



Hīnātore: Empowering Māori and Pacific workplace employees

Cain Kerehoma, Kia Ora Consulting; Anne Alkema, Industry Training Federation; Dr Nicky Murray, Industry Training Federation; and Laloifi Ripley, Careerforce conducted this research.

INTRODUCTION

The *Hīnātore* project name is drawn from Māori mythology when Ranginui and Papatuanuku were separated by their children. *Hīnātore* means phosphorescent light that, while feeble and distant, brought more light to heaven and earth. This relates to the mahi of this project in that literacy can be an empowerment tool opening up new potential and new light.

Background

Ako Aotearoa and the Industry Training Federation co-funded the *Hīnātore: Empowering Māori and Pacific workplace employees* research project. Conducted 2018–2019, the project investigated the development of employees who undertook literacy and numeracy programmes in their workplaces, during work time.

These programmes were funded through the Tertiary Education Commission's (TEC) Workplace Literacy and Numeracy (WLN) Fund. The ethos of this fund is **people development** where the approach aims to lead to the transformation of both employees and their workplaces. This happens through taking an expansive view of learning approaches that are contextualised to the workplace and to the wider needs and interests of employees.

Programmes funded through the WLN fund reach around 7000 employees a year, with just under 40 percent of them identifying as Māori or Pacific people. Learning in work time affords employees a chance they wouldn't otherwise have, given the access, time and cost implications of attending programmes outside of work. In addition, attending outside of work is unlikely given the lack of confidence and the possible whakamā they feel in relation to attending programmes with people they don't know.

Workplaces provide comfortable learning contexts for Māori and Pacific people as they build on existing relationships. Here there is a work whānau which provides the opportunity and conditions for joint endeavours, where there is a sense of collective rather than individual strength. Learning together in small groups for work and developing skills that can be transferred to their wider lives transforms Māori and Pacific people personally along with bringing changes to workplaces.

Taking a strengths-based approach, this research was conducted in eight workplaces through a combination of pre- and post-programme semi-structured and narrative, face-to-face interviews, focus groups, and observations. Data were collected from around 100 participants (employees, employers, programme facilitators, and family members).

The research identified three factors that contribute to successful outcomes for Māori and Pacific people: **ako**, **mahi**, and **whānau/aiga**.

Ako – teaching and learning

From an ako perspective WLN programmes require a skilled educator workforce with the teaching/facilitation skills to deliver learning programmes in a culturally competent way.



This means moving away from eurocentric and/or technocratic models of teaching and using culturally appropriate pedagogies that incorporate the context in which the employees live and work.

Making it relatable is so important. Most of the programmes we deliver are tailored to the needs of the company. So using their resources, like the Take Five or their health and safety reports or the forms they use, the health and safety vocab that's used on site. I think that's the difference... It's relevant. (Facilitator)

Here facilitators are not merely 'deliverers of content', rather they work in a co-constructed way that empowers employees to be active participants in the learning and acknowledges the expertise employees have in relation to the workplace content. Literacy and numeracy are woven through content that is explored through a range of teaching strategies and incorporates project-based learning.

I enjoyed how the teachers taught us to do things and most of all, what they taught us, we're using in the workplace now, communicating, using words, how to do the emailing... (Employee)

However, it is not just the content that is important, it is the people. Here skilled facilitators operate in a holistic way that acknowledges employees' culture, their way of thinking and their values. Space is provided for employees to bring their culture into the training room and allows for recognition that learning is about the cognitive, affective and emotional domains – ako, manaakitanga and wairuatanga.

Facilitators' cultural competence grows over time as they start by acknowledging they may not be cultural experts but are prepared to learn along with and from the employees in the spirit of ako. Showing their vulnerability opens the space for employees to step in as the experts and concept of tuakana-teina is seen in a new light.

I work hard at acknowledging culture – [to start with] getting the pronunciation of their names right. Also, let them tell their stories. It's very much a learner-centred approach. (Facilitator)

Building collaborative relationships, setting high expectations, and delivering relevant content with empathy leads employees to develop a sense of self efficacy and confidence. They know they can learn and are valued in their workplace. These learning opportunities can be seen as restorative, transformational and empowering.

Mahi – the workplace and connections to work

Learning in a workplace context is empowering in its own right. Here the authentic and concrete context for learning builds on employees' existing knowledge and expertise and they develop as individual workers and collectively as a workforce.

Employees spoke of their work whānau/aiga and how the workplace was a whānau-like environment which fostered learning that was collaborative, reciprocal and authentic. They spoke of being motivated to support and help inspire their teammates, as well as the depth of learning facilitated through peer-to-peer (tuakana-teina, whānau to whānau) interactions.

Yeah, I did see, coming from a Māori perspective, the whakawhanaungatanga side of things. ... You start analysing things – talk amongst yourselves. We're learning off each other at the same time. We know where each other is at a certain level, and so you try and bring that other person in. It was a bonding and that's what we call whakawhanaungatanga – that bond and that connecting. (Employee)

The sense of empowerment that grows during the course of programmes starts with employees feeling valued by employers who either select them or provide time for them to attend. It grows as they realise the contribution they can make at work and as they begin to recognise their own knowledge and skills.

*It started from work. This is where he was confident to go to. Because work asked him and told him about this course, he trusted his employers that this was something that was good for him...He would never go to a class outside of work. He doesn't know the people ...***(Whānau)**

While employers are open about the challenges associated with the logistics of programmes run in work time, for them this balances out when they see the benefits which include having employees who are more communicative and who participate more at work. This results in, for example, improved health and safety practices, improved teamwork, improved retention, improved workplace culture, along with quality improvement and innovation.

At first we were a little bit skeptical because we thought a lot of our staff already know their ABCs and their one, two, threes and that wasn't going to be something that they needed to focus on – that we could continue on with their technical training ... [but] we found it was so much more ... it was more about gaining confidence to speak up, why meetings happen, why we fill out forms ... and what happens to them. **(Employer)**

In addition to the collective outcomes for workplaces, economic outcomes also accrue for some of the individuals. As well as being more engaged with work and the workforce generally there were examples of employees moving on to industry training qualifications or more workplace training, taking on more responsibility at work and getting promotions.

While employers expect employees' knowledge and skills to grow for work, they are also open to the idea that learning should not be limited to the functional and narrow requirements of workplace content. They are keen for programmes that develop transferable skills so that benefits accrue to communities and whānau and aiga. Employers recognise they themselves are part of a wider community to which they have a responsibility.

...it's not teaching people how to read and write – it's teaching people a lot more of the basic skills that we take for granted... your eyes will be opened as to what you can do for people, not just in their work life to make them more productive, but in their personal life, to make them, I wouldn't say better people, but just more confident people ...
(Employer)

Whānau/Aiga empowerment

When knowledge and skills are transferred to employees' lives outside of work the flow-on effects for whānau and aiga of having family members who are more confident and feel better about themselves are transformational. Increased confidence and positive attitudes lead to stronger engagement with family, positive role-modelling to other whānau/aiga members and a renewed commitment to ongoing learning and upskilling.

This research found employees have the courage and confidence to meaningfully engage with, for example, children about their schoolwork and partners about aspects such as the family finances.

Now he talks – doing their [children's] homework and stuff. That's what changed. Since this, he is now sitting down with them and interacting with them. Because before [he] would always just get home very tired, stay on his phone, and then go to rest. But now he gets home and I tell him, 'The more your children's brain learns, that's how they're gonna be growing up. If they're just gonna see you sit on your phone, they're not learning anything. But you need to put what you've just learnt into practice.' And that's what he's been doing. **(Whānau)**

What also comes through from whānau and aiga is the sense of pride they have in their family member's learning. The idea that whānau and aiga members still want to learn, and/or have the courage to learn is inspiring for them.

Every time I come home and I see her [mum], she's always got a bright glow on her face. ... Recently, it's been a more happier glow because she's been at this course and she's learnt many skills that help improve not only her vocabulary but her passion and her personality towards others. To me, I find that very amazing, cause my mother still wants to learn, and she's still teaching me a lot of things. But to find that she can also learn new things to make her better just makes me wanna do better as well.
(Whānau)

The transfer of learning to home and family lives comes about as a result of the conversations facilitators have with employees about the relevance of skills generally, because of the sense of pride employees develop around their achievement, and the tools they now have to, for example, communicate better, use computers, and talk with their children about learning.

It's made a big difference across many levels ... these learnings have been taken home. I've had quite a few guys come back to me and say, "I know what my son or daughter is talking about now on their phone... I can actually see that they're doing on their phone and understand it now." **(Employer)**

Conclusion

Programmes funded through the WLN fund attract and retain high numbers of Māori and Pacific employees. This research shows why these employees stay in workplace literacy and numeracy programmes and engage with learning and the impact of this for them as individuals, for their workplaces and their whānau and aiga.

Learning in workplace settings provides the context for the weaving together of ako, mahi, and whānau/aiga. It provides the opportunity for expansive learning that empowers individual Māori and Pacific employees and transforms the way they work and the way they operate in their personal lives. This happens as a result of their employer's offer of the learning opportunity and the individual employees who have the courage to take this up. It is enabled by facilitators who deliver relevant content in a culturally competent and co-constructed way and workplaces that in turn provide the opportunity for new learning to be used. Finally, it is supported by whānau and aiga who are proud of their family members achievements and supportive of their current and future learning endeavours.

Overall, the findings highlight that the workplace is a context that suits Māori and Pacific employees. The opportunity to train in work time removes access barriers, provides a safe, whānau-like learning environment, and builds on the knowledge and skills they already have as workers. This is enabled by workplaces where there is strong leadership and commitment from senior managers to the learning and development of their

people; managers and supervisors supporting and taking an active role in the workplace learning programmes (e.g., attending some of the sessions); and both employers and employees recognising each other's respective investment and contribution to the learning.

Considerations for the Future

The findings of the research can be used:

- by educators to inform capability building
- by employers to gain an understanding of the difference these programmes make to workplaces and workforces
- by educators and policy makers to take note of the role of whānau/aiga and intentionally address this within programmes and funding rules and conditions
- by policy makers as evidence of the impact of workplace-based programmes and to think about ways to build this into social procurement processes.

Acknowledgments

The research team would like to acknowledge the project reference group, employers and workplaces, employees and whānau/aiga who contributed so willingly to this research. We particularly acknowledge the literacy and numeracy providers who participated – they have given unstintingly of their time, knowledge and expertise.

