

**COMMUNICATION IN THE NEW ZEALAND
WORKPLACE**

THEORY AND PRACTICE

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The Role of Research in Cross-Cultural Communication in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Elsbeth Tilley & Tyron Love

As New Zealand society becomes more diverse and the ethnic make-up of our population changes, people in the workplace now, more than at any other time in our history, need to be aware of differences in values, expectations and practices when communicating across cultures.

Most guidelines for effective cross-cultural communication stress the importance of communicators increasing their knowledge about other cultures. For example, Gudykunst (1995), a widely published American communication scholar, believes that following a practice he terms 'mindfulness' can significantly improve cross-cultural communication. The 'three tasks' of mindfulness include motivation (developing an attitude of willingness to learn about other cultures) and skill (improving techniques such as dialogue and listening).

The third task, however, and one that underpins both the others, is increasing knowledge by learning about other cultures through research. This may include formal research programmes to study other cultures, or informal research such as reading books, asking questions and contacting people within other cultures who can act as guides or advisors.

This chapter likewise endorses increased knowledge as crucial to cross-cultural understanding and therefore to effective communication. However, in New Zealand, as in other postcolonial societies, the concept of 'research' itself needs to be explored in more depth, as research is not always positive to all participants. Important cultural issues may surround even preliminary research steps, such as asking questions and making contact.

This chapter draws on the Kaupapa Māori research guidelines proposed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and developed by other Māori scholars, to suggest ways in which non-Māori in New Zealand can increase knowledge of the values, practices and communication expectations of our society's second-largest ethnic group, Māori, and thereby become more sensitive and successful cross-cultural communicators.

Increasing Diversity

Although Pākehā (European-descended New Zealanders) comprise about 80% of our population, diversity is increasing. According to 2001 census results, Māori make up one-seventh of New Zealand's population, an increase of 21% since 1991 (Statistics New Zealand, 2003). Māori are New Zealand's tāngata whenua, or indigenous population, and make a distinctive contribution to our overall sense of New Zealand's culture and identity. Many Māori are powerful business, political and social leaders, and Māori input is respected and valued across the spectrum of New Zealand society. For purely pragmatic reasons, no business operating in New Zealand can afford to ignore the specific communication expectations and needs of its Māori stakeholders, whether as customers, competitors, investors, employees, employers, suppliers, distributors or trading partners.

There are also legal and ethical reasons for learning to be a competent cross-cultural communicator, not only with Māori but also with contemporary New Zealand society's full ethnic range. For example, the Human Rights Act (1993) prohibits any communication, deliberate or accidental, that could cause racial disharmony (Human Rights Commission [HRC], 2004). Specific legal requirements for communication with Māori are continually being negotiated with reference to the Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 and adjudicated since 1975 by the Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal. At present, the tribunal's ever-evolving interpretation of the treaty is that it involves four principles: partnership (working together in good faith); duty to make informed decisions (including by consultation); active protection (of Māori rights, lands, possessions and taonga or treasures); and redress (compensation for treaty breaches) (Te Puni Kōkiri, Ministry of Māori Development, 2002). All parties to the treaty are required to be mindful of these principles when communicating across cultures.

Power and ethical issues relating to cross-cultural communication in New Zealand are more complex than legal compliance, however. New Zealand's recent history has been dramatically shaped by a major incident of colonisation, meaning that one group of incoming people (in this case mainly of British origin) attempted to displace groups of people already here, called indigenous people (in this case collectively called Māori).

Māori are powerful and resilient, and have made and continue to make strong responses and resistances to colonial domination. Furthermore, New Zealand is unique among former British colonies in having a treaty which recognises at least to some degree indigenous resource ownership and now provides a starting point for negotiations. Other colonies had treaties but most have since been disregarded (Orange,

1987/1989). However, the power structures established during colonisation remain influential, particularly the cultural and linguistic structures.

For example, although New Zealand is officially bicultural and bilingual, English, the colonisers' language, is the competency required for most citizens to gain employment. Most incoming colonists did not expect to learn Māori language (te reo) in order to communicate with Māori in New Zealand. Rather they expected, because of assumptions of cultural superiority upon which colonisation depends, that Māori would learn English. These issues remain current; New Zealand is a postcolonial society, meaning one living with and working through the ongoing effects of colonial history, rather than a society in which colonisation has finished having an impact.

Part of successful postcolonial coexistence includes recognising the power imbalances inherent in colonial history and minimising their repetition in the present day. For example, non-indigenous peoples do need to be mindful, when using the English language to communicate with indigenous peoples, that English reflects the colonisers' ways of thinking and seeing the world, and that those ways may be incompatible with indigenous ways of knowing.

In general, indigenous peoples are skilful communicators who have learned and adapted colonial languages and concepts to their own purposes to a far greater degree than colonising peoples have been able to learn indigenous languages and concepts. However, speaking in colonial language, and therefore on colonial conceptual terms, may still disadvantage indigenous communicators. For example, there may not be words or concepts available in English for Māori to communicate culturally specific concepts. One example is 'mana', sometimes translated as related to spiritual power, prestige, honour or reputation (King, 2001).

In te reo, mana's meaning is contained within the single word and its usage context, but attempts to approximate it in English need to use at least two, and sometimes long lists of, words, and still cannot fully accommodate the broader cultural context within which 'mana' makes sense through connections to ancestors and land, as well as personal attributes.

As a further example, not only Māori but indigenous groups worldwide have found English inadequate to express indigenous relationships with land that are not based in concepts of individual property ownership but instead involve shared management responsibilities and sacred aspects. Therefore, the most important form of knowledge any cross-cultural communicator can learn is the other cultural group's language. Language opens unparalleled windows into cultural understanding.¹

Also important to cross-cultural communication is specific cultural knowledge of values, protocols, customs and communication expectations; for example, in New Zealand this may involve immersion in and

understanding of te ao Māori, the Māori world. Gudykunst (1995) argues that knowledge of another culture can increase cross-cultural communication success and in principle we agree. However, in postcolonial cultures, non-indigenous communicators also need to consider the issue of knowledge appropriation. Because indigenous knowledge is a taonga (treasure) that many colonial groups have sought to plunder (for example indigenous medicinal knowledge has been gathered by and now generates profit for some non-indigenous pharmaceutical groups), many indigenous peoples now guard their knowledge resources carefully.

Specifically, when communicating with Māori, non-Māori communicators need to understand that there are some aspects of Kaupapa Māori (the Māori way) that can be shared with non-Māori, and some that cannot. And, as with any other issue, Māori do not represent a unified or single 'bloc'. There are also differing practices and views about Kaupapa Māori among Māori.²

The Kaupapa Māori Approach to Research

We have recommended increased familiarity with te ao Māori (the Māori world) as an important step in successful cross-cultural communication with Māori, and have emphasised the importance of research to building knowledge and enhancing understanding in each specific communication situation. As a guide to such research, the Kaupapa Māori research principles are helpful. This is a set of protocols developed by Māori academic scholars to guide any research in Māori cultural settings that aims to increase understanding of Māori values.

We believe the protocols are also applicable to non-academic research, for example, research that a communication consultancy or government agency conducts before launching a communication campaign designed to reach Māori audiences. Insufficient consideration for how Māori knowledge is treated during research interactions may lead to inadequate or inaccurate research findings that result in miscommunication, and may also have a negative or detrimental affect on Māori cultural values.

Durie points out that some attempts to understand Māori culture and values have "assessed Māori from a western standpoint only, as though Māori were cardboard figures with blank minds awaiting intelligence" (1998, para. 3). Durie says even "real attempts to get inside the Māori value system" have had "some tendency to see history in terms of the colonisers' precepts and to assess change in terms of the colonisers' agenda" (1998, para. 3).

Such attempts do not give "adequate reference to the agenda that Māori already had or to the depth of the ancestral opinions that influenced Maori thinking" (Durie, 1998, para. 3). Kaupapa Māori research

procedures address these issues. Traditional values form important assumptions that underlie the Kaupapa Māori research process; and thus, an exploration of Kaupapa Māori research protocol is also a useful introduction to core Māori values.

Resistance

The central principle of Kaupapa Māori research is resistance to any automatic or assumed 'rightness', 'naturalness' or dominance of Pākehā and Western ways. An assumption of Western models as 'normal' and indigenous models as 'different' underpins colonisation; Kaupapa Māori research rejects that basic assumption.³ Bishop suggests that the Kaupapa Māori position challenges "the ways of defining, accessing, and constructing knowledge about indigenous peoples . . . that is used by Western scholars as a means of attaining what becomes their version of the 'truth'" (1996, p. 146). Thinking about one's own values, motivations and identity, and taking a critical approach to Western influence, especially one's own Western influence, are therefore critical when working with Māori.

Bishop points out that, as part of resisting this influence, "Māori people are deeply concerned about who researchers are answerable to. Who has control over the initiation, procedures, evaluations, construction, and distribution of newly defined knowledge?" (1996, p. 145). In 1991, Smith (cited in Palmer, 2000) recommended a series of questions to continually ask during cross-cultural research. Adapting these to cross-cultural communication research, participants could ask:

- Who has defined the questions we ask and issues we discuss?
- For whom is this communication worthy and relevant?
- Who says so?
- Which cultural group or groups will gain new knowledge from this communication?
- To whom is the communicator accountable?
- Who will gain most from this communication?

Ensuring Māori are responsible for defining and guiding research processes and outcomes is also crucial, as it reflects the importance of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination and empowerment) for Māori (Henry & Pene, 2001). Kaupapa Māori research insists that "power and control over the research issues is located in" the indigenous "cultural frame of reference" (Bishop, 1996, p. 146).

Reasserting Traditional Values

Under Kaupapa Māori research protocols, resisting colonial dominance also involves reinstating values and beliefs that existed before colonisation (Glover, 1997, cited in Cunningham, 2000). Although traditional beliefs vary among iwi, there are some that are more broadly held. The values outlined below are just some examples of general Māori values that may impact on non-Māori seeking to learn from and communicate with Māori.⁴

Whanaungatanga

Traditional Māori society has been described as an 'economy of affection'. Henare (1995, cited in Henry & Pene, 2001, p. 235) sees affection as the opposite of the 'economy of exploitation' which has developed as a result of capitalism introduced by colonisation. The economy of affection may include, for example, Kaupapa Māori research's emphasis on collectivism. In Māori philosophy the whānau (extended family), rather than the individual, is the core social unit. Bishop (1996) identifies whānau as a "location for communication, for sharing outcomes and for constructing shared common understandings and meanings" (p. 148), and uses the term 'whanaungatanga' to refer to "kin relationships between ourselves and others" (1996, p. 147). Whakawhanaungatanga is "the process of establishing whānau relationships, literally by means of identifying, through culturally appropriate means, your bodily linkage, your engagement, your connectedness, and therefore unspoken but implicit commitment to other people" (Bishop, 1996, p. 147).

Kaupapa Māori research fulfils collective aims by using 'research whānau', groups operating like extended families and following Māori cultural practices (Bishop, 1996). Smith (1999) describes the 'research whānau' as a way of organising, incorporating ethical procedures, distributing tasks, keeping Māori values central, giving the community a voice, and providing a forum for debating issues that impact on the research project.

The internal organisation of the whānau group is usually guided by a kaumātua, described by Bishop as a leader but not one who makes all the decisions (1996). Rather, the kaumātua gives culturally appropriate guidance on procedures for decision-making and listens to all members of the whānau. Bishop (1996) says the role of kaumātua is "to seek consensus from the collective and be the 'voice' of the group" (p. 149). An expected part of any Kaupapa Māori research process is the inclusion of kaumātua; the structure of each whānau determines who will act as kaumātua for the group.

Ngā Tikanga o te Marae

For Māori, the central area for conversation, communication or discussion is the marae. The phrase *ngā tikanga o te marae* refers to all aspects of marae protocol including kitchen, toilets, marae and meeting house. The phrase *ngā tikanga kōrerorero* refers to rules governing discussion on the marae (*kōrerorero* means reciprocal discussion or exchange of ideas). These rules are flexible, and encourage and require modification depending on circumstances. Metge (2001) points out that in cross-cultural situations in New Zealand, group discussions are often held under rules familiar to Pākehā. She suggests that, under those circumstances, often minority groups feel disadvantaged, fail to contribute or become aggressively assertive. An understanding of *ngā tikanga o te marae* by all communicators can make discussion more productive.

Under *ngā tikanga kōrerorero*, discussion is grounded in basic Māori values: “respect for the spiritual dimension (expressed in *karakia* and the observance of *tapu*), ancestral connections (expressed in *whakapapa* and *whanaungatanga*), attachment to the land (*whenua*), generosity (*aroha*) and care for others (*manaaki ki te tāngata*), peace (*rangimārie*) and unity (*kotahitanga*)” (Metge, 2001, p. 9). Metge also recommends *kōrero tahi*, a form of meeting organisation that draws on both Pākehā and Māori traditions, and incorporates mechanisms such as *haere huri te whare* (going round the meeting house to hear speakers in turn), *whakawhitiwhiti kōrero* (‘talking criss-cross’), or *te haere o te rakau* (passing the stick), to ensure that all voices are heard.

Tāngata Whenua and Manuwhiri (Hosts and Visitors)

In any form of gathering where discussion takes place, a distinction is made between *tāngata whenua* (hosts) and *manuwhiri* (or *manuhiri*) (visitors). *Tāngata whenua* hold ancestral rights in the locality where the discussion takes place (often the marae) and are responsible for the proceedings. They decide on the appropriate *tikanga* and if the *manuwhiri* have organised the *hui*, then they are welcomed on to the marae and the proceedings are handed over to them by *tāngata whenua*. *Manuwhiri* should be treated with respect and guided through the process of discussion according to *tikanga* as decided on by *tāngata whenua*. They should also contribute to the discussion and provide *koha* (gifts) (Metge, 2001).

The values and practices outlined above can give only a brief hint as to the skills required of cross-cultural communicators in New Zealand. Postcolonial power issues have a complex impact on cross-cultural communication. Incidences of miscommunication do occur, although perhaps not to the degree that they are reported by some Pākehā media

in their search for newsworthy conflict (cf. Walker, 2002, for comment on the mainstream media and racial conflict). A prominent example of such reporting was the media focus on Helen Clark's visit to the Te Tii Marae on Waitangi Day, 1998.

Case Study 1: Helen Clark on the Marae

Waitangi Day is celebrated on the 6th February each year in remembrance of the Treaty of Waitangi signing in 1840. On February 7, *The Southland Times* reported that Helen Clark, then opposition leader, was prevented from speaking at the Te Tii Marae only a day after Jenny Shipley, then Prime Minister, had been given the privilege (Marae incident leaves, 1998, p. 1).

The Dominion also reported the incident, stating that objection to Clark speaking came from Titewhai Harawera, a well known Māori women's rights advocate, who wanted to make the point that "if Nga Puhī women were not allowed to speak on the marae, outsiders should not be allowed to speak either" ("Clark Denied Right", 1998, p. 1). *The Waikato Times* also thought the issue newsworthy, reporting that senior Nga Puhī elder Graham Rankin "defended elders for offering Miss Clark a chance to speak" ("Waitangi Doubts After", 1998, p. 1).

The incident became tagged 'controversial' after it was reported extensively in mainstream media on the days following. Headlines included: "Waitangi Doubts After Clark Fracas" (*The Waikato Times*), "Marae Incident Leaves Clark in Tears" (*The Southland Times*), "Clark Denied Right to Speak by Activist" (*The Dominion*).

This incident raises many issues. Te Tii marae kawa (protocol) was placed by the newspapers at the centre of the discussions about permission to speak, but the issue had broader aspects. We include it as a case study not to suggest any party was to blame, but rather because it highlights the fact that communicators often (if not always) have multiple positions - Clark, for example, was simultaneously political leader, manuwhiri, Pākehā and woman - and that there are often multiple differences of perspective both between and within cultures.

Metge (2001) suggests that cross-cultural communicators need to be comfortable with watching and doing (constant learning through experience) as opposed to seeking a formal or fixed code for 'right' behaviour. While there are common themes that are valued by all who identify as Māori, there are also internal differences. Members of different iwi insist on independent identity and differences through dialect and tikanga, creating tribal variations, but as with any cultural group there may also be internal gender, age, political or other differences.

Values and expectations also change over time. As Durie points out, “the norms and standards that constitute the custom of a society change with it, and Māori society and custom are no exception” (1998, para. 9).

Although at Waitangi in 1998 a cross-cultural miscommunication situation arose that enabled the mainstream media to overshadow the Waitangi celebrations, many other Waitangi celebrations and innumerable other cross-cultural occasions have been incident free. In fact, successful cross-cultural communication is a daily occurrence in New Zealand. Our second case study provides evidence that, as Metge (2001) observes, different cultural groups can work together toward a national life and culture where all can contribute.

Case Study 2: The *Jody F Millennium* Oil Spill

On February 6, 2002, a 156m-long, log-carrying cargo ship called the *Jody F Millennium* ran aground near Gisborne’s Waikanae Beach during a severe storm. It was carrying 22,000 tonnes of logs and 640 tonnes of heavy fuel oil. An estimated 35 tonnes of oil spilled shortly after impact, causing New Zealand's worst oil spill.

The Maritime Safety Authority of New Zealand (MSA) took responsibility for cleaning the spill. The response team included hundreds of regional council staff, seconded from other duties around the country (Brian Small, personal communication, August 16, 2004). Storms and high winds hampered efforts to salvage the vessel or pump out the remaining oil. A week after it was grounded, the *Jody F Millennium* still could not be moved, and because of a second storm there was a high risk of more spilled oil and worse environmental damage. The areas most affected by the oil included significant customary fishing areas belonging to local iwi and hapu, who held rights to manage fishing for iwi purposes such as hui and tangi.

The MSA employed public relations company Hill and Knowlton (H&K) to help manage communication and provide information to all those affected by the oil spill. Brian Small, H&K senior consultant at the time, explains that there were many stakeholders, including government representatives, environment groups, local communities and a wide variety of water users. H&K’s diverse communication strategy included community briefings, media summaries and conferences, notice boards on the beach near the salvage site, faxes and e-mails to local stakeholders, a website (with webcam provided by the Gisborne District Council), and one-on-one meetings with local iwi and environmental groups. For the purposes of this chapter we focus on communication with local iwi.

Small says the region’s four main iwi were extremely concerned about the spill’s short and long term impacts, as it posed risks to wahi

tapu (cultural sites of significance and sanctity), to kai moana (seafood), which for some, is part of their staple diet, and more generally threatened the coastline over which they held their kaitiaki (steward or guardian) role as tāngata whenua. Iwi representatives required comprehensive information from the MSA, and involvement in all aspects of the operation, from decisions about the use of dispersants through to training in beach clean-up and ongoing impact monitoring.

Iwi members also held important knowledge about rocks, tidal movements, and weather patterns in the area, and could provide resources such as marae (in case beach front properties had to be evacuated), a workforce that could deploy oil spill response equipment (with appropriate training), and access to fishing vessels (for towing oil spill booms).

Finally, there were important spiritual needs to be met. This involved ensuring unfettered access to certain sites for the purposes of conducting appropriate ceremonies.

In Small's: view these needs necessitated a comprehensive engagement and relationship of mutual trust and co-operation between the iwi and the MSA. He took the view that thinking of the four iwi as 'nation states' in their own right provided the appropriate mental framework. He and his team worked closely with Gisborne District Council's iwi relationship officers and also with representatives of local rūnanga (iwi councils) and marae.

Among the many outcomes of the relationship of trust that developed during extensive face to face meetings, was that crucial information was shared with the salvage operators to help facilitate the vessel's re-floating. Only certain members of local iwi held traditional knowledge of the location of rocky outcrops on the passage between the grounded ship and the open sea. Through discussion and mutual respect, a way was found to allow this navigation knowledge to be shared with the master of the salvage operation, without compromising the protection of taonga.

The *Jody F Millennium* was able to be freed on February 24 and towed elsewhere for repairs without any further damage to the environment.

Conclusion

Our main focus in this chapter has been to present a view of communicating with Māori, through the eyes of Māori academic scholars, who hold particular views of kaupapa Māori research. Familiarity with one set of ideas about Māori values is only the start of the process of becoming culturally aware of things Māori. In order to gain full appreciation of the Māori way, we recommend not only further reading, but interaction to experience cultural values in their physical settings.

We believe, as do many cross-cultural communication theorists, that the process of researching historical background and cultural values leads to better understanding and hence more successful communication with people from other cultural backgrounds to our own. This chapter has been written in the main to help non-Māori form a basic foundational understanding of some issues that concern New Zealand's tāngata whenua, in order to become more effective cross-cultural communicators. For this purpose, we have tried to summarise some of the broader principles of Kaupapa Māori that may apply in common cross-cultural communication situations, particularly where communication research is being conducted.

However, we also feel it is worth repeating Metge's (2001) observation that cross-cultural communicators need to become comfortable with adaptation through experience, as opposed to seeking a formal or fixed code for 'right' behaviour. Perhaps the most important lesson that beginning students of cross-cultural communication can learn is that each communication situation will be different and expectations can change. The best communicators are constantly working to understand and recognise their own values and assumptions, while also always open to learning new ways to connect with others.

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Throughout this chapter, we have tried to avoid glossing the Māori terms used with what could only at best be English approximations, and therefore many are untranslated rather than diminish the richness of their meanings as accessible in their cultural context. We do this for several reasons including: to encourage students to seek their own understandings of these terms through their own immersion in te ao Māori; and because we believe that becoming comfortable with 'not knowing' is an important step in abandoning the Western desire to exercise control over indigenous cultures by 'translating' and 'fixing' their living, culturally specific aspects within Western frameworks.

Any oversights or errors are of course, however, all our own work.

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¹ There are many excellent te reo Māori resources. One readily available example is the programme *Kōrero Mai*, screened free-to-air on Māori TV, which provides instruction in basic Māori conversation, plus information about tikanga (Māori custom and protocol).

² See for example Rata, 2004.

³ For a clever satirical reversal of this 'normal' versus 'different' dichotomy that highlights Western assumptions of white culture as 'the usual way', see the video *Babakiueria*, written by Geoffrey Atherden. In this parodic documentary, white Australia is invaded by Aboriginal people, and white culture is put under the microscope and inspected as 'quirky' and 'quaint'.

⁴ We can only briefly introduce and simplistically summarise these values here, and we strongly recommend further reading. Several useful sources of information on Māori values were suggested by Durie, in his 1998 paper about values and ethics in Māori research presented to Te Oru Rangahau Māori Research and Development Conference at Massey University. Durie commended the following: Cleve Barlow *Tikanga Whakaaro - Key Concepts in Māori Culture*, 1991; James

Ritchie *Becoming Bicultural*, 1992; John Patterson, *Exploring Māori Values*, 1992;
Joan Metge, *New Growth From Old, The Whānau in the Modern World*, 1995.