



Māori women’s perspectives of leadership and wellbeing

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Abstract

Within Aotearoa, New Zealand, Māori women are engaged in leadership roles in community and professional workplace settings, however little is known about how they maintain their wellbeing. This research sought to unravel how Māori women leaders maintain their wellbeing, while occupied in complex leadership roles. We report on the findings from semi-structured interviews, acknowledging *kaupapa* Māori theory and principles, with five Māori women leaders. Thematic analysis was used, and these themes related to five *whakataukī* (proverb) that provided overarching themes and directions relating to Māori women’s leadership and wellbeing.

Each *whakataukī* describe unique aspects of leadership and wellbeing from a Māori worldview. Themes include humility, collectiveness, courage, future orientations and positivity. While the themes are housed in *whakataukī*, central to the success of these Māori

women leaders was being connected to *whānau* (family) and friends, and being influenced by *tamariki* (children), *tauirā* (students) and employees. These social connections made Māori women leaders strong and resilient to change and challenges.

Keywords: Māori leadership, women, waiora Māori, kaupapa Māori, Indigenous psychology, organisational psychology.

Connecting Mana Wāhine and Leadership

Māori leadership is a growing area of research that acknowledges traditional and contemporary cultural influences on leadership styles and practices (Holmes, 2007; Katene, 2010; Roche, Haar, & Brougham, 2015). The values of traditional Māori leadership such as weaving people together, *tikanga* (customs) and *whakapapa* (genealogy) continue to be practiced in contemporary Māori society (Henry & Pringle, 1996; Mahuika, 1992; Walker, 2006). Navigating within the *Pākehā* (European) and Māori world – is the reality of Māori who work in leadership roles (Katene, 2010; Walker, Gibbs, & Eketone, 2006). Existing research has examined Māori leadership style, including elements of humour (Holmes, 2007), *mana* (power, influence; Te Rito, 2006), transformational leadership (Katene, 2010), *hūmarie* (humility; Holmes, Vine, & Marra, 2009) and *mana wāhine* (Māori women leadership style) in different areas of life (Kahukiwa, 2000;

Pihama, 2001; Te Awekotuku, 1991). However, the predominant view of leadership privileges masculine styles, or western based styles, while underplaying the role of female influences, particularly, mana wāhine.

Mana wāhine theory connects identity, culture and language (Pihama, 2001) which are all central to Māori women leadership. These elements represent mana and *mātauranga* (knowledge) being passed down generations through whakapapa lineage and recognition that Māori women are nurturers, workers and contributors to their family; resulting in influence for the next generation (Murphy, 2011; Pihama, 2001; Te Awekotuku, 1991). Mana wāhine encourages Māori women to draw on their own experiences and knowledge to portray their qualities and abilities (Pihama, 2001; Te Awekotuku, 1991; Winitana, 2008). Providing a space for wāhine, to engage, explore and transform their lives from their worldviews (Te Awekotuku, 1991) is an empowering stance, enabling wāhine to reclaim themselves.

Pūrakau (stories) are resources that encourage mana wāhine. An example is where the *pūrakau i te tīmatanga* (in the beginning) refers to all women who trace their ancestral roots back to Papatūānuku, the first Māori woman leader. Mana wāhine and *te whare tangata* (house of humanity) are *taonga* (gifts) that connect wāhine to Papatūānuku (Maori, 1992; Royal, 2012). The role of wāhine is to provide offspring to create a new whakapapa lineage enabling teaching, influence and *mātauranga* to be passed down (August, 2004). As whakapapa influences our everyday lives, our connection as wāhine to Papatūānuku, symbolises the importance of relationships, interconnection and identity to wellbeing (Kahukiwa, 2000; Simmonds, 2009; Te Awekotuku, 1991).

Studies on how Māori leadership experiences affect wellbeing show the importance of interpersonal, reciprocal connections between whānau, friends, and the importance of strategies that enhance mana, personal voice and facilitate self-confidence (Palmer & Masters, 2010; Roche et al., 2015). While these areas have been examined, scant research has focussed only on Māori women as leaders, how they sustain

themselves within contemporary times. This research intends to fill this void.

Māori Waiora

Māori wellbeing is defined as Māori *waiora* that combines an individual's *taba hinengaro* (mental wellbeing), *taba tinana* (physical wellbeing) and *taba wairua* (spiritual wellbeing) aspects of health (Palmer, 2004). Māori wellbeing has been framed in Māori models of health such as Te Whare Tapa Whā (The four corners of a house) and Te Wheke (The Octopus; Durie, 1984; Love & Pere, 2004). The relationship between Māori leadership and wellbeing is described as the combination of an individual's wellbeing and being in-tune across the wellbeing dimensions (Huriwai, Robertson, Armstrong, Kingi, & Huata, 2001; Palmer, 2004). As leadership is about influence, it is sensible that leadership sustenance is a critical issue. That is leaders that are well, psychologically, are also able to influence others positively (Roche et al., 2015). Using Māori models of wellbeing, we examine the connection for Māori women leaders between waiora and leadership. The following sections outline two models of wellbeing, we then outline the method and findings of this research.

Te Whare Tapa Whā and Te Wheke

Two models of wellbeing dominate the Māori landscape, Te Whare Tapa Whā and Te Wheke. Te Whare Tapa Whā is depicted as a *wharenui* (meeting house) that portrays the four aspects of waiora: *taha tinana*, *taha hinengaro*, *taha wairua* and *taha whānau* (Barton & Wilson, 2008; Durie, 2006; Glover, 2013; Pitama et al., 2007). Building on this, Te Wheke is displayed as an octopus that represents whānau waiora. The head represents whānau, the eyes depict waiora and its eight tentacles depict wellbeing dimensions (Love & Pere, 2004; McNeill, 2009; Ministry of Health, 2012): *Wairuatanga* (the individual's spirituality), *mana ake* (the individual's link to their ancestors), *mauri* (the individual's life force), *hā ā kui mā ā koro mā* (breath of life from ancestors or elders), *taba tinana* (the individual's physical development), *whanaungatanga* (the relationships that the individual develops and maintains), *whātumanawa* (the individual's emotional wellbeing) and *hinengaro* (the individual's psychological wellbeing). Both wellbeing models consider

Indigenous perspectives of wellbeing and explore wellbeing in depth.

The wellbeing dimensions within both models describe how an individual can achieve balance and waiora over time, by being connected to whānau, engaging in physical, social and spiritual activities. These models are relevant to this research because they inform waiora from a Māori worldview that provide a connection between leadership and wellbeing. Overall, the link between Māori leadership and wellbeing has started to be examined, and we intend to establish this link with further exploration to understand how Māori women leaders stay strong within their leadership roles.

Method

Kaupapa Māori theory and methodology guided the research process to gather Māori wāhine perspectives of leadership and wellbeing. Kaupapa Māori theory identifies Māori philosophies and tikanga that are appropriate for working with Māori or when conducting research (Pihama, Cram, & Walker, 2002; Walker et al., 2006). Kaupapa Māori is also about analysis and data usage. Pihama et al. (2002) emphasise that kaupapa is a foundation that informs Māori customs and *tika* (correct procedure), acknowledging the entire kaupapa from beginning to end.

A combination of kaupapa Māori principles developed by Smith (1997) were implemented within the interviews to navigate the research process. For example, participants were interviewed *kānohi ki te kānohi* (meet and greet face to face) which formed *whānaungatanga* (relationships) signifying the importance of making whakapapa connections.

Data Collection Method and Analysis

Qualitative semi-structured interviews gathered the leadership journeys of five Māori wāhine who have genealogical connections to Aotearoa and, who occupied a leadership role. Given the extremely busy lifestyles of these wāhine, it was important to explore their experiences and attitudes about leadership within their natural settings and *kānohi ki te kānohi* (Bricki & Green, 2007; Smith & Davis, 2010).

Interviews were analysed by thematic analysis to generate codes from raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Flick, 2009). The five interview transcripts were coded and resulted in ten initial themes that narrowed down to eight. A secondary analysis using five whakataukī Māori provided depth and exploration of themes. Whakataukī are embedded with mātauranga and have been passed down through many generations (Le Grice, 2014; McNeill, 2009).

Findings

Each whakataukī is presented and link to quotes from each participant. These whakataukī and quotes related to themes about Māori women leadership and wellbeing.

Kāore te kūmara e kōrero mō tōna reka: The kūmara does not speak of its sweetness. Each participant shared stories about hūmarie that discussed the influence of others. Hūmarie translates to humility and has been associated with *whakaiti* (be little), *whakahihi* (arrogance) and *whakamā* (shyness). Hūmarie was expressed in a way that aided influence, that is, hūmarie was viewed as central, and it is a form influence on others. We found hūmarie provided an understanding of how Māori women leaders practiced leadership, from a *te ao* Māori (Māori world) perspective.

Te Rina comments on maintaining a balance between hūmarie qualities:

One of the things for me... you need to be careful, because your strengths can also be your weaknesses... You can have confidence, but your confidence can also be arrogance... I've just got really comfortable in my own skin. (Te Rina, Chief Executive)

Te Rina discusses the importance of *kia tūpato* (to be careful) and *whakahihī*, not to boast about ability, because boasting can act as arrogance. Within leadership contexts, arrogance works against influence, whereas as individual hūmarie as an attitude or action, can influence others positively.

Aroha also comments on hūmarie:

I love talking about other people more than me... it is a real art in understanding what motivates people... My strength is humility... I would love

others to say... she's done great things but she's very humble in that. I mean I'm not going to be that kumara... who says it. (Aroha, Chief Executive)

Aroha emphasises that leadership is about developing the potential of others rather than self-advancement, realising, through discussion and time, what motivates others, and moving towards that. Aroha relates to building the mana of others; big or small - but in a way that is humble, not intimidating of her success, and as such, being *whakaiti* (little) she is encouraging others to grow.

Ēhara tāku toa i te takitini, he toa takitahi: My success would not be bestowed onto me alone, as it was not individual success but success of a collective. This whakataukī captures the ability to work together as a team or group to accomplish something great. It also refers to sharing achievement or success with other people rather than self-advancement.

Aroha shared a narrative about another Māori leader:

She won't ever say that she's done anything individually. It's always a collective... you find actually across Māori women – Māori in general... we tend not to act individually. (Aroha, Chief Executive)

This example demonstrates how others are central to leadership processes for Māori women. Aroha shared this story as an example to follow or aspire to be, within her own leadership role. That is, recognising the importance of the collective has empowered Aroha to similarly value this as a guiding principle.

Erana also comments on the importance for team work and identifies how too much work can also influence wellbeing:

It is important to have passion and commitment for the work that you do... that passion can make you sick and drive you into the ground... and the kaupapa carries on... (Erana, Chief Executive)

Erana describes how work can become too much and that it can affect an individual's waiora. Therefore, the importance of setting boundaries or having a team to carry the work load can support leaders and others through times of difficulty.

Pātua i te taniwha o te whakamā: Don't let shyness overcome you. This whakataukī refers to a *taniwha* who is a guardian within te ao Māori. The taniwha symbolises a challenge, a fear or opportunity to develop knowledge and character. In this context, the enemy refers to the individual who lacks the ability to overcome challenges.

Te Rina discusses taking new opportunities to develop herself:

New experiences and challenge... I've most learned about myself... out of my comfort zone... it's easier to stay with the comfortable... but when I push myself... I really love the feeling that it gives me. (Te Rina, Chief Executive)

Te Rina highlighted the rewards of exploring new things within her leadership role and how this gave her courage to develop further and became an important aspect of her leadership and influence. That is, overcoming challenges, pushing oneself, develops the leadership influence. Struggle is success.

Another dimension of this whakataukī questions how the taniwha presents challenges for these leaders. Katarina identified the taniwha and the impact it has on her:

When I'm the only Māori... the only woman on committees... it's largely white men... the veiled language that they use. . .the ways in which they'll try. You can't be calling people out directly because that becomes counterproductive and tiring... I'll just do a direct consultation... and other times there has to be a more subtle approach. (Katarina, Academic)

The taniwha described by Katarina is an experience that Māori women face within their leadership roles, an issue of standing up for culture and gender in leadership spaces usually occupied by (white) men. The taniwha in this context is about how Katarina faced those challenges as a Māori woman leader.

Piki kau ake te whakāro pai, hauhake tōnu iho: When a good thought springs up, it is harvested, a good idea should be used immediately. This whakataukī refers to using ideas as an opportunity to develop a pathway for future generations. *Hauhake* refers to harvesting an idea, goal or dream to turn it into something unique.

As described by Te Rina:

I've moved beyond thinking leadership's about developing me... leadership is about service to others... instead of... oh I've got a career path... how do I get other people to help... that's quite a Pākeha whakāro. (Te Rina, Chief Executive)

Te Rina described leadership as the ability to *manāki* (support) and guide others towards their career paths, and to embrace positive experiences. Similarly, Katarina highlights mentoring taura through a pathway every step of the way. In her view, she is developing pathways for future women leaders:

In that whole kind of mentoring relationship, people are going to take it personally. The feedback is not about the person, it's about the ideas and... the connection. (Katarina, Academic)

Katarina talks about being a mentor and the ability to guide others through a process. Mana wāhine links to the relationship between the mentor and taura through understanding and guidance. Hauhake is evident when Katarina described her experience of giving feedback.

He ōranga ngākau, he pikinga waiora: Positive feelings in your heart will enhance your sense of self-worth. This whakataukī refers to emotional, spiritual and family waiora dimensions of an individual. Expanding on this, an individual's waiora is maintained by a balance between all four wellbeing dimensions and this whakataukī draws on being positive.

Te Rina discusses finding a balance between the hinengaro and tinana:

I realised in my 40s that... physical activity didn't quieten my mind... to have clarity of focus. The physical activity wasn't doing that... you need a balance between those two things... They suggested that I do yoga or Pilates... I really resisted it... I went away with a friend of mine to a... wellness place... they did Tai Chi... and that's when I suddenly realised... I felt really good after I did it... my head just felt really clear... (Te Rina, Chief Executive)

Te Rina described her experience of achieving balance and that physical activities maintained wellbeing to an extent, but did not offer peace of mind. Knowing that leadership influence is based on positive influences, Te Rina realised she had

to look after her physical and mental wellbeing in order to look after others.

Abikā refers to the home keepers of a whānau, *ivi* (tribe) or *hapū* (subtribe) and symbolises an individual's home or family. Maia discusses whānau support:

They're really reliable people... that's the thing about being strong... there are others there who have got your back... to tautoko you, to manāki you... being strong which is not just in whānau; it's actually in tikanga. (Maia, Director)

While Te Rina acknowledges physical wellbeing, Maia points to the ability to draw strength from whānau members to gain support. Significantly, whānau support positively influenced participants to keep pushing forward in life.

Discussion

The primary aim of this research was to examine how Māori women leaders maintain their wellbeing. This research found that Māori women leaders integrated leadership and wellbeing into their everyday lives. Māori women leaders were strengthened by traditional Māori values through practices such as, *manākitanga* (hospitality, supportiveness) which is described in the whakataukī *piki kau ake te whakāro pai*, as leaders shared mātauranga and showed manāki. These practices allowed them to connect to people from all walks of life. Wellbeing interconnected with the whakataukī *he oranga ngākau* and was described as a balance between *taba hinengaro* (the psychological) and *taba tinana* (the physical).

Kāore te kumara e kōrero mō tōna reka: The kumara does not speak of its sweetness. Participants described humility as the ability to influence others through story-telling, guidance and mentoring. The findings of this research referred to *hūmarie* (humility) which participants related to wellbeing. Although wellbeing models do not include humility as a wellbeing dimension, this research found that humility maintained leadership and wellbeing practices.

Hūmarie is widely recognised as a Māori value, cultural norm and leadership practice, yet it is not explicit within Māori leadership (Holmes, 2007; Holmes et al., 2009; Katene, 2010). We found

that Māori women leaders developed and shared mātauranga, built relationships and were mindful of the influence on others. These values and practices relate to taha hinengaro, te taha whānau and *te taha wairua* (the spiritual side) from the Te Wheke and Te Whare Tapa Whā (Love & Pere, 2004; Ministry of Health, 2012). In greater depth, humility was found to strengthen mana and enabled Māori women leaders to become wiser leaders.

Ēhara tāku toa he takitahi, he toa takitini: My success should not be bestowed onto me alone as it was not individual success but success of a collective. Collectiveness was described by participants as the ability to work as a team to achieve workplace goals. Collectiveness related to *rangatiratanga* (chieftainship, right to exercise authority), mana wāhine and mana. Rangatiratanga was described by Māori women leaders as the ability to lead and weave people together. This is consistent with *he toa takitini*, tino rangatiratanga and mana wāhine (Pihama, 2001; Walker, 2006).

We found that Māori women leaders described the responsibilities of sharing knowledge and guiding others, which influenced others. Therefore, mātauranga was passed down through the generations empowering the leader-follower relationship and is consistent with mana wāhine (Barlow, 1994; Department of Statistics, 1990).

The notion of collectiveness for Māori women leaders spoke of building mana, relationships and being connected to whānau as central to their role. These elements interlink with three wellbeing dimensions from the two wellbeing models: te taha whānau, whanaungatanga and *mana ake* (self-esteem). Each dimension emphasise the importance of being connected to others to build individual and group mana (Cherrington, 2009; Love & Pere, 2004). Overall, collectiveness was described by leaders as central to success and wellbeing.

Patua te taniwha o te whakamā: Don't let shyness overcome you. Māori women leaders described challenges as opportunities to develop leadership practices, mana and courage. These challenges are relevant to this research because it related to drawing inner-strength and building mana. Although overcoming boundaries related

to leadership and is not identified in Māori wellbeing literature, the findings of this research found that te taha hinengaro, te taha wairua and mana ake from Te Wheke related to overcoming boundaries. Te taha hinengaro related to learning from difficult challenges, and was found across participants. While leadership and wellbeing may be understood in terms of courage and mana, these interrelated concepts need further research.

Finally, Taha wairua interlinked with mana ake because leaders discussed the importance of building inner-strength to step outside comfort zones, and to stand up for what they believed in (Love & Pere, 2004; Ministry of Health, 2012; Valentine, 2009). Elements of wairuatanga were described in leaders' stories, as being comfortable in your own skin. These findings related to both models of wellbeing, but in particular Te Wheke because it detailed all three dimensions in greater depth.

Piki kau ake te whakāro pai, hauhake tōnu iho: When a good thought springs up, it is harvested, a good idea should be used immediately. Setting pathways and guiding the next generation was a unique finding that recognised the importance of sharing and passing on knowledge, regardless of the leader's position of power. This whakataukī related to mentorship (Hook, Waaka, & Raumati, 2007), leader-follower (Pfeifer, 2005), and the *tuakana-teina* (older sibling-younger sibling relationship) model (Te Rito, 2006). Pathways and future thinking are central components of leadership, but we found that the future thinking for Māori women leaders was more specific on developing others futures.

Furthermore, *hauhake* was described by leaders as the ability to develop knowledge, and give feedback. Leaders chose to mentor and guide others as this was felt to be more important than self-advancement. Within this research, fostering pathways related to leadership ability, whakapapa, and whānau wellbeing dimensions.

The two wellbeing dimensions of Te Wheke: whanaungatanga and *hā a kui mā a koro mā* links to whakapapa (McNeill, 2007). Whanaungatanga connects the individual to whānau or friends through relationships. *Hā a kui mā a koro mā* depicts a process of passing on knowledge from *kui*a (female elder) and *koro* (male elder) to the

next generation which related to Māori women leaders and mentorship (Love & Pere, 2004; McNeill, 2007).

Whakapapa related to the passing on of knowledge from leaders to the next generation, which showed manākitanga and aroha. These values show that leaders practised traditional Māori values within contemporary settings and is consistent with mana wāhine because participants enabled others to develop their mana by sharing their ideas (Department of Statistics, 1990; Te Awakotuku, 1991).

Finally, using this whakatauki we found that the tuakana-teina model (mentoring model to guide tuakana and teina) was a theme that Māori women leaders practiced within their leadership role. As a result, Māori women leaders built relationships, had connections and were open to mātauranga. Therefore, the roles of tuakana and teina were reversed with *ako* (learning) and related to *hanbake tonu ibo* (when a good idea springs up it should be harvested). Overall, fostering pathways for future generations were discussed by participants as opportunities to develop future Māori leaders.

He ōranga ngākau, he pikinga waiora: Positive feelings in your heart will enhance your sense of self-worth. The importance of finding balance and a positive feeling within one's heart in work and personal life activities was an important finding. Although balance is important for wellbeing, there is a significant gap that details the link between leadership and wellbeing (Armstrong et al., 2011; Roche et al., 2015). The findings of this research found that wellbeing strategies developed over time for Māori women leaders and related to balance between taha hinengaro, taha tinana and spending time with whānau. These aided positive wellbeing.

We found that balance mattered, and was achieved by balancing an individual's wellbeing dimensions as a collective (Huriwai et al., 2001). Balance was achieved by practices such as quieting the mind through Tai Chi or turning off electronics for an hour a day which maintained taha hinengaro, tinana and whānau for Māori women leaders.

Taha whānau was found to be a resource for Māori women leaders from which to draw

strength or support in the face of hardships. Within this, taha tinana was also maintained because Māori women leaders participated in physical or social activities. We found that balance between leadership and wellbeing is integrated for Māori women leaders.

Overall, wellbeing strategies enabled participants to maintain balance and built positive thoughts and feelings of self-worth for participants and related to *he pikinga waiora, he oranga ngākau*.

Conclusion

This research explored Māori women perspectives of leadership and wellbeing from a Māori worldview. Stories about staying close to whānau, mentoring the next generation and receiving tautoko from others were central to the success of these Māori women leaders. Negotiating balance required time with whānau and participating in activities that eased the mind. These wellbeing practices developed over time and made the women resilient to change and challenges. In the increasingly fast-paced and competitive environments, it is crucial that Māori women utilise the resources available to them as Māori, to overcome the challenges that they face.

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