

INCORPORATING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE INTO WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY.



Credit: Atamira

Prologue: This is a very early article that has since development into the R's model.

I am often asked, “how does indigenous knowledge get incorporated into workplace health and safety?”

I offer no proper answer. The reality is, a practice has yet to be adequately evidenced and moreover widely accepted that, works on those six in the cold morning toolboxes, huddled in transportable buildings or trying not get blown over on some windy clearing, where no one feels like doing anything. While I'm sure practices are in the pipeline, in the meantime I offer two steps, educate, and engage.

Educate – learn some basic indigenous cultural values and find traits most common in good safety cultures.

Engage – present your findings to workers. Get your ducks in row and agree which value can be used and which practices can reflect the values. I have not yet designed a way to evaluate steps one and two.

By presenting your findings and agreeing with workers which values, and practices are relevant, you not only enfranchise them into safer workplace systems but also make the whole process open and practical.

Education

In this example, I am going to briefly describe tikanga Māori (guidelines for Māori culture). Five common tikanga Māori values and their meanings are:

1. Manaakitanga – Reciprocity of kindness, respect, humility, responsible hospitality, and caring for others and the environment.
2. Whakawhanaungatanga – Genealogy connects people through generations, kin, and lasting non-kin relationships.
3. Wairuatanga – Spiritual dimension of thinking, being, and doing, with a spiritual and physical being connected by a mauri—a unique life energy in everything
4. Auahatanga – Creativity, entrepreneurship, problem-solving, learning, confronting challenges, and adapting.
5. Kaitiakitanga – Preserving, sheltering, and protecting in relation to the environment.

There is considerable research describing traits for good performing safety cultures. I have highlighted some and included their meanings:

A reporting culture – Cultivating an atmosphere where people have confidence to report safety concerns without fear of blame.

A fair and just culture – Where workers are not punished for actions, omissions or decisions taken by them which are proportionate to their experience and training, but where gross negligence, wilful violations are not tolerated.

A collective mindfulness – where leaders and workers share common thinking and behaviours in terms of safety values, attitudes and practices.

Engage

The below diagram illustrates how manaakitangi can be incorporated into workplace health and safety?”. The wording describes how it relates to workers and their safety. Likewise, collective thinking and proactive reporting are traits for good performing safety cultures.



By placing in parallel indigenous cultural values and traits for good safety cultures, workers especially indigenous, can appreciate where their cultural values fit into their work-life.

So What?

The value of this two-step process is not limited to improving safer workplace practices.

Its foremost value is recognizing the good things that workers do at home and endorsing their shift to and use, at work.

I see no reason why tikanga Māori could not supplemented by other values to enfranchise other workers from wider cultures.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, I do think a re-think is in order, where safer workplace systems reflect accords between employers, workers and workplace health and safety. With the latter being a third person with all the rights, powers, duties, and liabilities of a legal person or something akin. Granting legal personage to things intrinsic to humans is becoming more common.



About the author. Vance Walker is a Director of Haumarū HS Limited and its international brand, IndigeSafe. Vance is a health and safety professional and practice researcher. He is a recognized leader of indigenous Māori health and safety.

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