



 Whānau Ora

LEADERSHIP DRIVEN BY KAUPAPA MĀORI, A RELATIONAL LENS

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Abstract

Māori have been at the forefront of the delivery of a whānau-centred approach to health and wellbeing services. In this paper, leadership in this area is explained and examined from a relational viewpoint. Māori values and practices are further examined in order to unpack key aspects of this type of relational leadership. The resulting research contributes to an explanation of how values such as kotahitanga and whanaungatanga contribute to collective participation by Māori in the realignment of the health system toward achieving Māori goals and aspirations, ultimately, as a means of improving Māori health outcomes.

Key words: Kaupapa Māori, kotahitanga, relational leadership, Whānau Ora

Introduction

There is extensive research available to highlight the health inequities between Māori and non-Māori (Mackenbach & Kunst, 1997). The indicators of inequality, and the underlying causes, support a need for change in governance of resources/services, in addition to the design of innovative approaches to solve the resultant issues for minority populations. One of the challenges for any government would be leadership of such changes required from community to organisational, regional, and national levels. Following the position that Māori culture is a rich source of knowledge that can add to the western models and theories of change, in this article, I investigate Māori values and concepts that can elaborate on how leadership is practiced in Māori communities. This can provide an understanding of a more compatible or whānau-centred approach for Māori regarding leadership of changes. An approach which can, by extension, be used by decision makers from governmental, not-for-profit, and private organisations who are involved with governance and service provision for Māori communities.

In order to investigate leadership approaches within a Māori context, I will apply a relational approach and will therefore investigate the way communities participate in activities that bring about the change required (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This is a less common approach in understanding leadership and will likewise complement the more conventional approaches of studying leadership.

The method used, centres on a critique of literature pertaining to Māori values and practices (kaupapa Māori) and contrasts these with relational theories of leadership. The aim is to investigate if Māori approaches and values promote a collective mode of leadership, and if so – how. Therefore, in this paper, first the concept of leadership is explained from a relational perspective, using relational theories of leadership; next a critical analysis of relevant kaupapa Māori concepts as they pertain to relational leadership; then, the Whānau Ora approach is analysed as an example of kaupapa Māori that promotes relational leadership. Finally, a summary of the analysis is provided, which includes an examination of how Māori values and practices are indicative of relational leadership.

Relational View Of Leadership

Leadership can be explored from a range of different perspectives. Traditionally, most of the studies have focused on traits and behaviour of leaders (Rost & Smith, 1992). They have tended to examine how individual leaders would influence their followers or how effective they are (Rost & Smith, 1992). This idea has been defined as an individualistic view (Uhl-Bien, 2006) in which the focus was on what successful leaders were engaged with (Kouzes & Posner, 2003) or on situations that would impact on leaders' behaviour and traits (Bass, 1990; Larsson & Vinberg, 2010; Van Vugt, 2006; Yukl, 1989).

There is a more recent trend that still focuses on individuals rather than the process of leadership, but which considers leadership as the relationship between leaders and followers. For instance, some of these theories examine what individuals bring to their mutual relationships and what they expect from each other (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). Leader-Member Exchange theory is one of these theories (Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). Charismatic/transformational leadership is another individualistic theory that discusses how charismatic power, strong relationships with people, and empowerment of followers can lead changes (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2003; Yukl, 1989). Although theories similar to transformational leadership pay attention to the support, care and respect for individuals,

they still view leadership as an influence that comes from leaders to followers and aims to secure commitment of the followers to achieve organisational goals (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014).

The newest trend is to examine leadership as a process in which change (e.g. new approaches, values, and attitudes) and new ways of working will be established as a result of some organising activities (Hosking, 1988). In this case, change is an ongoing/continuous process that happens through people communicating with each other rather than what leaders do (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Uhl-Bien (2006) framed this new approach/view in her Relational Theory of Leadership (RTL). Supporters of this view believe that we need to investigate the way we are working together and our local-cultural-historical processes rather than how an individual practices leadership (Hosking, Dachler, & Gergen, 1995; Hosking, 2006).

In other words, having a relational perspective in leadership does not mean we should follow a specific approach or style of leadership, but it emphasises the need to understand connections between people and how they are involved in the leadership process, rather than focusing on how individual leaders are practicing it (Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). This view is a constructionist view that considers leadership as a social construction process or a collective act (Hosking, 2006; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011).

It should be noted that the term relational has been used differently in the existing literature, hence it can be vague or confusing. For instance, situational approaches of leadership refer to the role of context or situation in leadership style and therefore they still focus on the reciprocal process between leaders and followers (Conger, 2004). Another example of using relational perspective in a slightly different way, is when researchers refer to authenticity in leadership (standing by what you say) or modelling the way (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). This view of leadership is also closer to individualistic theories as the behaviour of leaders is the focus rather than the process in which people contribute in leadership.

The relational theory of leadership does consider the impact of social, cultural, historical, and even organisational forces that affect people's behaviour, but it does not typically emphasise how people react to the forces. Instead, this theory highlights the collective impact of all the actors and entities to drive change. In other words, leadership is achieved by a collective (Drath, et al., 2008).

If we follow a relational perspective in understanding leadership in Māori communities, for instance, we need to understand how the meaning of leadership is socially constructed among them. Which likewise requires a considered review and examination of how, and in what pattern, leadership emerges in practice in Māori organisations or communities, and how people define leadership. Therefore, in the next two sections, the socio-cultural meaning attached to some Māori concepts and values will be explored from a leadership perspective, in addition to the analysis of an example of a Māori approach in changing the service delivery in the New Zealand health system.

Kaupapa Māori And Relational Leadership

Māori have rich historical and cultural bindings that underpin their social and individual practices in many ways. The term kaupapa Māori, which translates as Māori approaches or principles, covers a range of concepts that can be informing about Māori cultural norms or forces. Understanding these cultural forces and norms can reveal how Māori interpret leadership and how they practice it. Therefore, in this section I will describe the concepts which can reveal how Māori act collectively to see if any aspects of relational leadership can be unpacked.

Kaupapa Māori theory (Fitzgerald, 2003) promotes whanaungatanga (relationship building) and manaakitanga (hospitality). Whanaungatanga is a practice commonly used among Māori that emphasises knowing people who are working with each other over a common activity or to contribute in realisation of a common vision. It also highlights interdependence between whānau and their wider groups such as iwi (tribe) and hapū (subtribe) (Tassell, Flett, & Gavala, 2010). It can result in better support among people who are working alongside each other for a shared vision. This communication and support mechanism can be an aspect of relational leadership as it allows smoother contribution of people in bringing change or achieving common goals/visions. People who build relationships outside their immediate colleagues or network, can find potential support for their job or achieving their goals. This can improve their contribution in the change they intend to bring.

Within this paper, change is expected as a part of an ongoing life-experience, rather than an episodic/discontinuous event (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Especially in the context of improving inequalities for Māori and innovation development, change will be a natural characteristic of the work and everyone can be part of it (Weick & Quinn, 1999).

Manaakitanga (hospitality, caring for, support) is also about the faith that what you do for others will be returned (McNicholas, 2004). This value, for instance, was considered a driver that encouraged everyone to act quickly and effectively at the time of the earthquake crisis in Christchurch in 2010, where local Māori supported immediate needs of those who were affected (Kenney, Phibbs, Paton, Reid, & Johnston, 2015). This is an example of how Māori communities practice relational leadership through collectively participating in organising change and supporting a common agenda.

Kotahitanga (unity) is another kaupapa Māori concept that complements whanaungatanga. It encourages cooperation among different groups/individuals over isolation and fragmentation (Harmsworth, 2010). Kotahitanga implies that people require connections with each other and their activities, as a collective effort of all people (Māori community) is required for progress (Tassell, Flett, & Gavala, 2010). This is another instance of relational leadership in the Māori context that is reflected in many Māori frameworks (such as the Māori Health Strategy). Māori have been cooperating with non-Māori through community based health and wellbeing initiatives in New Zealand. This is another example of kotahitanga achieved at the community level aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of the community (Chant, 2011).

The emphasis on connections and relationships with others is significant to Māori cultural values such as kotahitanga (Tassell, Flett, & Gavala, 2010). This is interpreted as a type of collectivist approach that shows interdependence and equality between Māori group members in which a common goal/vision is achieved through cooperation, rather than following what authorities ask (Tassell, Flett, & Gavala, 2010; McNicholas, 2004). Research by Harrington and Liu (2002) revealed that Māori were more inclined toward collectivism

compared to Pākehā. Tohatoha refers to the fair distribution of resources (Henare, 1988). This is considered a social responsibility that everyone holds and is aligned with the value of kotahitanga as well (Tassell, Flett, & Gavala, 2010). Therefore, it appears that kotahitanga holds a significant role in relational leadership and collective activity among Māori.

Whakapapa is another common value in kaupapa Māori that refers to knowing the past or genealogy (Kenney, Phibbs, Paton, Reid, & Johnston, 2015). It is central in practicing Māori leadership (Henry & Wolfgramm, 2018), and it connects the self with realities of terrestrial, such as land and water, spiritual entities (gods, guardians), and social entities (iwi, hapū). This is, again, another example of relational ontology, which notes that leadership is relational and made between individuals and other entities (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Another concept is tangata whenua (people of the land) that refers to the relationship between people and their land (that has been occupied for generations) and their control over it (Henry & Wolfgramm, 2018). Hence, guardianship of the nature (tiakitanga) is another value related to Māori leadership that holds a relational ontology.

In the context of education and learning, the Māori concept of ako alters the leader-follower stance at schools and tries to distribute power equally so that teacher and student learn alongside each other (Hawkins, 2017). In this model, students are encouraged to set their own learning goals. Hence, they are considered as rangatira to lead and orchestrate their own learning journey. This can be seen as another instance of relational ontology in leadership of schools as the learning (reality) is constructed between subjects. Moreover, the epistemology (how we know something) of learning in this model is relational (Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012), as the learning happens through the interactions and communications between subjects (students and teachers) about the reality that needs to be learnt. Finally, this leadership model is in line with relational theory, as it distributes the control mechanism among everyone in the group that works toward the big aspiration of learning.

Another instance of a collective act of leadership can be seen in bicultural ECE (Early Childhood Education) centres. Shared leadership is a relational model that can benefit bicultural ECEs where iwi, teachers, whānau and their tamariki are encouraged to participate in achieving learning goals of the whānau and community. This model of leadership draws on the shared responsibilities and collective contribution in moving forward or as it is said “paddling the waka in the same direction” (Hawkins, 2017, p. 23). It requires sharing the power among those who are willing to participate and enhance leadership opportunities.

Values such as kotahitanga, whanaungatanga, whakapapa, and tohatoha form a relational connectivity among Māori populations in New Zealand. This relational connectivity (Kenney, Phibbs, Paton, Reid, & Johnston, 2015) drives iwi whānui (members of tribes) to act for collective purposes such as wellbeing of people, land and environment when a change is required (Kenney, Phibbs, Paton, Reid, & Johnston, 2015). Traditionally, a chief (rangatira) made decisions for an iwi (tribe) to ensure safety and to help their communities flourish (Hawkins, 2017). Although the role of individual leaders was important, the contributions and skills of everyone in the iwi were also required to collectively achieve their goals and aspirations (Hawkins, 2017). This is where leadership of change can be seen from a relational perspective.

Whānau Ora And Practicing Relational Leadership

In this section, the Whānau Ora approach is explained and analysed as an example of kaupapa Māori practice, to see whether it reveals characteristics of relational leadership.

Whānau Ora is a contemporary framework for Māori health and wellbeing (Chant, 2011) that aims to support Māori to achieve cultural, social, environmental, and economic health and wellbeing aspirations (Ministry of Health, 2002). The concept of Whānau Ora was the driver of a government initiative by Te Puni Kōkiri (the Ministry of Māori Development) in 2010 to develop and provide whānau-centred services (Dormer, 2014). The government expected the Whānau Ora service providers to follow a holistic approach (to improve health and wellbeing) in working with whānau (as opposed to individuals) to try to empower people to be self-managing (Dormer, 2014). In fact, in 2009, the government established a taskforce on whānau-centred initiatives that collected data from the Māori population and reported on whānau outcome goals and the characteristics of whānau-centred services to provide a framework for an integrated approach to whānau wellbeing (Durie, Cooper, Grennell, Snively, & Tuaine, 2009).

The concept of Whānau Ora was not new to Māori and it was included in the Māori health strategy (He Korowai Oranga) in 2002 as the high level aim. This inclusion is considered as an example of kotahitanga or the (theoretical) co-existence of Māori health organisations and the Ministry of Health (Chant, 2011). Whānau Ora is also interpreted as a model for realisation of kotahitanga as it is co-existed and co-operating within non-Māori models of health and wellbeing. It is a framework that has been designed to include both Māori and non-Māori families who use Māori health and wellbeing services and it can be used by both Māori and non-Māori health practitioners within mainstream and Māori health and disability organisations (Chant, 2011). It allows Māori health organisations to have their own service delivery model, as Whānau Ora is a collective expression of them all and provides an overarching tikanga for their models (Chant, 2011). Therefore, being an example of kotahitanga and an inclusive model of health and wellbeing, would justify Whānau Ora as promoter of a relational approach of leadership.

As mentioned earlier, Whānau Ora is about a holistic view of whānau needs and goals. It requires all the health, cultural, social, and economic service providers who can support whānau to achieve their goals and become self-managing, to collaborate or at least be available for whānau. It encourages collaborations with all the stakeholders (including whānau) and engagement of whānau in design and delivery of services. This would result in the contribution of a group of people – including whānau – in design and deriving the change (leading the change). Similarly, the Taskforce Report highlighted how different government, private, public, and non-profit organisations should work together to provide more whānau-centred services. Hence, it is about a collective act that every provider and the whānau itself have their own contribution in changing the service delivery system as well as the whānau life. The whānau need to be able to plan for their goals and future and Māori service providers who can support them should empower whānau by increasing their knowledge, their access to services, their capability to change, and eventually self-managing their health and wellbeing.

Another instance of a relational approach in leadership of change for whānau can be seen in the funding model that is used for Whānau Ora providers. Unlike traditional forms of funding that measure success based on predefined and centralised outputs such as number of patients, time, and costs, the government follows a Commissioning for Outcomes model for funding Whānau Ora providers (Te Pou Matakana, 2015). It means the Whānau Ora providers can be flexible in defining their local problems and their whānau outcomes (changes) and then be measured based on their success in achieving those outcomes. This approach promotes a collaborative approach in defining the changes required (by putting whānau at the centre) and shifts the power from authorities to people in the community to decide what needs to be changed. This can be considered as a collective or relational way of leading change in the community as well.

Discussion

Exploring concepts such as kotahitanga, whanaungatanga, whakapapa, and manaakitanga as they relate to leadership has been the major focus of this paper. It reveals how these values can promote collective acts and relational connectivity among Māori, which can drive the collective role in leadership of change in social systems and achievement of common goals. Kotahitanga plays a pivotal role from a relational perspective of leadership, as it embodies the need for cooperation and collective responsibility in order to work together to achieve collective goals.

In the New Zealand health system, the Whānau Ora approach is an example of kaupapa Māori in the development and delivery of whānau-centred services that encourage collaboration between different stakeholders. As a model for realisation of kotahitanga, Whānau Ora brings all Māori and non-Māori providers together to collectively – with whānau – change the way health and wellbeing services are delivered. Moreover, the Commissioning for Outcomes model for funding Whānau Ora providers is another enabler in the provision of collaborative approaches in bringing about the changes required for whānau.

This abridged analysis of existing literature and practices supports the contribution of Māori kaupapa (especially kotahitanga) in the realisation of a relational form of leadership among Māori. Further research would be required though to assess the significance of this leadership among Māori service providers (for instance) by using a more comprehensive study.

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