



CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

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TE TIKANGA MAORI

Section Five

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CONCEPTS

There are certain key concepts which still strongly influence the attitudes and behaviour of Maori people today. As with everything else though, there is a wide variation from tribe to tribe, from young to old, from urban to rural. These philosophical ideals underpin the way the Maori deals with the world and underlie many ideals and actions which you may have found difficult to understand.

These concepts coming as they do from the heart of Maoridom are difficult to describe in words. These notes are therefore useful only as a very general introduction. Careful observation of Maori people may reveal these concepts in practice to you.

CONSENSUS : NOT MAJORITY.

Internal social relations within the tribe were as close as human social organisations could get to the true meaning of democracy. Firstly kinship dominated social life. This meant that those in the hierarchy of social power (chiefs, tohunga, and kaumatua) were not in the position to use power in an exploitive manner.

Corporate activity dominated social life, and everything was done for the good of the group. Because hapu were small social units of 300-500 people it was incumbent on those in power to advance their mana only by doing what was best for their kinsmen who supported them.

Democratic debate was facilitated by the limited size of the group and the institution of the marae where a man's words and actions were open to public scrutiny. The marae was particularly well adapted to the process of consensus decision-making. Problems were debated on the marae where they were exposed to " the searing rays of sunlight " and "blown about by the wind". Literally everyone in the community would be present. If no conclusions were arrived at on the marae then it was expected matters would be terminated in the house at night.

TAPU

The system of tapu is a series of prohibitions which acted in the same manner as moral and civil law. Its influence covered a wide range of activities, life, birth, marriage, sickness, death, burial, exhumation, and every kind of work. No one in the community was free from its very strict rules. To disregard them, meant disaster to the individual.

Punishment came, however, not from the human world. It was imposed by the gods. Naturally, this system only works where there is a strong religious-spiritual belief. While today the beliefs may not be as strong in everyone, there are a surprisingly large number of Maori whose beliefs in the ancient spiritual-religious system are still very strong.

Everything is subject to tapu. Homes, gardens, personal belongings, land, forests, trees, rivers. All these came under tapu from time to time. People, too, were tapu or lived in a state of tapu from time to time. This persists to the present day.

" People with much mana have to put a form of tapu, a restriction on themselves, if I don't continue to observe certain restrictions it will be gone "
-Rangimarie Pere

Many illnesses which Maori have today are said to be "mate Maori". The usual effect of violation of a tapu, is death or illness. This can be avoided by intervening with the appropriate rituals performed by those with the knowledge.

There are four major ways of violating tapu. These are

1. Food
2. Women
3. Going onto a tapu place
4. Mistakes in performing certain tasks.

Today, these translate into certain restrictions. For example. Avoid any connection between food and the head. Don't put anything to do with hair or the head near food or on a table. Never sit on a food table. Don't wash teatowels with other clothing. When with Maori people, offer a prayer before eating or wait until karakia are said.

Women in most tribal areas are restricted from speaking on the marae atea. It is still believed that if they do there will be some negative consequence. Women in some areas are restricted from areas where carving or canoe building is going on. Women must never step over a mans legs as this harms his mana.

MANA

Mana is a concept which is very strong among Maori today. Mana is a fire which is held by the gods and which keeps the world going. It is handed down through the gods and through the ancestors. So that today, as in traditional Maori society, descent and achievement are still the criteria of mana. This mana handed down from the ancestors is of fundamental importance.

The meaning of mana varies :

authority and control

influence

prestige

power

psychic force

Mana can never be assumed by an individual. It is attributed to them by others, through exceptional achievement. Or it comes through the persons genealogy and therefore is that of their ancestors.

Mana is not static, but changes over time, depending on their performance, their relations with the gods and with other people.

The descent groups, iwi, hapu and whanau, and some other Maori groups also have their own mana which fluctuates over time. The individuals mana moves with that of the descent groups.

MANA TIPUNA

This is the mana handed down from the ancestors. This gives its holders authority within the whanau, hapu and iwi. This mana normally is distributed according to seniority, but a particular junior may have more depending on whatever special qualities they have, and their relative importance to the whanau, hpu and iwi.

MANA WHENUA

Mana whenua derives from inheritance in land. The mana whenua of the people is vested in the rangatira.

MANA ATUA

Mana atua derives from the gods. It transfers the authority to act in spiritual matters. Mana atua is indicated by tohu(signs) such as unusual events surrounding the persons birth, dreams they might have, and their spiritual sensitivity. From mana atua comes the ability to heal mate Maori.

MANA TANGATA

Mana tangata is given to individuals by others because of their particular skill or performance in a given area.

MAURI

"Mauri is the life principle which is latent in all things, the elemental force that binds things together and gives them their being. There are certain gradations, depending on the being of the thing concerned. For example, the mauri of an individual or a people. The mauri of trees and other animate things. Then the mauri of the inanimate."

-Maori Marsden

Mauri is the essential force, life spirit.

Mauri is concerned with the physical dimension of the body and the senses. The physical symbols of mauri are tapu, to be treated with great respect. A person with strong mauri is sure to acquire mana.

IHI

Ihi is variously, authority, charisma, excitement, magnetism, pride and awesome power. Ihi is not spiritual but psychic. Ihi can arouse the psychic and emotional levels of others. Ihi is best seen during whaikorero, haka or other rituals.

DEFINITIONS OF MURU (From Nga Tikanga Iho A Te
Maori: Customary Concepts of the Maori- compiled by Hirini
Moko Mead)

MURU - as defined by Best in the Maori, Vol. 1, 1924, p.
358-9:

" The word murū means to plunder, and it represents a form of punishment that consisted of robbing a person of his property. Possibly we might employ the word fining, but the property was taken by force. A strong muru party seems to have been viewed as something of an honour by the sufferer, on some occasions, as showing that he must be a person of some importance."

MURU - as defined by Best in the Maori as He Was, 1924, p.
94.

" The word murū means to plunder, and was applied to an extraordinary custom, the plundering of those who had committed some offence against the community. So far it was a disciplinary measure, the oddness lying in the list of offences. People were subjected to muru plunderings on account of offences committed by others, and in which they had no part. Should a man meet with an accident and incapacitate himself, he was liable to be plundered as a punishment. Such offences as adultery were generally punished by a muru raid, the unjust part of such proceedings from our point of view, being the fact that innocent and guilty alike suffered in many cases."

MURU - as defined by Firth in the Economics of the N.Z
Maori, 1929, p. 400-1:

" This was an institution which provided for the extraction of compensation for the offences by the confiscation of property. Not only the offender, but also his immediate kinsfolk suffered, and the amount of property seized and damage done, as well as the circle of people affected, grew according to the magnitude of the offence. Infringement of tapu, accidental wounding of oneself or others, or adultery, were all common causes of the muru being set

into operation. The tauamuru, or the plundering party raided the village of the offender, made away with his moveable property, ate up all his provisions - which were generally set out in readiness by the people invaded - and in graver cases burned his home and set one of their party to oppose him in a duel. This institution was regulated by a well defined code of procedure, and was very useful as an instrument of social justice. Though the loss of wealth by a muru party was a severe blow to the person responsible, yet in the one sense he welcomes the visitation. It implies that he was a person of consequence in his tribe, whose acts were sufficiently important to be the object of interest to a wide circle of relations."

MURU - as defined by Tregear in *The Maori Race*, 1926, p.294:

" Whether the man had eloped with his wife or carried her off by force with the help of his comrades, he was sure to have a "plundering visit" (muru) from his friends before he was allowed to settle down. But this surprise party was generally arranged for and a feast got ready for the entertainment of the visitors who would depart laden with presents. It was the reverse of the European custom where the bride receives the presents. At ceremonial marriages presents of food, mats, etc. changed hands but they were made by the parents of the bride and vice versa; the bridegroom and bride received no presents."

UTU

One of the deeply embedded themes in classic Maori culture was the concept of utu (equivalence). If the harmony of social existence was disrupted by some misdemeanour then harmony was not restored until utu was obtained. The prototype for utu is contained in the myth of Kae's theft and killing of Tinirau's pet whale Tutunui. In this myth Kae is clearly cast in the role of a villain who deserved to die for his crime.

The Tribal traditions abound with accounts of the pursuit of utu. The most benign form of which was a murū or raiding party which plundered the property of an offender. The extreme forms of utu involved killing for previous murders or making war to avenge past defeats. These expressions of utu or lex talionis are the equivalent of the biblical laws of the Old Testament which predicated justice on an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. While these expressions of utu seem rather Hobbesian, the basic principle of equivalence which they express is readily translated into higher and more noble forms of human behaviour.

In his discussion on gift giving among the Maori, Marcel Mauss argued that gift exchange was an expression of trust and moral principle. When A gave something of value such as a treasured tribal heirloom to B a disequilibrium was established in their relationship. The object was a deposit of good faith. Because there was nothing of equivalence the recipient could give in return, whatever he gave was only a temporary balancing of the account. The account was not really squared until the original gift was returned at some future date perhaps several generations later. For instance a valuable greenstone heirloom with its personal name, history and association with illustrious ancestors might be handed over to another tribe in peace-making ceremonies. It was a deposit held in trust for which interest was returned in the form of a political alliance and mutual support in war against outsiders.