"Constructing Cultural Values in Career"

Culture and Career

Culture is like blood, it flows though our body and shapes our lives, but we are not normally aware of it (Garcea, 2005). While concepts used in the career industry have been criticized for being of limited relevance for clients of a 'different' worldview, few alternatives have been proposed that reflects the complexity of other cultural environments. Current work in this area may be described as culturally 'sensitive', rather than culturally 'explicit' (Young, Marshall & Valach, 2007). The identification of cultural values brings meaning to activities that go to make up the sum of a person's career. It is proposed that identifying cultural values could contribute to understanding how individuals construct careers in new ways.

Cultural themes deliver a powerful tool through which indigenous communities may express personalized interpretations of their full identity. When considered alongside career, cultural themes may go some way to explaining choices made and the meanings that guide these choices. Cultural identity is formed within a range of places and settings. These places and settings have their own personal definitions, description, significant events, experiences and relationships, which subsequently give rise to cultural identity.

This study

The findings of this study Maori is the diversity of Maori in terms of how they define their own identity and express it. Maori are often referred to as if they are homogenous 'people', but they are actually heterogeneous (Houkama, 2007). Maori today are not the same as Maori yesterday, neither will they be the same as the Maori of tomorrow. Rather, collective voices from the past and present; across the fractures of time and space provide a dynamic and ever evolving process. Within this paper I discuss responses from Maori on how being Maori shapes their career story.

Participants: The twenty two participants from this study were aged between 23 to over 60, thirteen female and nine male, and from both rural and urban backgrounds. A selection of participants was made to span career life stages (Super, 1980). However, this concept was adapted to include an integration of age, life stages and Maori cultural responsibilities. The description 'career cultural stages' was coined for this sampling strategy. Three broad stages were identified, 'rangatahi' (youth),' pakeke' (adult), and 'kaumatua' (elder).

Interview Procedure: Life story interviews (Olson & Shopes, 1991) were chosen to encourage a reflective and narrative style. According to Bishop (1996), storytelling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the diversities of experience yet the storyteller still retains some control. This method encouraged the participants to reflect upon and talk about their experiences in a biographical manner (Edwards, McManus & McCreanor, 2005). Cultural values were analysed within the context of participants recounting their career story from their first job to their current position. Participants were encouraged to describe their early work experience, childhood memories and relationships and how they may have shaped being Maori and their career story.

In this paper participant's identification of their cultural values will be presented through their reflections on the link between culture and career. Participants responded to an invitation to be involved in this study, confirming their ethnic identity as Maori. Other characterizations for identifying cultural values were familiarity and expression of cultural values, the practice and inherited belief in cultural values, their practice and relationship to Maori principles. The familiarity and expression of cultural values was characterized by participants describing a range of Maori cultural values throughout their cultural story. The practice of cultural values meant that participants would be readily able to describe 'how' they actively engaged in the expression of these particular values. An inherent belief in Maori values meant that participants would be able to associate the practice of values, to the significance for broader Maori cultural principles. The transcripts and recorded interviews of each participant were studied to analyse pertinent

cultural themes. The text of transcriptions was analysed into themes using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 7. A node was created for data on cultural identity. A node acts as a 'filing cabinet' for ideas, and as related data emerges it can be collected in to that particular file. Participants were then grouped according to their responses. Three groups were identified from this analysis 'The Keeper', three participants; 'The Seeker', nine participants; and 'The Cloaked', ten participants. A description of each group identifying cultural values will now be described.

Findings

Identifying groups based on cultural values

The "Keeper"

Cultural themes
This descriptor was chosen for those who were 'keepers' of cultural knowledge and traditions. Participants were often raised in a 'traditional' Maori context, usually in a rural setting, which was reflected in their knowledge and expression of cultural traditions, practice and language. Not only did they look through a Maori lens, but their expression of being Maori indicated this was the only way they were accustomed to living, as exemplified by this participant:

> "Oh well it's been for a long time because I've been on up and down waves as well with the company because I came straight from the hapu and so your whole mind set about tikanga and kawa and you're just living it, to working in a mainstream" (Female, Pakeke, Rural)

Career themes
The construction of cultural values for participants in this group is reflected in their ability to articulate rich career themes. However the career themes were dominated by poetic 'life' stories, filled with people and their relationships to each other. The following quote describes how one participant was connected to people first, before being asked about the type of work she was doing:

> "you know so we left there and we went to the Horouta meeting and cause she, they introduced me, oh most of these people are dead now but we were sitting there and she stood up, Auntie P did and introduced me. She said I'd like to, you all to meet our you know our mokopuna, our niece here and mother is so and so R., here father's so and so P. and all this, and you know, I'll never forget the thrill of people saying kia ora dear I'm Uncle T. Oh kia ora, I'm your mothers cousin too you know. So I became very close to those people I met there. Cause just like that they acknowledged me. No questions asked you know. And I think that's where I first learnt and felt extreme power of Whanau. Was then. And then they all wanted to know where I was and I told them how I was working at Maori Affairs..." (Female, Kaumatua, Rural)

Career stories for this group were often secondary to life stories, with cultural values constantly embedded and intertwined. Participants were intensely aware of their identity in their life stories and the strong influence of people surrounding them. They described a strong sense of responsibility toward helping Maori in their career stories, and referred to this as a sense of destiny or duty to lead and help Maori. These participants were, or had been actively involved in community work and work for their iwi (tribe) and hapu (sub-tribe). Their aspiration was to work specifically with, and for the benefit of Maori. This hope was once again expressed as a responsibility where they had to give back to others as they had been taught. Their career history typically involved working with Maori clients, within Maori organizations and using more traditional Maori values and beliefs in their day to day tasks. Participants were very proud of having the opportunity to share their wisdom and experiences in the workplace.

The "Seeker"
Cultural themes
This description was chosen as 'seekers' forged their way through life intent on exploring new possibilities and discovering and re-discovering meaning to their lives. Participants labeled as having this identity recognized and accepted that their expression of being Maori would vary according to the situation they were in. They were in control of how much or how little they revealed about themselves as Maori, and believed in taking control of their own destiny and fate. They moved in and out of a Maori and non-Maori world. This participant describes her ability to engage with Pakeha with ease, as demonstrated to her by her 'Nan and 'Koro':

> "There was very little Maori people in there but yeah I think that's another thing that really helped me because my parents were or my nan and my koro, they weren't racist people, they were very

embracing towards pakeha cause you see my dad was English and French and it was on my mums side that you know that I was raised by my koro and nan and so I was able to you know to socialise with pakeha people and it didn't you know..." (Female, Kaumatua, Rural)

This group had traveled widely overseas, and possessed a diverse network of friends and colleagues. This network of relationships was an expression of their strong interest in moving out of their own world to discover and learn new things. It also represented the development of a broader and more liberal view of life.

Guidance and sage advice was a crucial factor for the 'seeker' in their quest for purpose. Whakapapa (geneology) served as the most significant marker for their identity. This was the only place where the past was used as a platform of old traditions for the creation of a new way of living. It represented an immediate acknowledgement of the value and importance of a source of 'lived and real' knowledge, directly from their tipuna (ancestors), and specifically for them. Participants here often had several photos at their home and workplace of significant tipuna in their whanau (family). The pride expressed in 'being like them (tipuna)' was very evident during our interviews. They were also highly motivated to share this knowledge with the younger generation in their whanau to ensure their memory would live on. Their purpose was to 'seek' out how lessons from the past can be modified, to benefit the present and the future.

Career theme

Participants here were able to express a range of career identities generated from an ability to place themselves easily into diverse stories and self characterizations. It is this multiplicity of identities that 'seekers' use as source of self assurance and self confidence. The range of career identities also meant a range of contacts, and work opportunities available to them.

They were able to interweave these characters to create meaningful career themes and found it very easy to combine career and cultural themes. Being Maori was seen as an asset, and a means to a niche career pathway. They were bold and outspoken about their unique position in the workplace as 'tangata whenua' (indigenous people of the land),

and not afraid to utilize all aspects of their cultural identity. Participants were typically seen as campaigners for social injustices, and affirmative ideologies.

When speaking about their career they used descriptions such as, 'a passion'; 'something I enjoy' and, 'more than just a job'. Participants here developed their career for their own purpose, and were willing to utilize their skills to help Maori, but viewed this as a long term goal. They have a respect for the organization that employed them, and continued to be mindful of the need for organizational structures, and processes.

Participants in this group view themselves as 'different' to other Maori and thrive on the challenge of placing themselves in two worlds, Maori and non-Maori. When considering Maori as a collective identity they were very positive about their place there but did not want to be 'categorised' as being 'only' Maori. The following participant expressed a belief that there was more he could learn from a combination of knowledge sources which could ultimately assist Maori even further:

> "I talked about not going totally Maori and wanting to stay generic. I see that as advantageous because to be able to help our people, I believe there's some things that in a generic world, you need to learn and need to take and apply it to our people because there are some good things and for me I believe that I could be of more help and there's a lot of knowledge that you can get from old people. The kaumatua and kuia and blend them together and should have something really great. So even though I might say generic, there is a lot of ways that I can help our people" (Male, Pakeke, Urban)

The "Cloaked"

Cultural themes

This description was chosen as the cloaked participants attempted to locate a cultural identity which had meaning for them. This does not mean that they lacked information on certain cultural themes, but at times were unable or unwilling to connect themselves to their cultural identity.

'Cloakers' are characterized by an apparent erratic and random quest for cultural identity. They have a preference for settings which minimise the need for uncloaking their identity, and can pull away from situations where they may have to describe their personal perspective or a Maori viewpoint. They would prefer to be in control of how,

when, and to whom they reveal themselves. At times their own awareness of a Maori identity was awakened by other people. Others have identified them as Maori, and have placed pressure on them to articulate their opinions on issues pertinent to Maori. One participant speaks of how uncomfortable it was to be expected to know the answer to how his organization should deal with strategies for Maori, just because he was Maori:

> "The other jobs have predominantly been working developing strategies relating to Maori, so immediately all of the other staff in the organisation would turn to you and say well, what's the answer? Oh, I don't know" (Male, Pakeke, Urban and Rural)

Another participant recalled Maori people scrutinizing her and how disheartening it felt. In the following quote the experience of seeking to explore her cultural identity remains a strong memory of non acceptance by her Maori peers:

> "I was raised Pakeha until I was 27, when I did make approaches to join Kapahaka, the atmosphere at the time, they did not know where you were from, don't even bother to find out, they said you're a potatoe, it was like another form of oppression, I felt quite, because I don't speak Maori either, in limbo" (Female, Pakeke, Urban)

While some participants were reluctant to develop their cultural identity, for others it became a quest of self discovery. Their main navigational point for identity began with aspects of their lives most familiar to them, such as the place they grew up in and immediate family members. Yet it is here that their first sense of cultural identity was compromised. The Cloaked may be off spring of mixed marriages living within the dominant culture. Essentially these people were able to describe typical Maori cultural practices but are unable to connect these to Maori cultural values. The Cloaked may also be from families for whom being Maori attracted negative and derogatory perceptions by others. For the cloaked it was 'safer' to assume a detached identity and as a means of escape, to disguise their identity. While these participants would rarely deny their identity as Maori, they did not make it publically known. They believed the life they had is in no way shaped by cultural values and beliefs.

Career themes

Career stories by this group were well constructed, but lacked personal meaning and association to the participants. For example they were readily able to describe positions and tasks they had held but did not immediately divulge a personal context. Being 'paid' for their skills was a strong motivation, as too was job security and opportunity to move within an organization. For these participants, culture and career were seen as completely separate entities, unless prompted by another person. In the following comment a trusted friend insisted that she work for a Maori organization, which turned out to be a very positive experience:

> "If she hadn't of said you will work for me and she said that. You are coming to work, she didn't ask me, she told me. And she's like that, she's a good person. She said you're coming to work for me and I said no. She goes yes you are. Oh all right then. So I did yeah. And I never looked back. Never looked back and I'm working trying to work for a Maori organisation, just opened up my eyes because I was never into the reo, into the anything but boy by the time I leave here, you can korero, you can waiata, your, what's the word, confidence, you know enough to do that…" (Female, Pakeke, Rural)

Like this participant, others used their working life to compensate for a lack of cultural experiences and to ensure others did not face the same humiliation as they may have done:

> "And I guess just talking about issues that come up for that person like there are some things, there are knowing their culture and who they are. There's so much about being whakamaa, there are some issues that I find are related to me that I can relate to with that person." (Female, Rangatahi, Urban)

Some took personal credit for their success, and believed they had succeeded on their own individual merits rather than that of a collective identity.

Implications for Career Practice

Key differences between each group of participants were found. The 'keepers' know themselves within their own worldview. They ascribe meaning to career consistent with 'traditional' Maori values and beliefs. This would be a group uninterested in the identification of vocational personality. Instead, the focus should be based within their cultural world of people, places and relationships.

'Seekers' are constantly looking for new ways to describe and identify themselves in their career. They speak of multiple voices and layers to their existence and acknowledge that who they are in their career is influenced by cultural values, but this is only one source of influence. Here is a group willing to learn more about themselves on all levels; be it their vocational personality and their life themes.

'Cloakers' described a career with occupations, tasks and duties. They have disconnected culture from career themes but appear to view vocational exploration as a 'safe' option for exploring who they are. As a group they are more likely to request vocational assessments but with encouragement and support, may also be willing to delve deeper into personal meaning and connections to cultural identity.

Cultural identity may go some way toward providing a framework for how meaning is evoked in career stories for Maori. Nodes of connections can be seen between culture and career. Cultural themes weave together in the construction of career by using cultural settings and places made up from past memories, present experiences and future aspirations. These cultural themes are made real through enacted career behaviour. Applying the notion of cultural identity interwoven with career themes offers promising avenues for career practitioners.

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