

CULTURAL CAPABILITY AS A WAY OF BEING IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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Whakataukī

Mā te huruhuru ka rere te manu

Adorn the bird with feathers so it may soar

Exploring cultural capability as a coaching way of being is making us more effective coaches. Jan reflects: “It has changed the way I connect with my coachees. It has deepened and fast tracked the relationships and made the process more of a partnership from the outset. Reciprocity comes more easily.”

More importantly, we believe it gives our coachees a deeper learning experience.

What is cultural capability?

Cultural capability is more than knowing about, and even valuing, another person’s culture.

While attitudes, knowledge and understanding are critically important, it is about getting to know your coachee very well and knowing how they experience and live their culture. This is different for every individual.

Cultural capability includes a deep understanding of our own practices that perpetuate discrimination, racism and equity. It involves recognising unconscious bias and reflecting critically on the imbalance of power and resources in our society. For us as coaches in Aotearoa New Zealand, it means recognising white privilege, understanding racism and inequity faced by Māori and disrupting that status quo to strengthen equity.

In Aotearoa New Zealand we are continually unpacking what it means, in practice, to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi - 1840), our nation’s founding document. Commitment to this understanding and practice is embedded in our Standards for the Teaching Profession. As coaches in educational settings, we wish to align with these. We are improving our understanding of te ao Māori (the Māori world) and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) and how these impact on us as culturally capable coaches.

A different framework for thinking about a coaching way of being

The image is a koru, the unfurling frond of the New Zealand native fern, which depicts new beginnings, life, and hope. For us, this represents growth and development which is what drives our passion and commitment to coaching. The Māori cultural concepts identified within the koru are the keys to how we can put this commitment and passion into practice.



We start at the centre of the koru with Mana. “Mana is a source of personal and collective strength, pride and identity” (Riwai-Couch, 2022:205). Mana determines the right of a person to have agency in their lives and the decisions that affect them. Enhancing mana means recognising the reality of their world and what is ‘right’ for them. This strengths-based approach is core to a person’s wellbeing. We believe a coaching process and outcomes must enhance a coachee’s mana.

Within the koru are eight contributors to a coaching way of being, all of which will enhance mana. These concepts are central to a Māori world view, and as such, add layers of meaning to what it means to be a New Zealander. These words strengthen the cultures of both Māori and non-Māori.

Kotahitanga - togetherness and unity

Kotahitanga emphasises the concept of unity and working together to achieve common goals. We are stronger when we work together. Strength comes from working collectively with others. It is partnering in the coaching process for greater impact.

Rangatiratanga - empowerment

Rangatiratanga frames Article Two of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It means having autonomy to make decisions, and to be self-determining. It ensures that the coachee is in the driver’s seat and has ownership of their thinking and the actions they take.

Ōritetanga - equity

Pursuit of equity aligns with Article Three of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It ensures access and participation, and equity in terms of success. The coach supports the coachee to use their strengths and resources as a springboard for next steps, and to work through any barriers to success.

Whanaungatanga - care and connectedness

Whanaungatanga is about forming and maintaining relationships through shared experiences and working together. It provides people with a sense of belonging and is the essential glue that binds people together, providing the foundation for a sense of unity and cohesion. A coaching process should build this kind of relationship, one that is of mutual benefit.

Ako - reciprocity

Ako means to both teach and learn and is a reciprocal non-hierarchical relationship between the kaiako/teacher and ākonga/learner. Jim Knight expresses this well when he says “reciprocity is the inevitable outcome of an authentic partnership” (2018:5). When coaches engage in dialogue, reflection and apply that knowledge to their work, they live out the old saying that “when one teaches, two learn”. Reciprocity represents shared power as well as shared learning.

Manaakitanga - respect and generosity

Manaakitanga embodies the concepts of hospitality, kindness and generosity. It ensures that the coachee, their experiences, their culture and what they bring to the coaching process is acknowledged and respected. The coach is aware of bias, avoids making assumptions, is non-judgemental and brings a generosity of spirit to the coaching conversation.

Māhaki - humility

Māhaki highlights important attributes for a coach such as being calm, quiet, mild-mannered and humble. It assumes a patience and tolerance that gives the coachee space to be themselves.

Pono - integrity

Pono is characterised by honesty and sincerity. This implies that the coach will bring all the other concepts and values in the koru to every conversation. The coach will be prepared to challenge the coachee when something is getting in the way of their thinking and possibly making progress. The coach will be authentic.

Impact of our koru

Over the last two years, exploring cultural capability and growing our understanding of what a coaching Way of Being looks like for us in Aotearoa New Zealand context, is making us more effective coaches. We are keen to keep working with mana whenua (people with local tribal authority), kaiarahi (mentors), tumuaki and kaiako (principals and teachers) to deepen our understanding. We value reciprocity so that we can learn together. We hope to embed cultural capability in a sustainable way into our organisation and into our practice.

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini

I come not with my own strengths but bring with me the gifts, talents and strengths of my family, tribe and ancestors

References:

Knight, J. (2018) The Impact Cycle. Thousands Oaks, California: Corwin A SAGE Company

Riwai-Couch, M. (2022) Niho Taniwha. Wellington, New Zealand: Huia Publishers

