



Public Health Association  
of New Zealand  
**Kāhui Hauora Tūmatanui  
o Aotearoa**

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## Think Piece - Kawa in All Things

### Kawa in All Things

PHANZ Māori policy advisor Chris Webber provides a think piece to progress our application of kawa in public health.

As we reap the fruits of embracing Māori engagement with public health, we should discover guidelines for our collective future - like 'kawa in all things', a pressing need in places where kaupapa Māori need to prevail. This universal principle for customary practice balances human behaviour with guidance drawn from realms of atua - often tied up in pūrākau (traditional stories) like our creation story or activities of the children of Ranginui and Papatuanuku.

The concept of kawa is understood in traditional Māori settings and governs 'organised efforts of society' there - like how activity is conducted on the marae and which tikanga are applied in what order during protocols like powhiri. As space is found for Māori expression in wider public health settings, so too can the guidance of kawa be applied. For PHANZ, this includes a Tiriti-inspired 50% Māori on our governance committee to open space for new growth and enlightenment - a bit like the kawa of powhiri on marae or kawa of new harakeke shoots emerging safely between the parents and grandparents in the domain of Tane. The template of 'what to do' is sacred or tapu, not to be corrupted by vagaries of human minds, egos and politics other than applying local tikanga for 'how to do it'. In some regions the words are interchangeable (tikanga/kawa) but the eternal principles remain.

So which kawa applies where? On the marae, the war-like domain of Tumatauenga in front of the meeting house permits fiery korero, whilst inside more peaceful korero prevails as the domain of Rongo. What workplace wouldn't benefit from such separations and dedications of space? As a musician, the performers 'green room' helps settle and prepare for a stage performance, helping the right spirit carry in the music. At very least, a karakia helps create space for minds to settle and tune into the task at hand to with the intention to achieving the desired outcomes.

To answer the question - keep asking the question, and be listening for the answer - not just from the human mind, or the one, but from collective wisdom of community from whence the kawa resides. Find the 'carriers of the kawa', the whakahaere, or create space for them to surface. Kaumatua with the knowledge may be in short

supply, but younger leaders may be picking it up and being recognised amongst others as individuals or in a collective caucus.

## **Aronui-Tikanga-Kaupapa**

Drawing from Royal's (2004) explanation for 'organic arising' of tikanga, a tool for understanding human behaviour can be applied and used to refine what kawa will be maintained by whom. A person or group's world view (aronui) relates to their selected ground or subject (ka-u-papa) from which understanding of correct actions arise (tikanga) pertaining to that kaupapa or world view. A group cultivating gardens on dry ground will develop different water tikanga from a group cultivating gardens on wetlands - the kawa for garden growth will be achieved by each using different sets of tikanga around water transport or drainage by those 'whakahaere' or leaders whose kawa is to know what the plants need to grow. By extension, someone growing hydroponics in their back room needs the same kawa of getting correct requirements for plants to grow, but will do it differently - the set of new tikanga becomes the kawa that is maintained.

The same is needed in many contemporary spaces Māori are operating in, but then become frustrated or burnt out when generic systems don't accommodate sufficient tikanga and kawa - let alone have adequate 'whakahaere' to apply it. In generic spaces like government agencies, this shouldn't be left solely to government or departmental managers that change with the times. It needs to be enshrined in more than just policy or Tiriti principle interpretations. My aspiration to assist organised efforts of society, is all Māori who work in government space must be valued, respected, cared for and protected - like in the pūrākau about Rata who took a tree from the forest without proper acknowledgement, so the forest took the tree back. We often say this when we hand over someone in a whakatau, but sadly learn sometime later they felt used, abused and burnt out before leaving. The whakahaere of this kawa should help correct things.

A final seed to plant here - Te Kawa Tapu a Hine. From our pūrākau, our taha wahine (female aspect) is central from coming into the world via te whare tangata and exiting the world via Hine-nui-te-po. However some might say the male energy of Tumatauenga has dominated in the world which now needs healing from domains of Rongo and the female energies. Just one way to look at things, but tied up by the concept of 'Te Kawa Tapu a Hine' - the need for sacred healing and protective protocols in the world, in our policies, amongst people, for the planet. We are looking for ways to lock this into the work we do.

Pehea ou whakaaro - what do you think? Engage in [our monthly 2nd Friday Kai Tahī zoom sessions](#) to discuss the five elements around our kawa discussions and find ways to progress kawa in your space.

### Reference

Royal, T.A. (2004). An Organic Arising: An Interpretation of Tikanga based upon Māori Creation Traditions. Published in Tikanga Rangahau Matauranga Tuku Iho - Traditional Knowledge and Research Ethics Conference 2004. Nga Pae o te Maramatanga. Auckland.