

REPRISING KIA TŪPATO.



Credit: Microsoft

The use of Māori culture in health and safety has been shown to produce safer and prouder Māori workers. I once talked with a Māori worker about his reputation for following health and safety rules. To many, he appeared as a conscientious worker but behind this façade his mindset centred on *kia tūpato*, a Māori concept or value akin to caution. His strong sense of cultural identity reinforced his use of *Kia Tūpato* which resulted in cautious behaviour that helped him to keep safe. In his words “*Kia Tūpato* is about who we are, why would I change that for anyone?”

Research involving disparities often problematize Māori. Workplaces can harbour an unconscious bias that treats Māori and other vulnerable workers as problems to be fixed. In contrast, our above worker illustrates an alternative narrative, where connecting with Māori culture can help workers stay safe.

When Māori identify with their culture they are enabled to perform and contribute better. That empirical finding applies to a range of settings from education to business development. In comparison, our understanding of ethnic cultures and health and safety practice is rudimentary and even this maybe more a fluke. Improving this situation involves research and practices that resonate with practitioners, workers, and employers alike. *Mātauranga Māori* (Māori knowledge) and conventional health and safety disciplines need to connect and demonstrate practical value.

Kia Tūpato Case Study

I started my doctoral research three years ago to reprise things Māori and to reverse a tide of indifference. The crux of research involved the modest *Kia Tūpato Case Study* (Study). As well as *kia tūpato*, *manaaki* (extending respect and hospitality) and *ako* (a reciprocating teacher and learner relationship) values were examined for their ability to improve the perception of risk by Māori workers. A connection was therefore conceived between the *Mātauranga Māori* and Māori values and conventional theory in the form of

risk perception. The practical value, fingers crossed, would be observed as improvements in worker behaviour.

The Study initially used three sources of data. Observations - for two weeks workers used their conventional systems to identify, assess, control monitor and review risks. The only difference was each day they selected a value to perceive those risks. Their selections were recorded, with related behavioural changes observed. The Study did not examine the appropriateness of controls. Surveys - findings from observations were then reiterated to workers and their views surveyed. Experts - observations and survey findings were then discussed as part of individual interviews or whitiwhiti korero (panel interview) with experts from within and outside of health and safety practice. Experts had an added task of interpreting how observations and survey findings interfaced with Mātauranga Māori. An unforeseen gap in practitioner and related professional views was closed with an online survey.

Tikanga Trumps Compliance.

The Study evidenced a ready uptake of values in particular Kia Tūpato. As a result, changes in behaviour were observed including a heightened awareness of risk, greater use of controls, and enhanced inter-communication about health and safety matters. When surveyed, workers felt health and safety was more lucid, they were more affiliated with Māori culture and conventional systems and felt proud about being Māori at work. “I take the good and the bad home, it has been all good since we used uara (values)”. The experts however, dashed my hopes of a clean sweep. They underscored, that while the values did indeed work, on balance however, they could be a novelty, the Study was too brief, and the selection of values too limited. Moreover, Practitioners etc will need a basic understanding of things Māori or lead-in cultural competency training to effectively interact with Māori workers to use Mātauranga Māori. It was mooted investing in those crusty, experienced, and well-respected supervisors that lead on the ground should be a priority. Experts also revealed an interesting process for how workers protect one another using values holistically. From a conventional perspective, workers ensure the health and safety of one another for ethical and compliance reasons. To action this, workers disclose risks and encourage the use of controls. This process is arguably an ideal. As a parallel, manaaki obligates a worker to enhance the mana (including wellbeing) of a co-worker. To action this, workers use ako to exchange information whereas kia tūpato provides a handbrake, ensuring that information is tika or correct and fit for purpose. The Study showed that workers preferred this approach to conventional systems. A last-minute survey included online responses from 70% Non-Māori practitioners and related professionals with over half having ten plus years’ experience. The majority supported the use by workers of values as a lens to perceive risks and the need for improved cultural competency coupled to continued professional development.

Conclusion

More needs to be done. Another kind of Kia Tūpato Case Study needs to be upscaled and include research aims and opportunities for practitioners to contribute. Cultural competency training is well established in the education and health and disability sectors, it is not in ours. That indifference needs to be overcome by consensus and leadership if harms and deaths are to be arrested. There is no silver bullet or legislative requirement compelling change. Nevertheless, a connection has been made between Mātauranga Māori and conventional health and safety. Being able to resonate two bodies of knowledge and show their practical benefits in a workplace is a significant step forward. And more applied research is coming, with the three-year ACC funded Haumarū Tāngata Study examining Māori worker wellbeing at, work, home and within the community. For practitioners, the emerging Te Rōpu Marutau O Aotearoa offers a home for those interested in Maori health and safety issues, while HASANZ Poutama scholarships continue to strengthen the workforce with Maori practitioners. For the sceptics, the Te Ahu a Turanga Manawatū Tararua Highway Project and its iwi partners pragmatically actions the Te Whare Tapa Whā Māori health model everyday with, and for its workers. And the General Managers Safety Forum supported by HASANZ. is examining the way its leaders see things Māori. All of these initiatives signal change, but they do not secure it, we should be cautious about indifference and reversing these modest gains. He Taonga nui te Tūpato – caution is highly prized.



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