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Māori Cultural Confidence



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How do I grow my understanding of Māori experiences in the workplace?

The number of Māori employees in the food and fibre sector in Aotearoa New Zealand is steadily increasing, with one in five employees now identifying as Māori.

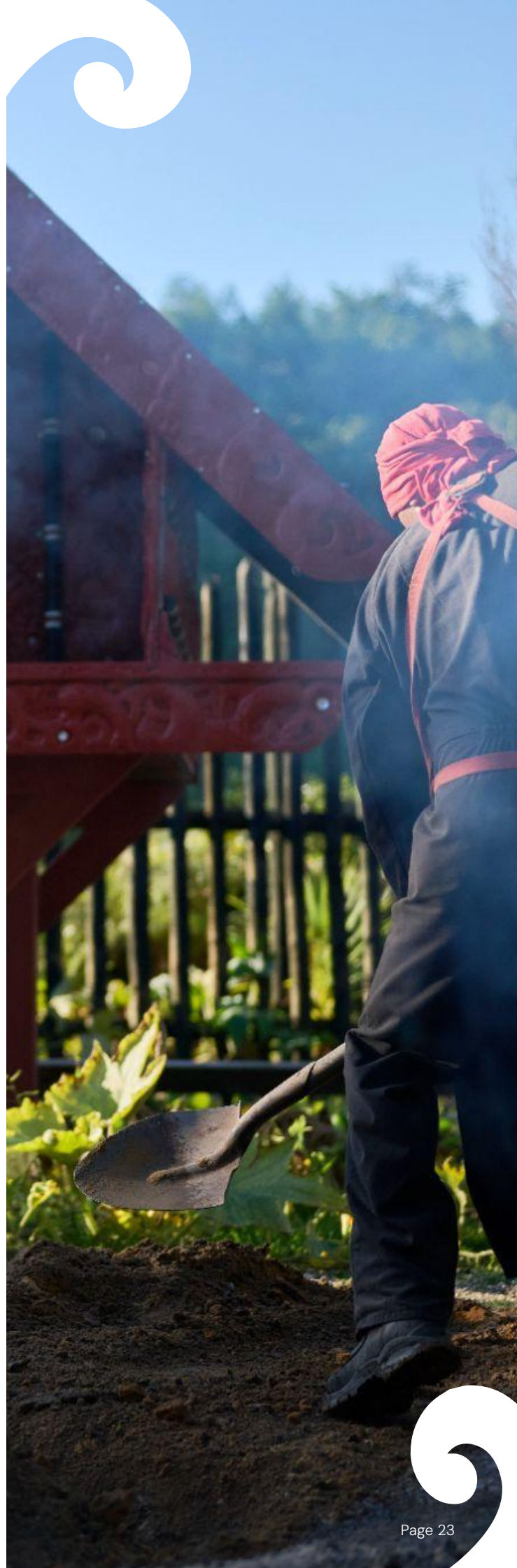


Currently, one in five employees in the sector identify as Māori.

Recognising and valuing the unique cultural perspectives of Māori employees is not only a matter of inclusivity and respect but also a strategic advantage. By creating an environment that embraces te ao Māori (the Māori world), employers can enhance workplace cohesion, improve employee satisfaction, and drive innovation.

Understanding the Māori worldview, cultural values, and practices can help you best support your Māori employees. Learning about another culture can be a lifelong journey, as what is common for some New Zealanders may hold deep cultural significance for others. This chapter is designed to build your confidence in engaging with Māori employees. It provides valuable insights and practical tips on incorporating te ao Māori into the workplace effectively, benefiting everyone involved.

We present introductory information into what you should know. Please see our website for further resources to help you on your journey.



Fundamental elements of te ao Māori

Te ao Māori, or the Māori world, is deeply connected to the natural environment. Like many indigenous cultures globally, Māori believe that we are not only from the land but of the land.

Mātauranga Māori² refers to Māori knowledge systems that have evolved over hundreds of years. This knowledge spans various topics, including education and kaitiakitanga (guardianship / stewardship) of the taiao (environment). While there have been historical conflicts with other knowledge systems, such as Western science, Mātauranga Māori exists alongside and complements these systems. Its application to the food and fibre sector continues to be explored and appreciated.

Example: Mātauranga Māori can be applied through the practice of rāhui, a traditional method of temporarily restricting access to certain resources to allow them to regenerate. A rāhui might be placed on a fishing area to ensure fish populations can recover, promoting sustainable harvesting and preserving marine biodiversity.

Example: Mātauranga Māori can be incorporated into soil health practices, by treating soil as a living entity with its own mauri (life force). This includes using methods like crop rotations, cover cropping and adding organic materials to improve the quality of the soil.

Te reo and tikanga Māori are expressions of the Māori culture. Te reo Māori³ is the Māori language. Although there is one common language, there are many dialects across the country (for example in parts of the South Island there is the use of ng and in other areas they use k – Ngāi Tahu and Kāi Tahu are both used). Tikanga Māori⁴ are practices and customs that are widely accepted as to how things should be done within the Māori culture. For instance, a common tikanga is to avoid sitting on tables, as they are places where food is eaten. Understanding and respecting these practices can foster a more inclusive workplace. Additionally, **kawa**, is also an important concept in Te Ao Māori alongside tikanga. It is generally used and observed in more formal settings.

Whakapapa⁵ is the concept of genealogy, crucial for understanding the connections between people, places, and events. It is fundamental to grasping identity, relationships, and heritage within the Māori culture. Recognising the importance of whakapapa can help employers appreciate the interconnectedness valued in Māori culture, enhancing workplace relationships and cohesion.



² Hirini Moko Mead, 2022.

<https://e-tangata.co.nz/comment-and-analysis/understanding-matauranga-maori/>

³ Reo Māori, 2024. <https://www.reomaori.co.nz/>

⁴ Hirini Moko Mead, 2016.

https://huiia.co.nz/products/tikanga-maori-living-by-maori-values-revised-ed?srsId=AfmBOoq8ltwjtJMs_zgs-OaWdOgT7MKFNuWgPENDU7gMGR-mrhT_Blrt

⁵ Rāwuru Taonui, 2011.

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/whakapapa-genealogy>

Informing your workplace culture

Māori experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand are deeply connected to the natural environment. There is a long and rich history between Māori and the food and fibre sector, nurtured over many generations and continuing to thrive today.

Embracing a values-based approach in the workplace

Although Te ao Māori is diverse, it is generally guided by key values. Here are some of these values and how they can be applied in a food and fibre workplace. These are only a few values that can be applied from a broad and diverse range of values informed by te ao Māori.

Whanaungatanga (Kinship and Relationships)

Whanaungatanga emphasises building strong connections between people to create a sense of belonging. This value can help everyone work together towards common goals while strengthening the community or workplace.

Practically, this may look like:

- **Building relationships**
 - **Getting to know your Māori employees** – spend time getting to know them personally. This creates space for Māori staff to share their whakapapa through the use of their pepeha (type of introduction). Show genuine interest in who they are, their whānau (family), and what drew them to this kind of mahi (work).
 - **Letting your employees get to know you** – create opportunities for your employees to get to know you too. Share who you are, where you're from, and a bit about your whānau.
 - **Engaging with your community** – foster connections with the local community by supporting local initiatives and encouraging employees to get involved.

- **Sustaining relationships**
 - **Scheduling one-on-one meetings** – regularly discuss their experiences and goals, showing that you are interested in their growth and wellbeing.
 - **Involve your Māori workers in conversations** – share opportunities that align with their culture. They may be new to your business, but have insights that could be beneficial to your business objectives.

Manaakitanga (Caring and respecting others)

Manaakitanga is about fostering a positive and collaborative environment by caring for and respecting each other. This encourages everyone to work together, building a workplace where everyone feels valued.

Practically, this may look like:

- **Checking in with your employees:** consistently support their mental, physical, cultural and social wellbeing. For more information see chapter 3, Workplace Wellbeing and Culture
- **Acknowledge and celebrate achievements and efforts:** show gratitude for hard work, such as a morning tea.

Kaitiakitanga (Stewardship)

Kaitiakitanga involves creating a balanced relationship with people and nature to live sustainably. This could mean managing and protecting natural resources for future generations. In your workplace, you can practise kaitiakitanga by encouraging sustainable practices and respecting the environment.

Practically, this might look like:

- **Implementing waste management practices:** minimise waste and promote recycling and composting within the workplace and community

- **Leading efforts to look after native species:** actions such as planting riparian and other native bush especially close to waterways, contribute meaningfully to kaitiakitanga
- **Creating opportunities for tikanga** for example, ask your staff if they would like karakia (ritual chants) to take place before cutting down flax or other natural resources
- **Supporting Māori employees to use maramataka (Māori lunar calendar) practices:** the traditional Māori lunar calendar can guide planting, harvesting, fishing, and hunting. Matariki, signalling the start of a new year, is another example of maramataka Māori in alignment with the lunar calendar.

Understanding these values can help create a supportive and inclusive workplace. When these values are put into practice, they can help Māori employees feel valued and respected.

Getting to know Māori culture and supporting your people

Language

There are many ways to incorporate te reo Māori in your workplace. Here are a few tips and helpful resources to support this effort:

- **Pronouncing people's names and place names correctly:** ensure you pronounce people's names and place names correctly. A guide on te reo Māori pronunciation can be found on reomaori.co.nz. If in doubt, ask the person how to pronounce their name correctly.
- **Incorporating basic words:** use words such as *kia ora* (hello, thank you, be well) in workplace conversations. It is very common to include te reo Māori in daily conversations like “*whānau*” and “*mahi*”. Reomaori.co.nz has examples of everyday words you can incorporate into your workplace.
- **Recognising and celebrating te reo Māori:** participate in Māori language week, te Wiki o te Reo Māori and the Māori language month, otherwise known as Mahuru Māori to celebrate and promote the use of te reo Māori. More information can be found on reomaori.co.nz.

Cultural practices

Tikanga Māori are practices that can be incorporated into the workplace. Below are some examples, recognising that some may be more relevant to your work than others.

- **Land based-practices:** consider following protocols when engaging with the land, such as seeking permission from local iwi (tribe) before accessing particular sites or harvesting natural resources. Find out which local marae are near you to talk to, using Te Kāhui Māngai (Directory of Iwi and Māori Organisations) through this website - www.tkm.govt.nz.
- **Meeting practices:** be open to including karakia at the start and end of meetings to set the intentions for a hui (meeting). This only takes 30 seconds. It is also common to hear karakia before harvesting crops or resources such as flax. Discuss with your Māori staff whether this is something they see value in.
- **Welcoming practices:** depending on your location, visitors may be welcomed with a mihi whakatau or a pōwhiri (welcoming ceremonies). This is a great opportunity for new employees to get to know their new colleagues and workplace. In workplaces, a mihi whakatau is more common and can include kōrero (speeches), waiata (songs) and karakia. The kawa, tikanga and order of proceedings varies, so please check with the local iwi, hapū (sub-tribe) or marae beforehand on the Te Puni Kōkiri Te Kāhui Māngai website. You can also learn more about pōwhiri on the Te Ara - NZ Encyclopedia website.
- **Mourning practices:** Tangihanga, the practice of mourning the passing of a loved one, typically takes priority over all other events in te ao Māori. It recognises the impact of the individual and supports whānau through the mourning process. Tangihanga are similar to funerals, but are typically longer in length. You can learn more about the tangihanga process on the Te Ara - NZ Encyclopedia website. For more information about leave entitlements please see our website or the Employment NZ website.



Helpful hints:

- **Varied connections to land:** Mātāwaka is a term known for Māori who live away from their traditional lands. Mana whenua are those who live on their ancestral lands. Both are examples of the experiences of Māori connection to the land, which may vary.
- **Use of te reo Māori:** While the use of te reo Māori is becoming more common across Aotearoa New Zealand, not all Māori employees may feel confidence speaking their language.
- **Expectations:** Don't assume your employees can be cultural advisors without discussing it with them. Appropriate remuneration may be needed if you're asking staff to take on additional cultural responsibilities.
- **Diversity in Māori Culture:** Māori culture is diverse, with many differences from language dialect to practices. Understanding this diversity is crucial as it is a common misconception that the aspirations, needs and ways of doing things are the same across all Māori communities.
- **Governance and co-design:** It is important to note that while this information focuses on your support for the needs of your employees, there are opportunities to empower your employees also through enabling decision making and co-design.