

# Learning from Kaupapa Māori: Issues and techniques for engagement

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## Abstract

*This article argues for recognition of the value and relevance of Indigenous knowledges about principles and practices of engagement to theory-building and praxis in public relations. Specifically, in this article, the Kaupapa Māori body of knowledge and practice that has developed around Indigenous/non-Indigenous engagement in Aotearoa is identified as a valid source of insight for the analogous situation of organisation-public engagement where power imbalance is inherent.*

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## Introduction

Engagement has been described as “the new buzzword” (Payne & Kowalski, 2008, p. 554) in public relations. Edelman (2009, p. 4) suggests that the practice is moving “from public relations to public engagement”, a claim that has quickly been echoed with scholarly calls for the profession to “reframe its ideas of control and become more concerned in the theoretical and practical modelling of . . . ‘public engagement’” (Balnaves & Mahoney, 2009, p. 13). Modelling and theory-building are indeed crucial, because inherent in the rapid popularisation of such attractive-sounding terms as “engagement” is a risk that they simply provide new discursive legitimising labels for continued practices of co-opting publics to organisational agendas—or what Mackey pithily describes as “pariah activity that hegemonically frames understandings in particular ways in order to shape the behaviour of the masses” (2006, p. 13). Where “engagement” is driven, facilitated, managed, and evaluated by organisations, it certainly has the potential to enact a worst-case-scenario such as Mackey describes, in which increased organisation-public interactions simultaneously bolster the organisation’s position of communicative power and enable it to assemble an appearance of public permission for its activities, while milking those same publics for their knowledge of environmental conditions and insights into operational challenges (e.g. see Roper, 2005; Motion, 2005). Grunig (2009, p. 1) observes that much recent public relations online engagement, for example, appears to involve practitioners

simply “using the new media in the same ways they used the old—as a means of dumping messages”, but with the potential to greatly magnify their reach. Consideration of normative parameters and processes for public relations “engagement”, then, would seem in our view to be a fairly urgent issue.

As a general working definition of engagement for the purposes of this article, we offer Taylor, Vasquez and Doorley’s (2003, p. 260) proposition that “engagement as a philosophical and pragmatic framework seeks to overcome alienation, foster communication, and stimulate reform . . . Engagement means that relevant stakeholders<sup>1</sup> are considered, and involved, in the organization’s decisions”. Some theoretical and practical modelling of engagement of this kind is already occurring, with a particular focus on social media’s potential for engaging spaces and tools (e.g. Grunig, 2009; Tilley, 2010). A prevailing focus on harnessing new technologies for e-engagement may tend to imply that engagement itself is likewise relatively novel, and that all public relations ventures into engagement will need to pioneer new “rules” for engagement.

In spheres not traditionally considered resources for public relations theory-building, however, engagement has a long history. For example, valuable frameworks for operationalising engagement may be learned from the well-established literatures on e-democracy (e.g. Macintosh, 2006; Wang & French, 2008) or participative community governance (e.g. De Cindio, De Marco & Grew, 2007). Some integration of these literatures into the public relations discipline has already occurred (e.g. Johnston, 2008; Yang & Kang, 2009). One long-standing area of research and practice that has not been acknowledged in terms of what it can teach us about the potential and pitfalls of engagement is postcolonial relations, and in particular the repertoire of skilful and time-tested communication, negotiation and relationship-building techniques that Indigenous peoples have developed as a result of the forced necessity of engaging with colonising peoples.

The discipline of public relations is not alone in being slow to recognise the value (and applicability to modern and evolving contexts) of Indigenous knowledges. Bala and Joseph (2007) argue that inadequate recognition of the validity of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies by mainstream scientific communities has detrimentally affected both the status of such knowledge, and the development of many fields: “In recent years, a number of scientific bodies and development agencies have called for Indigenous and traditional systems of knowledge to be recognised as valuable reservoirs of learning” (2007, p. 39). Bala and Joseph (2007, p. 40) point out that “Indigenous knowledge is not only a repository of practical techniques and empirical information but is also a guide for ‘determining hypotheses, research designs, methods and interpretations in science’” and call for more disciplines to “legitimise, where possible, Indigenous theoretical and methodological discoveries” in order to improve the body of knowledge.

In line with these aims, this article uses the example of Indigenous–non-Indigenous relations in Aotearoa (New Zealand) to offer both normative and practical contributions to the theory-building literature on engagement in public relations. Combining our two cultural perspectives (as one non-Māori and one Māori author), we first note the importance to engagement attempts in Aotearoa of recognising fundamental underlying forces of power and resistance. We suggest that considering such issues will also be crucial to theorising and practising engagement in public relations, irrespective of the

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<sup>1</sup> We prefer the term public, to stakeholders, for the reasons outlined by Mackey (2006).

publics engaged and technologies used. Then, from a review of Kaupapa Māori literature, we propose a series of core normative values, with examples of practical applications, for engagement. These can be summarised as: first, that all publics be considered and approached as sovereign entities; second, that all publics be involved in co-negotiating the terms of, objectives for, and measures of proposed engagement; third, that practical turn-taking and spatial mechanisms ensure equal share of voice and freedom of expression; and fourth, that engagement be conceptualised as a set of reciprocal relationship obligations alike to kinship, in which the good of the collective has priority above individual (personal or organisational) agendas. Without such underlying core commitments to power-sharing, and the implementation of techniques to deliver them, we suggest that engagement will continue to be a new name for old practices, rather than a paradigm-shift in the potential of organisations and publics to relate in ways that accrue benefits to society as a whole, not only to individual organisational agents.

### **Challenges in achieving praxis**

It is often observed in the public relations literature that, while normative theoretical ideals, such as two-way-symmetrical communication or, more recently, engagement, provide aspirational principles (Grunig, 2001), there are few models for how to put them, even imperfectly, into practice (Bowen & Jiang, 2007; also see for example comments on the impracticalities of operationalising symmetry in the Delphi study of public relations' global research priorities by Watson, 2007-08). In applied contexts, relationships that follow normative ideals such as symmetry or engagement are sometimes a stated aim of practitioners, particularly those in public service roles (see for example Sommer, 2007). Yet the public relations body of knowledge to date lacks a clear and detailed repertoire of processes and tactics that can shift the bulk of practice towards greater degrees of reciprocity, partnership, and power sharing. Symmetry remains a label that may contribute to masking, rather than alleviating, unequal access to power (Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Leitch & Neilson, 2001)—our concern in this article is that “engagement” not follow suit.

In this article, we see engagement as a worthwhile goal (if not a current reality) for professional public relations practice. We also see Marx's (1844) belief that praxis (translation of theory into functional practices) is essential before theory can change society, as relevant to the historical divide between public relations norms and practices. Just as organisations seldom relinquish enough control to make significant advances towards achieving symmetry (Leitch & Neilson, 1997), we expect that, without practical, accessible tactics that practitioners can apply to address power imbalances in organisation-public relationships, engagement will also remain more theoretical ideal (and discursive label) than material force.

In seeking sources for praxis, we have observed that, in Aotearoa as a society, an analogous situation exists with respect to power and relationships. There is a large, well-resourced organisation (the Crown), dealing with various publics, and having stated intentions in its dealings with one set of publics in particular (Indigenous peoples) to share power and establish partnerships. As with the efforts of public relations to enact symmetry or engagement, both the intent and the success of these efforts can be judged very differently from different perspectives. Nonetheless, because the process has been occurring for some time, a body of practice and knowledge has grown up both around the idea of partnership and how to enact it, as well as around

difficulties or challenges in such a process. From this situation in Aotearoa, we believe, some learning can be drawn that is helpful for public relations practitioners who genuinely have a commitment to attempt “to overcome alienation, foster communication, and stimulate reform” (Taylor, Vasquez & Doorley, 2003, p. 260).

This article identifies, from some of the protocols and practices that communication scholars and Māori scholars in particular have developed as suggestions for Indigenous–non-Indigenous collaboration in Aotearoa, some issues that are relevant and principles that might be applicable more broadly to attempts to enact collaborative relationships in other contexts. Our intent here is not to appropriate valuable knowledge from the Indigenous episteme but rather to suggest that, with proper acknowledgement, the sophisticated body of communication and relationship management knowledge held and developed by Indigenous peoples is worthy of wider recognition as a valuable tool for approaching and enacting communication relationships. Kaupapa Māori in particular has much to offer the body of public relations knowledge in light of calls for “public relations engagement processes to acknowledge vested interests, recognize conflict, and encourage marginalized critical discourses” (Motion, 2005, p. 505), and we believe its potential contribution has not been fully recognised to date.

## Background

Aotearoa is a postcolonial society, in which Pākehā (European New Zealanders) and Māori (Indigenous peoples or tangata whenua<sup>2</sup>) co-exist. Some of the terms of that co-existence are governed by an important document called Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi), which specifies that the Crown must uphold the principle of tino rangatiratanga (Māori sovereignty). Power relationships between the Crown and Māori are continually being negotiated with reference to Te Tiriti, which was signed in 1840 and has been adjudicated since 1975 by the Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal (Orange, 1987; 1989). The enshrinement of Te Tiriti in legislation formalised a process of engagement between diverse peoples and interests that continues today. At present, the tribunal’s ever-evolving interpretation of this engagement is that it involves four principles: partnership (working together in good faith); duty to make informed decisions (including by consultation); active protection (of Māori rights, lands, possessions and taonga or treasures); and redress (compensation for treaty breaches) (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2002). All parties to the treaty are required to be mindful of these principles of engagement.

In this article, we posit the Crown (nominal entity of government power and one party to the treaty) as analogous to a large organisation that holds most of the financial, political, and other power in negotiations, if not necessarily the moral power, and tangata whenua (the other party to the treaty) as analogous to a smaller (yet also extremely powerful in its own way) public with its own agendas (comparable, perhaps, to a collective of well-organised community publics dealing with a corporate, although also having some corresponding qualities to internal publics). We see Crown–tangata whenua interactions as comparable to a large organisation interacting with smaller publics because, despite (or in some views because of) Te Tiriti, there are profound power imbalances between the negotiating parties in much the same way that there are

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<sup>2</sup> Tangata whenua is a term referring to Māori peoples as original and continuing owners of the land—“people” (whenua) “of the land” (tangata).

inevitably power imbalances between a well-resourced and well-connected corporate entity, and its community publics. Māori peoples are powerful and resilient, and have made and continue to make strong responses and resistances to colonial domination, and Aotearoa is unique among British colonies in giving influence to a treaty which recognises, at least to some degree, Indigenous resource ownership and now provides a starting point for negotiations; many other colonies had treaties but most have been disregarded (Orange, 1987; 1989). However, the power structures established by colonialism remain influential, particularly the cultural and linguistic structures.

For example, although Aotearoa is officially bicultural and bilingual, English, the coloniser's language, is the competency required for most citizens to gain employment. Most incoming British did not expect to learn Māori language (te reo) to survive; rather they expected, because of assumptions of cultural superiority upon which colonisation depends, that Māori would learn English. Subsequently, Aotearoa has not decolonised, meaning British colonisers and their descendents have not returned total governance to Māori, reinstated te reo as the first national language, or reverted to Aotearoa as New Zealand's earlier name. Instead, we are a society living with and working through the ongoing effects of colonial history; not a society in which colonisation has finished having an impact. Part of successful postcolonial coexistence includes acknowledging the power imbalances inherent in colonial history and minimising their repetition in the present day, rather than pretending that they don't exist. Likewise, we posit in this article that a basic premise of successful organisation—public engagement needs to be authentic acknowledgement of the levels of power imbalance between an organisation and its publics—an acknowledgement that, as Mackey argues, the “reality” of any engagement is likely to be constructed hegemonically by “those with power over the means of communication” (2006, p. 2). To counter this, specific steps are needed to divest the more powerful partner of absolute control over the communication and engagement processes themselves.

We propose that, in a macro sense, the central aim (enshrinement of sovereignty) and four pillars (striving for partnership, consultation to be fully informed as to publics' needs and wishes, protection of the rights of all publics, and redress for any wrongs done to publics) of Te Tiriti o Waitangi provide important guiding principles for any organisation seeking functional, mutually supportive engagement with its publics. McIntosh (2003) suggests that interactions seeking to enact Te Tiriti will always be characterised by dialectical impulses. Collaboration, which she defines as reaching across boundaries, co-labour, joint effort, joint ownership and shared decision-making, will always be counterbalanced by tension resulting from different agendas and the cynicism inevitably produced by a history of un-kept promises and empty rhetoric. Nonetheless, McIntosh's research with Indigenous communities found that attainment of a genuine sense of shared benefit from partnership was possible. The essential conditions for this to occur were “mutual respect and power sharing that led to the empowerment of communities” (McIntosh, 2003, p. 3).

At the macro level, then, we suggest that organisations seeking engagement will ultimately need to acknowledge (and will do so either proactively or eventually as a result of trial and error through failed “engagement” efforts) that publics are sovereign and that therefore any engagement process is inherently dialectic and *not* simply another tool for achieving organisational goals. Publics are self-determining independent entities—not, as a recent practitioner conference on Social Media and PR described them in language typical of the “engagement” buzz, “stakeholders” awaiting

“discovery” in order to be “leveraged” for “mindshare maximising” (Ting, 2010). At the micro level, Kaupapa Māori is an evolving set of specific practices, based on traditional knowledge yet ever developing, that many Māori scholars have proposed as offering parameters for interactions between Māori and non-Māori that can develop the “mutual respect and power sharing” described by McIntosh. We believe these practices also have something very relevant to offer public relations practitioners seeking practical ways to engage in ethical, respectful engagement with publics.

## **Kaupapa Māori**

The Kaupapa Māori principles are protocols developed by Māori academic scholars to guide research that engages with Māori cultural contexts or peoples. We believe the protocols are also helpful for non-academic contexts; for example, research that a communication consultancy or government agency conducts before launching a communication campaign (Tilley & Love, 2005), and even for engagement generally. The key overarching principle that underpins Kaupapa Māori is that attempts to understand any group’s cultural values and norms (and we see such understanding as a fundamental precursor to engagement) must be guided by the group itself. Durie points out that some attempts to understand Māori culture and values have failed because they “assessed Māori from a western standpoint only, as though Māori were cardboard figures with blank minds awaiting intelligence” (1998, n.p.). Durie says even “real attempts to get inside the Māori value system” have had “some tendency to see history in terms of the colonisers” precepts and to assess change in terms of the coloniser’s agenda” (1998, n.p.). Such comments could equally be applied to many organisation–public interactions, in which organisations see community publics either as having no culture and norms of their own, or as purely reactive, existing only in response to the organisation’s own frame of reference. Similarly, attempts to understand publics’ values using measures designed by the organisation, rather than by the public seem doomed to fail. An understanding of Kaupapa Māori procedures may help address these issues.

## **Resistance**

The central principle of Kaupapa Māori is resistance to any automatic or assumed “rightness”, “naturalness” or dominance of Pākehā and Western ways. An assumption of Western models as “normal” and Indigenous models as “different” underpins colonisation; Kaupapa Māori rejects that basic assumption. Bishop suggests that the Kaupapa Māori position challenges “the ways of defining, accessing, and constructing knowledge about Indigenous peoples . . . that is used by Western scholars as a means of attaining what becomes their version of the ‘truth’” (1996, p. 146). For non-Māori working with Māori, thinking about one’s own values, motivations, and identity, and taking a critical approach to Western influence, especially one’s own influence, is therefore crucial. Analogously, for an organisation, self knowledge of its own political positions, investments in a situation and in the status quo, biases, norms and assumptions is crucial to successful partnerships with publics. Organisations are not neutral, with only activist publics being “political”—all parties are political.

To address this at a practical level, Kaupapa Māori focuses on broadening accountability as a way of resisting continued imbalance between competing agendas in a communication situation. Bishop points out that, as part of resisting the dominance of colonially-derived thinking, “Māori people are deeply concerned about who researchers

are answerable to. Who has control over the initiation, procedures, evaluations, construction, and distribution of newly defined knowledge?" (1996, p. 145). In 1991, Smith (cited in Palmer, 2000) recommended a series of questions to continually ask during cross-cultural research. Adapting these to engagement relationships where power is also unbalanced, participants could ask:

- Who has defined the questions we are asking and issues we are discussing?
- For whom is this engagement worthy and relevant?
- Who says so?
- Which group or groups will gain new knowledge from this engagement?
- To whom are the communicators accountable?
- Who will gain most from this engagement?

Kaupapa Māori research protocols insist that "power and control over the research issues is located in" the Indigenous "cultural frame of reference" (Bishop, 1996, p. 146). This means goals are set by Māori participants, and processes for reaching them and measures of success agreed mutually between all participants. Adapting these principles to the arena of organisations engaging with publics, it becomes apparent that setting objectives for a relationship with a public and evaluating the success of an engagement process from the organisation's viewpoint only would be entirely inadequate to the idea of "partnership". The principles of Kaupapa Māori suggest that partnership is only possible when all parties set the objectives for a relationship in consultation, and all parties have the opportunity to evaluate the success of the relationship process. In practice, very few public relations campaigns are consultative from the outset, setting their direction and performance measures in collaboration with publics, then giving publics the power to decide the success or otherwise of the process. Rather, most campaigns set objectives first, then consult publics post hoc (evidence for this can be found in many public relations textbooks—a standard communication campaign approach typically begins with gaining an understanding of organisational goals and how the campaign needs to fit within them). If the public relations profession wishes to substantiate its claim that it is "engaging" with publics in more than name only, goals, objectives and measures for such engagement would need to be mutually agreed by all participants. Such an approach would, of course, negate the validity of or need for emerging generic benchmarking tools for engagement such as "scorecards" or "dashboards" (e.g. Wunderkind, 2010; Prebynski, 2010). Rather, it would enact a process of engagement itself in the establishment of measures for engagement.

## **Reasserting traditional values**

Under Kaupapa Māori research protocols, resisting colonial dominance also involves reinstating values and beliefs that existed before colonisation (Glover, cited in Cunningham, 2000). Although traditional beliefs vary between iwi and it is crucial to maintain awareness of diversity within the category of Māori (Wilson, 2010), there are also some values that are broadly held (Patterson, 1992). The principles outlined below are just some examples of more general Māori values that may impact on non-Māori seeking to engage with Māori. Many of these principles can be extrapolated from their specific application here to indicate broader underpinning mindsets that are necessary precursors to authentic attempts at engagement between groups with different norms and agendas.

## **Whanaungatanga**

Traditional Māori society has been described as an “economy of affection”. Henare, 1995 (cited in Henry & Pene, 2001, p. 235) sees affection as the opposite of the “economy of exploitation” which has developed as a result of capitalism introduced by colonisation. The economy of affection may include, for example, Kaupapa Māori research’s emphasis on collectivism. In Māori philosophy the whānau (extended family), rather than the individual, is the core social unit (Barlow, 1991). Bishop (1996) identifies whānau as a “location for communication, for sharing outcomes and for constructing shared common understandings and meanings” (p. 148), and uses the term “Whanaungatanga” to refer to “kin relationships between ourselves and others” (1996, p. 147). Whakawhanaungatanga is “the process of establishing whānau relationships, literally by means of identifying, through culturally appropriate means, your bodily linkage, your engagement, your connectedness, and therefore unspoken but implicit commitment to other people” (Bishop, 1996, p. 147).

Kaupapa Māori research fulfils collective aims by using “research whānau”, groups operating like extended families and following Māori cultural practices (Bishop, 1996). Smith (1999) describes the “research whānau” as a way of organising, incorporating ethical procedures, distributing tasks, keeping Māori values central, giving the community a voice, and providing a forum for debating issues that impact on the research project. Within the whānau, the principles of reciprocity and mutual obligation are important. All members have a responsibility to, and are accountable to, the whānau. Organisations working with publics could consider mutually creating whānau-like groups; small teams comprising members of both the organisation and the public, who have equal power within the group and who must work together collaboratively to determine the parameters and goals of the organisation–public relationship, with all members of the group responsible and accountable to the whānau group and its agreed shared outcomes as a whole (rather than the organisation retaining oversight and therefore power) for their conduct of the relationship.

Another aspect of power-sharing relates to the spatial politics of organisation–public meetings. Under Kaupapa Māori, the inherent pre-existing power imbalances are at least partially resisted because communication occurs within a Māori spatial context, under Māori communication norms. Non-Māori are expected to make the effort to learn these norms, including the manuhiri role and ngā tikanga o te marae (the protocol governing a specific iwi’s marae). Analogously, organisations that are genuine about redressing power imbalances in engagement contexts would make the effort to engage with a public in the public’s own space, on the public’s own terms.

## **Tāngata whenua and manuhiri (hosts and visitors)**

Kaupapa Māori interactions are underpinned by the concept that macro power imbalances can be at least partially redressed in micro contexts by the adoption of particular roles with attendant status. In any form of gathering where discussion takes place, a distinction is made between tāngata whenua (hosts) and manuhiri (visitors). Tāngata whenua hold ancestral rights in the locality where the discussion takes place (often the marae) and are responsible for the proceedings. They decide on the appropriate tikanga. Even if the manuhiri have organised the hui (meeting), it is still conducted according to the tikanga of the host marae. Manuhiri are welcomed on to the marae and the proceedings are handed over to them by tāngata whenua. Manuhiri



are treated with respect and guided through the process of discussion according to tikanga as decided on by tāngata whenua. They should also contribute to the discussion and provide koha (gifts) (Metge, 2001).

Analogously, this signals the importance of organisations who wish to consult with publics agreeing to do so not in their own premises, nor even on “neutral” ground, but on that public’s space, and on that public’s chosen terms. Allowing publics to determine the location and procedural terms for negotiations cannot fully reverse the organisation–public power imbalance but it can go some way towards making both the physical and psychological parameters of meetings less skewed towards the organisational agenda. As European spatial theory has noted (e.g. LeFebvre, 1991; Soja, 1989) and as the Kaupapa Māori protocols clearly also recognise, space matters during communication, and the politics of space influence outcomes. The host/visitor distinction, and the formal roles accorded each, enshrine the importance of spatial arrangements to the outcomes of a discussion process and provide ways to negotiate that space. Organisations with a genuine commitment to partnership with publics can begin to enact that commitment by taking the simple step of leaving their premises for meetings, going into community spaces for discussion (and we include the figurative space of cyberspace within that definition), yet also showing their respect for the discussion hosts by making contributions (koha) to the cost of hosting such discussions. In Kaupapa Māori, the most respectful way to contribute to hosting costs is with a cash donation, with no conditions imposed upon how it is spent. This entails a gesture of trust in the community and a demonstration of confidence in its ability to use the hosting donation appropriately. By way of example, an e-engagement initiative that followed these principles might begin by establishing a steering group comprised of equal numbers and status of representatives from organisation and public, allowing the group to establish its own terms of reference and protocols, and funding it to establish its own independent e-spaces for discussion and collaboration.

### **Ngā tikanga o te marae**

For Māori, the central area for conversation, communication or discussion is the marae. This is a space—part meeting house but also much more than that—in which discussion, social interaction, and collective decision-making occur. The phrase ngā tikanga korero refers to rules governing discussion on the marae. These rules are flexible, and encourage and require modification depending on circumstances. Metge (1995; 2001) points out that in cross-cultural situations in Aotearoa, group discussions are frequently held under rules familiar to Pākehā. She suggests that, under those circumstances, often minority groups feel disadvantaged, fail to contribute, or become aggressively assertive. An understanding of ngā tikanga o te marae by all communicators can make discussion more productive.

Metge also recommends korero tahi, a form of meeting organisation that draws on both Pākehā and Māori traditions, and incorporates mechanisms such as haere huri te whare (going round the meeting house to hear speakers in turn), whakawhitiwhiti korero (“talking criss-cross”), or te haere o te rakau (passing the stick), to ensure that all voices are heard.

In a purely pragmatic sense, we see these last methods in particular as having much to offer public relations practitioners as techniques for communication with publics. Either literally or figuratively (such as in an online forum), swapping turns in a pre-determined order or passing the “talking stick” so that each person present has time

and authority to command the floor is a highly effective way of ensuring meetings are not dominated by the loudest voices or most powerful organisations present.

In a wholistic sense, the importance placed in Kaupapa Māori upon respecting the worldviews and customs of Māori peoples in all communication with them (rather than assuming that a non-Māori worldview such as European business meeting conventions should govern interaction) provides an important underpinning reminder to organisations to think outside their own paradigm when engaging with publics, and especially to recognise their own organisational biases, protocols, and assumptions (Ritchie, 1992). For example, organisations should not take for granted that publics see their mission as socially acceptable, even if they themselves consider it laudable. Society is not homogenous, and that one simple mantra can help dislodge a fixed organisation-centric worldview. All communities, including organisational communities, have customary norms for interaction, and recognising these and attempting to step outside them before engaging in dialogue can help that dialogue be more productive.

## **Conclusions**

Despite a policy of biculturalism in Aotearoa, there remain underpinning inequalities of power that are inherent in colonialism. The Kaupapa Māori protocols are one attempt by Māori scholars to redress, at least in the micro-processes of communication and negotiation, some of that imbalance, and to resist ways in which power imbalances continue to grow and be embedded in the fabric of engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups in the postcolonial context. We have argued in this paper that this situation has some analogous aspects to the situation of a large powerful organisation seeking to engage with its publics, and that therefore, for organisations seeking behavioural (as opposed to symbolic) engagement, there may be valuable lessons to be learned from studying Kaupapa Māori guidelines.

The selected values and practices outlined above can give only a brief hint as to the skills required for engagement. It should have become clear from the analogy with postcolonial engagement that power issues in particular have a complex impact on relationships between groups with differing agendas and norms for engagement. However, we feel nonetheless that, in searching for tools to help navigate complex relationships in a range of organisation–public contexts, public relations scholars and practitioners can find guidance from the rich storehouse of Indigenous communication literature, theory, publications, and practices, which often provide useful procedures and can contribute to building the overall communication body of knowledge. In particular, from the body of literature developed in Aotearoa by Māori and other scholars around issues of Indigenous–non-Indigenous engagement, come some overarching principles and useful practices that may assist with developing more authentic, behavioural approaches to engagement. These include: taking as a basic premise that all parties to engagement be considered sovereign entities and therefore have rights of control over the interaction; involving all parties in co-negotiating the terms of, objectives for, and measures of proposed engagement, such as by setting up autonomous organisation–public working groups; using pragmatic turn-taking and spatial mechanisms to ensure equal share of voice and freedom of expression, such as by funding independent spaces for e-engagement rather than containing discussion within the organisational domain; and conceptualising engagement as a set of reciprocal relationships similar to kinship, which places obligations on the organisation to encompass its publics' needs via the engagement process, not only its own needs. As

guideposts, such values offer a very different journey, and we believe will lead to a very different kind of engagement, from talk of “leveraging stakeholders” and “maximising mindshare”. We suggest them as an alternative possibility for exploration in applied contexts to the current direction of much of the “buzz” around what engagement means and how it might be enacted.

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