

Reflecting on Māori academic leadership

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Abstract: In a constantly changing world, the role of leadership is of ever increasing importance. In 2010, a series of wānanga (forums) were organised and facilitated by the Manu Ao Academy and Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga. The focus of the wānanga was contemporary Māori leadership. An array of presenters and speakers provided their thoughts, philosophies and experiences in leadership roles to the audience of, mainly, early career Māori academics. This paper is the reflection of one of those participants in regard to Māori academic leadership. It highlights some of the recurring themes presented during the wānanga as important features of Māori academic leadership, particularly the role of tikanga Māori and a Māori perspective of the world.

Keywords: academic; leadership; Māori

Introduction

Leadership is a topic that is often discussed and debated. Māori leadership, in its various guises, is not immune to this as attempts are made to define and categorise the features or attributes of a good leader and good leadership practice. Traditionally and in contemporary society leadership continues to be important to the welfare and wellbeing of Māori as indicated in the following whakataukī from Ngā Puhī:

He toka tūmoana he ākinga nā ngā tai. A standing rock in the sea, lashed by the tides. (Kawharu 2008)

This whakataukī describes the role of a leader in traditional Māori society as an important buffer between their people and external pressures and issues. They also have to be able to navigate internal demands from their own people as well. This article reflects on some ideas related to Māori academic leadership presented during the 2010 Manu Ao Leadership Wānanga.

Māori leadership

Leadership has always been important in Māori society and various writers have attempted to describe and define the characteristics that contribute to a traditional Māori understanding of leadership. Two notable accounts of Māori leadership in the 19th century are those of Tikitu of Ngāti Awa and Te Rangikaheke of Ngāti Rangiwewehi. Both described the qualities that were desirable in a leader. These qualities related to the specific needs of Māori at that time, they were directly associated with the context in which Māori were living (Grove, 1985). Te Rangikaheke provided eight main principles to describe effective Māori leadership. These were: bravery, war speeches, food procurement, feasts of celebration, restraining the departure of visiting parties, council speeches, welcoming guests and looking after visitors. Tikitu also provided eight principles which were: knowledge of and industrious in obtaining food, ability to mediate and settle disputes, courage in war, good strategist and leader in war, knowledge of the arts of carving, knowledge of how to look after people, knowledge of how to build large houses and canoes and a sound knowledge of tribal land boundaries (Hohepa, & Robson 2008). There are commonalities between

the principles promoted by both men, however the context of their respective environments is reflected in the principles. Te Rangikaheke, prior to the land wars, had a focus on the hosting of guests and various types of speechmaking while Tikitu, following the land wars, had a focus on military activity, food production and maintenance of tribal land. As in these examples, leadership in contemporary Māori society is dynamic and the contexts varied.

Within modern academia the subject of leadership is also important. Issues such as the development of Māori academic leadership and the succession planning for current Māori leaders are continuing considerations. The Manu Ao academy was established in 2008 aimed at focusing on developing Māori academic leadership and Māori scholarship (Manu Ao, 2011). In 2010 Manu Ao instituted a leadership programme that included a three part leadership wānanga programme and leadership workshops. The various speakers came from an array of leadership roles as judges, academics, politicians, business people and corporate tribal leaders. They each presented on their own ideas of contemporary Māori leadership drawn from their own personal experiences. The following article is a brief reflection of one of the participants of this wānanga on Māori academic leadership.

One of the recurring themes in the various presentations was the importance of Māori cultural concepts in informing the leadership practice of many of the presenters. The way in which these concepts were described differed between speaker, however, the centrality of the Māori worldview articulated through the application of the cultural concepts was constant. Dr Manuka Henare, Justice Joe Williams and Dr Te Ahukaramu Royal each presented sessions that shared commonality in that their approaches were all founded in a Māori worldview based on cultural concepts.

Both Henare and Williams asserted the importance of various cultural concepts in informing their leadership practice. Despite the difference in their professional positions they both posited the idea of a Māori worldview based on these cultural concepts. They believed that it was this worldview that differentiated Māori, and Māori leaders, from others. The range of concepts that might be used to define and describe this worldview might differentiate slightly from one person to another but fundamentally Māori concepts such as mana (status), tapu (protected, sacred), manaakitanga (hospitality, kindness), tikanga (custom, rule) and aroha (love, concern) are the foundation for Māori academic leadership (Henare, 2010; Williams, 2010). Henare also intimated that one of the issues for a Māori was that they were still expected to participate and support their own community, tribal or other, development. This was different than his non-Māori colleagues who were able to focus primarily on their own interests and careers. For Māori academic leaders who adhere to a Māori worldview this was not the case as tribal and community obligations remained important (Henare, 2010).

Royal had a similar focus when he spoke of aroha (love, concern) as a foundational concept upon which his actions and beliefs are based. He also posited the idea that effective leadership is based on incremental quality development. He described this development using the concept of “Iti nei, iti nei”, which he defined as small quality steps. Therefore his template for effective leadership was one based on the Māori worldview that focused on deliberate quality development rather than a rushed or ad hoc approach (Royal, 2010).

The importance of the Māori worldview is also highlighted by Penetito (2011) who asserts that:

The world is considered value-bound (aroha, manaakitanga). We learn those values from the social world (whanaungatanga/kinship, tangihanga). We internalise them and they become part of us (whakapapa, reo). They cannot be set aside (mana/power and authority, tapu/sacred and prohibited). We come to know the social world as being essentially relativist and where multiple realities are the norm. Everyone has his/her own story to tell and variation is the reality (tikanga).

This worldview and the cultural concepts that make it up are fundamental to how we each behave and relate to others and the world around us.

The understanding of tikanga is also important in academic leadership. Te Ripowai Higgins in the third wānanga stated that the ability to enact and understand tikanga was a fundamental skill required in modern leadership. This understanding means that a leader can adapt tikanga and its application to suit modern situations and relationships. She posited this with the term tikangakore or those that have no understanding of tikanga. Higgins used examples from the Te Herenga Waka marae and the way in which tikanga enacted on the marae is flexible and pragmatic within its university setting but that ultimately “correct” tikanga must be acknowledged and adhered to. She promoted this as also an important characteristic for personal behaviour and the way in which Māori should approach their roles within academia and their scholarship. Her perceptions and examples supported the ideas raised earlier by Royal, Henare and Williams.

Professor Roger Maaka in a Manu Ao leadership workshop at Massey University described Māori intellectual leadership as being founded on solid scholarship and administration. He asserted that Māori academic leadership was about creating and maintaining space within the academy and fostering the development of young Māori academics. In these points Maaka is alluding to the internal pressures that are associated with being Māori and working within academia. He sees a difference for those in Māori academic leadership positions, as opposed to non-Māori, in the role of continuing to advocate and strengthen the status of Māori knowledge and Māori scholars within New Zealand universities. He specifically considered the need for effective succession planning to ensure the continued development of Māori scholars within the academy and to allow for the support of current senior Māori academics who often have to fulfil a multitude of roles due to a lack of Māori academic capacity within the universities. Another significant point he made was the assertion that the application of cultural concepts and tikanga which inform the way in which Māori viewed the world is the difference between Māori and others within an academic context (Maaka, 2010).

Conclusion

This article has explored briefly some ideas related to contemporary Māori academic leadership. Specifically, it has focused on a group of presenters that asserted that their leadership practice was intimately tied to a Māori understanding of the world. They believed that good Māori academic leadership is founded on a Māori worldview built on Māori cultural concepts and enacted through tikanga. Those Māori in senior academic positions who are obliged to assume leadership roles have the external expectations from their own iwi and communities to continue to participate in tribal affairs. Whilst they also have the internal institutional pressures of meeting their own responsibilities and broader responsibility of ensuring the continued development of Māori knowledge within the academy, he toka tūmoana.

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