

## Travelling, Navigating and Negotiating Māori Leadership Challenges in the 21st Century

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**Abstract:** The focus of this paper is on the challenges faced by contemporary Māori leaders and the strategies employed to overcome these challenges. The paper is a personal reflection of the Manu Ao Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Māori leadership wānanga. It brings together the academic and personal experiences of some of the wānanga presenters identifying a range of issues that impact upon Māori leadership in a broad sense, Māori research, the obligatory nature of researchers to both the 'researched' communities and requisite responsibilities in the production of knowledge. Throughout this programme I was inspired by the range and excellence of all the speakers, many of whom posed challenges to what or how Māori leadership is fashioned in this new and contemporary cultural landscape.

**Keywords:** cultural landscapes; Māori leadership; travelling Māori

*Kō te reo karanga o te rā, te wero, te wero o te takina,  
ko tāu rourou, ko taku rourou, ka ora ai te iwi e*

*The call of today, the challenge to leaders, bring together your basket and my basket there lies the  
wellbeing of the people*

Māori have a history of being travellers and ocean navigators. The radical relocation of whole communities from Hawaiiki to Aotearoa required extraordinary leadership to navigate, to relocate and settle in new environments. Today the Māori 'traveller' still exists albeit in a contemporary sense. Māori are navigating new cultural landscapes and as such continue to seek leadership that will foster hope and carry ancestral lessons in order to negotiate a rapidly changing global environment. Sir Tipene O'Regan offered an illustration of how Māori historically have adapted to change while synchronously utilising tikanga Māori (Māori ways) in practice (O'Regan, 2010). He explained how the heke (rafters) in the whare tupuna (ancestral house) Rehua, display the technologies, innovations and evolution of the landscape over time and the connections or relationships with our natural environments. While things change, ancestral lessons are still transmitted as our legacy and obligation.

At a recent Manu Ao seminar Professor Lyn Carter offered up a term for those of us that find ourselves in environments away from home or the haukāinga (tribal home), that is the 'travelling Māori' (Carter, 2010). I think this term far better reflects Māori who live outside our tribal boundaries than the commonly used term 'urban Māori' and ruminates with the notion of us continuing our ancestor's navigator and travelling acumen. This 'travellers' thread was a common theme during the leadership wānanga. Many of us now live outside our iwi (tribal) boundaries, sometimes three, four or five generations removed. We are creating new cultural landscapes that are increasingly shaped by relationships developed or maintained in new types of communities and within new technologies. For example there is the evolutionary mode of cultural communication systems such as whakairo (carvings), ngā tūrapa (flax weaving) and modern communication modes, such as social networking and digital communications.

The travelling Māori concept can also be associated with many Māori who may be living away from 'home', working in non-Māori institutions or dealing with communities outside their whānau. These environments are often far removed from our extended families at the home village. So how do we

negotiate this fast changing world as Māori away from home, away from our whānau, away from, in some instances, whānau obligations? We don't get called upon to go to the marae to do 'marae duties'. Our children don't learn the ways of the marae, the silent hand that manages a hui. The marae is an important part of genealogical, cultural connection and historically has been a central feature in Māori leadership models (Ka'ai & Higgins, 2003). The marae processes are largely controlled by the diminutive actions of kaumatua. For example, the subtle gasps or eye movements of the kaumatua when one needs to modify behaviour. These many idiosyncrasies, in a traditional Māori society, are transmitted by what Rahui Katene MP termed "learning by osmosis" or through participation, often not available to the 'travelling Māori' (Turei, Katene & Parata, 2010). The 'travelling Māori' presents opportunities for Māori leaders to take advantage of the diverse and dispersed resource of Māori throughout the world.

The diversity of Māori society requires leadership that responds to today's globalised world. Contextualising these environments is a key factor in recognising the reality and subsequent leadership requirements of Māori and their communities. In a very broad sense Māori leaders are faced with the task of balancing and negotiating their way through an increasingly multifaceted society. They are confronted by political agendas that influence perceptions of who or what it is to be Māori, both for themselves as well as for those they lead, which poses more challenges and opportunities. The urban Māori debate, for example, has highlighted the disconnection of many Māori to their tribal affiliations and subsequent marginalisation of whole communities (Meredith, 2000). Setting aside issues around public funding criteria and the increasing requirement to register with individual iwi authorities, research shows positive social outcomes when Māori identify with their culture, understand the meanings of social practices and engage in power relations within their communities (Durie, 2008; Houkamau, 2006; McIntosh, 2007). In response to the common practice of homogenising Māori into one set of criteria, Paul Meredith (1998) called for the end of defining "the innocent essential Māori subject" (p. 1) and proposed instead a more inclusive definition, "a complex and plural Māori subject constructed around a sophisticated understanding of the notion of 'Māoriness', a Māori critical consciousness, and a relational politics betwixt Māori" (Meredith, 1998, p. 1). This stance encourages multiple interpretations of Māori identity and, at the same time, incorporates the individuality of group members (Houkamau, 2006). Māori leaders must navigate through the complex and often highly political web of the contemporary Māori world and be well versed in both te ao Māori (the Māori world) and te ao Pākehā (the non-Māori world).

Leadership within Māori contexts, such as marae, are modelled on tikanga Māori (Māori customs) passed down as ancestral lessons, legacies and requisite obligations. Ancestral messages in customary processes such as pōwhiri, whakapapa, whaikōrero, mōteatea (traditional song) and pakiwaitara (storytelling) provide clear and tested negotiation processes for leaders today. Māori leadership qualities are imbued with the notion of reciprocity, of mutual understandings, developing relationships and/or leading through serving people. For example, Soloman & McMeeking (2010) reflected upon the concept of whānaungatanga (sense of family connection associated with kinship rights and obligations) in business operations. He spoke of a practical example of implementing tikanga Māori into what is a very corporate environment albeit an iwi corporate. His presentation highlighted how Māori thinking is often sectorised as we seek to define Māori terms in administrative situations, often losing sight of the practical reason, the kaupapa (philosophy) or rationale behind respective tikanga practices. The ability of leaders to impart practical understandings of tikanga Māori within their respective organisations is important. Operationalising tikanga is a great challenge for Māori leaders as often space for cultural imperatives are not considered practical in implementation. This is perhaps more significant now as tikanga Māori practices are increasingly being adopted in both Māori and mainstream institutions.

Māori leadership in mainstream contexts such as universities requires compromises, and poses many obstacles and challenges to research, teaching and administration. A range of dynamic Māori leaders

presented their experiences working within the academy and their respective universities (Henry, 2010; Kawharu, 2010; Mead, 2010; Tapsell, 2010). They spoke of how they have navigated their way within very rigid institutions and created space for Māori to practice tikanga in their work. Solomon & McMeeking (2010) supported that notion as she shared her university journey as a law student. Her career since graduating changed dramatically for the better when she chose to work within her iwi corporate organisation. She found that working within the restrictive confines of mainstream law was too much of a compromise and encouraged emerging Māori leaders to continually seek positive outcomes for iwi Māori whether in business, tribal affairs or research. All noted that one of the key skills in working within their university environments is negotiation and balancing work between themselves as Māori and the needs and wants of their respective universities. This sometimes presents great challenges as often research imperatives for universities do not necessarily benefit those being researched. This was a critique of many presenters at the wānanga and the necessity for research to inform Māori communities is another important aspect for Māori leaders to continually cultivate within the academy (Tamihere, 2010).

Māori leadership is not conducive to wielding power and control over others but rather it is about being servants to their whānau, hapū, iwi and wider communities they relate to. It was not surprising, therefore, that during a workshop conducted by Lena Gray and Colin Cox (2010) on analysing types of leadership the leadership style of most of the wānanga participants was more democratic and laissez-faire as opposed to autocratic and bureaucratic. Māori leaders often have long term, multi-generational responsibilities, they are not just operating for retirement or the short lifespan of a business; they also must consider the future generations that follow them.

The concepts of travelling, navigating and negotiating were common threads throughout the wānanga. Bringing together academic and personal experiences provided a rich forum for critical reflection of our work practices, research and personal positions within our whānau, hapū and iwi. Critically analysing ourselves as present or future Māori leaders offered both the opportunity to reflect on our work practice as well as proffering strategies to support applying elements of Māori leadership in our respective work and personal lives. The Manu Ao and Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Māori leadership wānanga is another were of those life transforming experiences for me. Listening to the presentations and being able to reflect on and debate issues within a professional cohort of scholars outside my actual employment has definitely influenced my practice at work and beyond.

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