

Te Waka Tangata: Using waka as a model for the structures of Maori organisations

Anaru Eketone

Anaru Eketone was born and raised in Otago but belongs to the Ngati Maniapoto and Waikato iwi. He has worked ten years as a youth worker in South Auckland, six years as a Maori health promoter in Otago and is currently in his second year as a lecturer in the Community and Family Studies Department at the University of Otago.

On a visit back home to Dunedin in 1990, Te Wai o Tapu, a 'marae theatre company', performed a Hone Tuwhare play, 'In The Wilderness Without a Hat'¹. The play was based around an old English children's song that I had heard my mother-in-law from Lancashire sing to my children, 'On Ilkley Moore 'bhat 'at' (On Ilkley Moor Without a Hat). The play wove the song through a story of a young urban Maori man returning to his marae for a tangi. The basic premise of the song is that if you go on Ilkley Moor without a hat then you will get sick and die. My understanding of the basic premise of the play was that if you are Maori and go into the Pakeha world without the kakahu (clothing or covering) of your kaumatua and your tipuna, you will not survive culturally and spiritually.

It is a concept many of us as Maori are familiar with. I remember being at an interview for a job that would require me to work extensively within the Maori community. The interview was near its end and they asked me if I had any questions. My only question was, 'Whose covering will I be working under?' There were two kaumatua on the interview panel. One of them pointed to the other and then to himself and said 'ours'.

What was I asking and, what were they saying?

I did not feel confident, as a 32 year old Maori man, to work in that community, in the role I was supposed to fulfil, unless I had the tautoko and awhi of people who were recognised as being kaumatua in that community. Without it, I was going to be on 'Ilkley Moore 'bhat 'at'. I would have been operating in a way that was unsafe for the community and in an environment I considered unsafe for me.

I had my own tribal kaumatua that I related to, and by saying that I would be working under the covering of other kaumatua in no way usurped the role of my own kaumatua. Even though it wasn't spoken, there was a mutual understanding between those kaumatua and me, that if people had a problem with what I was doing, they could go to them. But when I was out there in the community I had a responsibility to them because I was now representing them.

Within the organisation I was to be employed by, these kaumatua had no legal standing, authority or responsibility, but in the context of providing services for Maori by Maori, their place as cultural and

spiritual overseers was invaluable and unquestioned. (Eventually their role changed but that is another story.)

Organisational structures.

A number of years later, in the year 2000 I was asked to describe the organisational structure of a Maori organisation that I was associated with. (I will call it a Maori organisation as it was an organisation made up of Maori from a variety of iwi as opposed to an iwi organisation that is tribally based.) I was to show the lines of accountability and authority in what, from first glance, was a hierarchic structure. The descent from 'management' through to the 'workers' in the form of a flow chart was quite easy to do but I was not satisfied with it. It fitted into the paradigm of a western experience of organisational structure² but was strictly authoritarian in nature. It identified who had the authority in the pakeha world but did not examine the relationships inherent in an organisation made up of Maori working with Maori using kaupapa Maori models.³

(It should be pointed out here that not all Maori experiences of organisations is the same and there are a number of Maori models of organisational structures that have a different point of origin and a different purpose. For instance it is not uncommon in contemporary Maori society to have a structure that is strictly hierarchal in nature, but these models can be discussed at a future date.)

Instead of a 'box diagram' or 'flow-chart', I find it easier and in some ways more appropriate to visualise a waka as representative of not only an organisation but as a useful model for Maori organisational structure.

The model I am advocating is in some ways idealistic, but I believe it contains important concepts that can help justify why we need what we need from funders.

In this model the body of the waka itself represents the organisation. It is the services that are being delivered, the purpose for it being there.

Starting from the front of the waka, the tauihu is the prow of the waka. I have been told that the tauihu, along with the rest of the carvings on the waka, relate to one another and contain the mana of the waka. You can interpret that as where the authority and the mandate comes from to provide the services. Does the mandate come from the Government or one of its agencies, does it come from the local community or from the local iwi?

I once had a go at dragon-boat racing. When we were practicing it was just a boat. But when race day came the organisers stuck a fibreglass dragon head on the front. From that point on it became not just a 'boat' but a 'dragon-boat'. Those carved heads had brought their own mana to the boat.

If it is going to be a Maori waka, the mandate for the organisation to deliver services has to come from Maori, not the Government.⁴ The Government may want to support the organisation by contracting services or through grants, but in the end the mana has to reside with Maori. This is essential particularly if you want to empower Maori and contribute to 'Maori Advancement'.⁵

The hoe are the paddles and represent the resources available. If you've got no paddles you are not going anywhere. You need resources for everyone involved otherwise they will lose interest. If they lose interest the project or organisation will run aground. You need a role and a sense of participation from everyone involved.

The kaihoe are the paddlers and represent the workers. Each section of a waka has it's own role and duty to fulfil. They get you to your destination, they ensure the goals and purposes of the organisation are met. Teamwork is vital, working together, being together and of course paddling together in the same direction. Waka ama is one of the growth sports in New Zealand at present,⁶ one of the attractions is being part of a team. Personally I hate paddling on my own. I get bored after 5 minutes, but I can paddle with a group for hours and love it. Being part of a team is important.

The kaihautu is the one who sets the beat and gives instructions to the steerer. These are today's managers and coordinators. They get everyone paddling in the same direction and in time thus ensuring the efficiency of the waka. They are the most visible with their heads above the rest, and they are the ones who keep their eyes on the destination while keeping an eye out for hazards, be they natural or human. They are the ones whose job it is to keep their eyes on the big picture.

The kaihautu is the person who has been given the responsibility to be in charge. They are there because they are trusted by the paddlers and are there to encourage everyone to work together. It is a position of responsibility. The authority remains with the people and the kaumatua, but the responsibility is delegated to the kaihautu.

The kaiarahi is the steerer and is there to keep things on track. In an organisation they are usually involved in the administration and or clerical support area. I have noticed from my involvement in waka ama and dragon-boats, that if you have a poor or inexperienced steerer, the paddlers are often trying to compensate and stop the waka from tipping. They are therefore not putting their full effort into their work. However, when you have a steerer you can trust you can just concentrate on what you have to do and get stuck in. Confidence in your kaiarahi is vital (sometimes on the big waka you need more than one).

At the rear of the waka is the taurapa, the stern. The taurapa is there to help point the waka into the wind. Waka can be fairly large craft and in strong winds if they are caught broad side it can be difficult. I noticed this in a recent waka ama race. The crew who were slightly in front of us came to a place where the harbour narrowed and consequently the winds were very strong. As they rounded the corner they started to shift a little side-on to the wind. The wind caught them, and from our perspective, it looked as though it was driving them backwards, until they managed to head back into the wind. The race was so close that this enabled us to get ahead of them.

To me the taurapa represent the involvement of kaumatua. When everything is smooth sailing we think we can do without them and it is not until we hit trouble that we realise our need for them. I have seen numerous problems occur in organisations that would have been resolved quickly if kaumatua had been involved right from the start.

There are other people associated with waka that I will touch on briefly.

The kaikarakia and kaikaranga represent those responsible for the spiritual aspect of the journey/organisation. Before you go out on waka you have someone perform a karakia and often when you return a kuia will do the karanga. It refers to the role of kaumatua and the safety of what's being done. Is this project a safe thing for our people to be involved with? Is their dignity enhanced?

Kaumatua provide the spiritual covering over an organisation. Sometimes it is referred to as a korowai and as mentioned earlier some refer to it as a kakahu. This is a huge responsibility, making sure

that tikanga is observed, the mana of those who are brought in contact is upheld and that the concepts of tapu and noa are respected. I have often heard people criticising kaumatua for 'going on too long'. But kaumatua have undertaken an obligation to do things correctly and follow the correct processes to ensure the spiritual safety of what is taking place. I am not the person to explain the role of kaumatua, or who has the mandate to be called a kaumatua, but what I can do is stress their importance for making us feel safe in what we do.

Conclusion

This is an analogy and like all good analogies it eventually falls down somewhere, however, I believe this model has its uses. It gives me a model that I, as a Maori, can relate to. It identifies the roles of people in an organisation in a way that I feel comfortable with and it provides a framework for my expectations of those with whom I am journeying.

To me it also highlights the importance of kaumatua and how it can be easy to overlook the important contribution that they should, as of right, make. One of the issues with non-iwi based Maori services is their failure to allow kaumatua into their structures. Often organisations think that they can get away without involving them in a meaningful way, or they claim they 'have' a kaumatua but they are not kept informed on the organisation's progress and processes.

Maori organisations whether they be independent or part of mainstream organisations, and those working in them, need the spiritual covering and protection that kaumatua can provide. Sometimes we forget that the vision for many of the Maori organisations that we have today originally came from our old people. If we do not have their involvement, we become like those in a waka who have travelled a great distance and are so intent on what they are doing that they begin to lose their connection to those who sent them out there in the first place. In the words of Hone Tuwhare being in 'the wilderness without a hat.'

References

- Durie, M. (1998). *Te Mana, Te Kawanatanga: The politics of Maori self determination*. Oxford University Press: Auckland.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum: New York.
- Jones, A. and May, J. (1992). *Working in human service organisations: A critical introduction*. Longman Cheshire Pty Ltd: Melbourne.
- Scwimmer, E. (1974). *The world of the Maori*. A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd: Wellington.
- Te Puni Kokiri. (March 2002). *Kokiri Paetae*. Wellington, Ministry of Maori Development (Te Puni Kokiri), 38: 16.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Zed Books Ltd: London.
- Tuwhare, H. (1991). In the Wilderness Without a Hat. Text published in *Australasian Drama Studies* (1991) 18: 95-143.

1 Tuwhare, H. (1989). In the wilderness without a hat. Text published in *Australian Drama Studies* (1991) 18: 95-143.

2 Jones, A., May, J. (1992). *Working in human services organisations: A critical introduction*. Longman Cheshire Pty Ltd: Melbourne: 198.

3 Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999). Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples. Zed Books Ltd: London: 186–189.

4 Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum: New York: 26.

5 Durie, M. (1998). *Te Mana, Te Kawanatange: The politics of Maori self-determination*. Oxford University Press: Auckland: 4.

6 Te Puni Kokiri. (2002). *Kokiri Paetae*, Issue 38, March 2002. Ministry of Maori Development (Te Puni Kokiri), Wellington: 16.