses in the north of Fiji's main island, in waters off Nadi and Lautoka.

The Ministry, in partnership with the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF), is constructing these lighthouses as part of Fiji's Aids to Navigation (AtoN) development program. The Ministry is planning another eight to nine lighthouses in other parts of Fiji in 2014.

Manasa Lesuma, Deputy Secretary Operations for the Ministry, says the lighthouses are a major infrastructure project that not only supports tourism and cruise ship visits, but also economic development in Bua, the local bauxite mine and Wairiki wood chip mill, plus the sugar and oil terminals in Labasa.

"I believe any seafarer will be more confident sailing our seas with those visible navigational aids out there," says Manasa. "We [also] have a lot of cruise ships in the area of Lautoka, so it helps with the tourism."

President of the Labasa Tourism Association, Paul Jaduram, believes that the lighthouses are important, along with other government infrastructure works in Labasa, to help grow the local tourism industry.

"The only way we can increase tourism is to provide infrastructure," says Paul.

He also says that the current "very small percentage of tourist arrivals" and close to nil growth in the industry will continue unless there is more infrastructure development in the area.

Ideally, Paul would like to see an international seaport or airport constructed in the future to make a major impact on the community by bringing tourist dollars "to restaurants, cafes, and shopping centres".

Improving environmental practices

APTC graduate Paul Tikoicolo Vatakale (Tiko), who was recently appointed Acting Senior Mechanical Engineer for Water and Energy at the Ministry of Works, Transport and Public Utilities, has used his APTC training to ensure stricter adherence to international environmental standards in government construction projects in Fiji.

These standards are essential to protect the fragile nature of Fiji's coral reefs, which are easily damaged by poor work practices in related industries, such as lighthouse construction.

The units of competency in all APTC courses cover Australian standards for the disposal of waste (oils, chemicals and general pollutants).

"In the sea, what we stress to all [employees] is not to dump unwanted rubbish into the water, but [rather] to take it back to the mainland for proper disposal," says Tiko.

Initially this important message was ignored by many, but according to Tiko, when people understood how important the environmental aspect is and then they finally actually did it.

Tiko believes that it is also important for Government to provide employees with the right resources, especially in terms of machines and equipment, when working at sea to minimise any potential environmental damage.

"We now have more awareness," says Tiko.

"Instead of me telling them what to do, they now help each other and so it is becoming a long term practice and is part of the job satisfaction for them."