

Viewpoint

# Tikanga Māori as a Relational Framework for Cultural Change in Aotearoa New Zealand

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## Abstract

Tikanga Māori, the indigenous system of values, principles, and practices in Aotearoa New Zealand, offers a relational, ethics-based framework for responding to contemporary global challenges such as geopolitical instability, environmental degradation, and digital disruption. Dominant Western approaches, often grounded in individualism and resource extraction, are increasingly limited in addressing these issues. Drawing on Aotearoa New Zealand as a case study, tikanga is presented as a living system centred on interconnectedness, responsibility, and collective wellbeing. Examples from law, health, research ethics, and sport demonstrate how these values shape both institutional practice and everyday behaviour. Rather than functioning as a cultural add-on, tikanga provides an alternative way of understanding relationships between people, communities, and the environment. The analysis highlights the relevance of tikanga-informed approaches for rethinking governance, leadership, and sustainability in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

**Keywords:** philosophy; culture; resolving conflict

## 1. Introduction

Major armed conflicts, including those in Ukraine [1], the Middle East [2] and Sudan [3], continue to cause widespread human and infrastructural devastation, alongside increasing global displacement.

Climate change presents an existential threat [4], with current mitigation efforts unlikely to prevent escalating impacts, such as intensified fires, storms, and rising sea levels.

At the same time, digital communication is dominated by powerful corporations and individuals, limiting the capacity of nation states to regulate issues such as financial crime, harmful online content [5], misinformation, and digital influence on socialisation [6].

In considering how to respond to these interconnected challenges, it is useful to examine them through the lens of cultural change. Culture can be defined as follows:

*“a dynamic system of rules—explicit and implicit—established by groups to ensure survival, involving attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, behaviours, shared by a group, but harboured differently by each (individual) within the group communicated across generations, relatively stable but with the potential to change across time [7].”*

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Cultures have also been described as shared narratives that explain the world, enable collective living, and define what constitutes “right” behaviour [8].

As global interconnectedness has increased, elements of a shared “world culture” have developed, including standardised time systems, measurement units, air traffic control, currency systems, postal agreements, maritime law, and digital governance protocols.

Following the Second World War, there was recognition of the need for improved mechanisms to resolve conflict. Institutions such as the United Nations were formed to negotiate details of a “world culture” and to support a shared global framework of governance and cooperation.

This attempt at developing a global culture that relied on agreed processes between countries and the use of diplomacy to resolve conflict is unravelling. Russia invaded Ukraine without legal justification [9]. President Trump is explicitly repudiating a “rules based” international order [10]. The US has withdrawn from the World Health Organization [11] and the Paris Climate Accord [12]. The US has provided considerable support for Israel in its attacks on Palestinians [13], and the US and Israel have attacked Iran without legal justification [14]. China continues to threaten invasion of Taiwan [15].

These developments raise questions about the adequacy of dominant cultural norms, and whose interests such systems have historically served [16]. While global institutions and governance structures have provided stability for some populations, Indigenous communities worldwide have often experienced exclusion, dispossession, and marginalisation within these systems [17]. Consequently, for both dominant and marginalised societies, there is recognition that alternative epistemologies and relational frameworks may be needed to address contemporary global challenges.

Rather than positioning tikanga Māori as a universal solution, this paper explores its potential contribution as a living and evolving relational framework grounded in interconnectedness, responsibility, and collective wellbeing. Using Aotearoa New Zealand as a case study, we examine how tikanga informs contemporary practices across law, health, research, and sport while acknowledging the ongoing complexities, tensions, and structural constraints that shape its implementation.

## 2. Tikanga Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand is generally considered to be part of the dominant “Western” culture as a result of our colonial heritage. We were colonised reasonably late due to our geography. Unlike many countries, our country was settled following the signing of a treaty between the British Crown and the Indigenous Māori; Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. For 140 years, the treaty was largely ignored by the government and Māori suffered as many indigenous people did, decimated by introduced diseases and attacked to force them to give up their land. The Māori population in 1840 was estimated to be around 100,000 but declined to a low of about 42,000 in 1896. In 1856, physician and politician Dr Isaac Featherston said it was the duty of Europeans to ‘smooth down ... (the) dying pillow’ of the Māori race [18]. In the last 45 years, there has been a significant Māori renaissance. The Māori language (Te Reo Māori) was made an official language in 1987. Māori language pre-schools were started in 1982 and the latest census reported that 4% of the population of 5.3 million spoke Te Reo [19]. The Waitangi Tribunal was established in 1975 and from 1985 was able to investigate historical claims, particularly grievances in relation to land confiscation. Since that time, nearly every iwi (tribal group) in the country has completed a claim and received some redress for these losses. This has provided iwi with some resources with which to develop. Māori are a Pacific people with close genealogical links to other Pacific islands. Whilst there are cultural differences, Māori and Pacific cultures have much more in common than they do with the dominant culture. In the last census, Māori were 18% and Pacific Peoples were 9% of the

population. So, for 27% of the population, Tikanga is “normal”. “Tikanga is lived and practised every day on the more than 700 marae (traditional meeting complexes) spanning the length and breadth of Aotearoa New Zealand. Tikanga is also well established in other places: in iwi and hapū (family groupings) corporate entities, in Māori incorporations and trusts, in urban Māori authorities, in homes and businesses, in public agencies and institutions such as local authorities, schools [20] and hospitals, and ... courts.” [21].

This historical trajectory is critical to the contemporary relevance of tikanga. This paper is concerned with tikanga as it is lived, practiced, and negotiated in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand, rather than an idealised representation of pre-colonial Māori society. Like many Indigenous knowledge systems, tikanga has not remained static; it has been profoundly shaped by colonisation, urbanisation, institutional restructuring, and ongoing political and economic pressures [17,22]. Colonial processes disrupted Māori social structures, land relationships, language transmission, and systems of knowledge, creating enduring impacts that continue to influence how tikanga is enacted and experienced today [17,18].

Consequently, contemporary expressions of tikanga emerge within complex social institutional realities. While Māori culture revitalisation over recent decades has contributed to the visibility of tikanga across law, education, health, sport, and public institutions, its incorporation remains uneven and contested, often constrained by broader governance structures, institutional priorities, and funding mechanisms [17]. Therefore, the contemporary presence of tikanga should not be interpreted as a straightforward process of cultural restoration or integration, but rather as an ongoing process of adaptation, resistance, negotiation, and relational change [22,23].

Tikanga continues to evolve through whānau, hapū, iwi, and wider societal contexts. This provides an opportunity to examine tikanga not as a universal model or romanticised Indigenous framework, but as a living system that may contribute important insights into contemporary societal and global challenges [22,23].

### 3. What Is Tikanga (Doing Right)?

Tikanga has been defined as “the set of values, principles, understandings, practices, norms and mechanisms from which a person or community can determine the correct action in te Ao Māori (the Māori world)” [24]. However, this definition, while useful, understates the depth and relational complexity of tikanga. Tikanga is not simply a system of rules or guidelines; it is a dynamic, lived framework grounded in whakapapa (genealogy), maintained through practice, and continually adapted across contexts [22]. It provides an ethical compass and a way of organising relationships between people, communities, and the environment.

Tikanga is about “doing things right”, but what is “right” is not fixed or universal. Instead, it is determined through context, relationships, and collective understanding. This relational ethic distinguishes tikanga from Western rule-based systems, as it prioritises balance, reciprocity, and collective wellbeing over individual autonomy [22,25].

A foundational basis of tikanga lies in Māori cosmology. The Māori creation narrative describes a movement from Te Kore (the void) and Te Pō (darkness) into Te Ao Mārama (the world of light), initiated through the separation of Ranganui (sky father) and Papatūānuku (earth mother) by their children [26]. From this act, the natural world emerges, with atua (deities) such as Tāne (forests), Tanagaroa (oceans), Tāwhirimātea (winds), and Rūamoko (earthquakes) representing distinct environmental domains. These entities are not symbolic abstractions but genealogical ancestors within a living system [26]. Importantly, humans are also situated within this whakapapa network. Through Māori cosmology, people descend from the same genealogical lines as the atua and the natural world, creating relationships based not on separation but on kinship and shared ancestry

[22]. Consequently, forests, waterways, lands, and wider environments are understood not simply as resources or external entities, but as relations to whom responsibilities and obligations are owed [27,28].

Through this whakapapa, people are positioned not as separate from or dominant over the environment, but as participants within an interconnected network of relationships extending across ancestors, communities, lands, waterways, and atua [27,28]. Within this relational understanding, responsibilities of care, reciprocity, and stewardship emerge through maintaining relationships rather than asserting ownership or control [27,28]. While this worldview differs from many dominant Western approaches that have historically framed environments as resources to be managed or utilised, such distinctions should not be viewed as absolute or mutually exclusive categories. Contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand reflects interaction, adaptation, and overlap between diverse knowledge systems and cultural traditions.

Tikanga is expressed through a range of interrelated values and concepts, which together guide behaviour and decision-making. Key among these are:

- Whakapapa (genealogy): Establishes relationships between people, ancestors, and the natural world, forming the basis of identity and responsibility.
- Mana (authority, prestige): Reflects both individual and collective standing, maintained through actions that uphold integrity and respect.
- Tapu and noa (sacred and ordinary states): Regulate behaviour and interactions to maintain balance and safety within social and spiritual domains.
- Manaakitanga (care and hospitality): Emphasises the importance of nurturing relationships, generosity, and respect for others.
- Whanaungatanga (relationships and kinship): Prioritises collective belonging and interconnectedness.
- Kaitiakitanga (guardianship): Reflects responsibilities to protect and sustain the environment for generations.
- Kotahitanga (unity): Encourages collective action and shared purpose.

These concepts are not hierarchical; they operate as an integrated system where decisions are shaped by multiple, often overlapping considerations [22].

Tikanga is not confined to historical contexts. It is actively lived and practiced in everyday settings, including marae, homes, workplaces, and increasingly within public institutions such as education, healthcare, and law [21]. For example, manaakitanga may be expressed through hosting practices on a marae, but also through inclusive leadership in organisational settings. Similarly, kaitiakitanga is evident not only in traditional resource management practices, but also in contemporary environmental policy and sustainability initiatives.

Rather than positioning tikanga as a replacement for existing cultural frameworks or system of thought, it may be better understood as offering an additional relational lens through which contemporary issues can be interpreted and addressed. In contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand, tikanga exists alongside and in interaction with other social, legal, and cultural traditions, contributing to an evolving and negotiated landscape [21]. This process should not be understood as a straightforward substitution of one worldview for another, but rather as an ongoing process through which values, practices and understandings continue to influence and reshape one another.

Tikanga contributes perspectives centred on interconnectedness, collective responsibility, and reciprocity [22,28]. These perspectives are not presented as universally applicable solutions, but as contributions to broader discussions concerning how societies may respond to complex social, environmental, and political challenges.

#### 4. The Impact of Tikanga on Law

Tikanga is described as the first legal system of Aotearoa New Zealand, existing prior to the arrival of British colonial institutions and the introduction of English common law (the second law) [21]. The relationship between tikanga and contemporary legal systems should not be understood as a simple progression from one system to another. The introduction of colonial legal structures displaced and marginalised many Māori legal practices, producing enduring tensions regarding authority, sovereignty, and the recognition of Indigenous systems of knowledge [21].

More recently, legal scholars have described an evolving legal landscape in which tikanga and common law interact [21,28]. This interaction remains complex and contested, reflecting broader constitutional and societal discussions regarding the place of tikanga within contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand [21]. The New Zealand Law Commission's report *He Poutama* highlights both the increasing influence of tikanga within legal decision-making and the practical challenges involved in its implementation [21]. Justice Williams summarises key differences between these systems, noting the following.

*"The fundamental difference between the respective values of the first law and the second law was really that one was predicated on personal connectedness (and through that group autonomy) and the other was predicated on personal autonomy (and through that group welfare)" [28].*

Examples of this interaction can be observed in legal developments recognising Māori concepts and relationships within statute and case law. The legal recognition of the Whanganui River as a legal person through *Te Awa Tupua* represents one example where relational understandings grounded in *whakapapa* and *kaitiakitanga* have informed legal practice [29]. However, scholars also note that translating tikanga into legal frameworks creates challenges, particularly where Indigenous concepts are interpreted through institutional structures developed from Western legal traditions [21,28].

#### 5. The Impact of Tikanga on Health

Tikanga has influenced healthcare ethics and health policy in Aotearoa New Zealand. Dominant biomedical ethical frameworks, such as those outlined by Beauchamp and Childress [30], emphasise principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice [30]. This approach privileges individual decision-making and may not always align with relational understandings of wellbeing emphasised within Māori contexts [31].

This became particularly visible in Public Health Ethics. The New Zealand National Ethics Advisory Committee report, *Getting Through Together; Ethical values for a pandemic*, incorporated several values aligned with tikanga, including: *Manaakitanga* (nurturing relationships, looking after people, and being very careful about how others are treated), *Whanaungatanga* (relationship, kinship, sense of family connection) and *Kotahitanga/Unity* [32]. Although these concepts originate from Māori worldviews, the report argued that they also reflected values shared more broadly across Aotearoa New Zealand society.

Aotearoa New Zealand experienced the lowest excess mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic of any major country [33]. Attributing this outcome to any single factor would oversimplify a complex situation. Geographical isolation, public health policy, border controls, political leadership, public trust, and social cooperation likely all contributed [34,35]. Given that tikanga-informed values were included in our pandemic plan, and that central elements of the public narrative focused on kindness (*manaakitanga*) and the team of 5 million (*Kotahitanga*) in a way that was absent in the narrative from many other countries [35], we see this as a clear example of a beneficial influence of tikanga on important real world outcomes [35].

Research Ethics is another area where tikanga has had a significant effect on NZ policy. The standards in the 2009 edition of the guidelines were based on “bioethics principles” and were in accordance with key international guidelines. There was reference to requiring engagement with Māori in any research involving them and addressing cultural issues. By contrast, the standards in the 2019 version [36] (Figure 1) present two sets of principles: the “bioethics principles,” similar to the previous edition, and Te Ara Tika (the right path), Māori principles. They explicitly state that “These Standards do not ethically or conceptually prioritise either of the two sets of principles.” They discuss where there is overlap in the concepts but argue that “When used together, the two sets address ethical positions of different societies, thereby strengthening ethical discourse in New Zealand.” These standards place Māori ethical values in the centre of research ethical discourse in New Zealand.



**Figure 1.** Overview of Te Ara Tika and bioethics principles [36]. (Source: Public copyright.)

Tikanga has had a significant impact on teaching medical students. Central to medical education is an understanding of what health is. The international definition from the World Health Organisation is “Health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Within Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori health frameworks such as Te Whare Tapa Wha have become a dominant model shaping understandings of health and wellbeing [31]. Proposed by Mason Durie, the model conceptualises health through interconnected dimensions including Taha Hinengaro (mental health), Taha Whānau (family health), Taha Tinana (physical health) and Taha Wairua (spiritual health) [31]. While initially developed to improve Māori health contexts, the framework has informed broader approaches to health, education, and healthcare practice [20].

Across these domains, tikanga operates not simply as a cultural addition to existing systems, but as a relational framework that contributes alternative perspectives regarding ethics, wellbeing, and collective responsibility. At the same time, implementation remains complex and uneven reflecting broader institutional, political, and structural realities within contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand [21].

## 6. The Impact of Tikanga in Sport

While the influence of tikanga is clear within law, health, and research ethics, it is not limited to formal or institutional settings. Tikanga is also lived and expressed in everyday environments, including sport and physical activity, where values are enacted through behaviour, relationships, and shared purpose.

Sport in Aotearoa New Zealand provides a highly visible example of how tikanga may be expressed within every-day and institutional settings. Sport represents an important site of identity, social connection, and community engagement, particularly within Māori and Pacific contexts [37]. However, the incorporation of tikanga into sporting environments is neither uniform nor unproblematic. Expressions of tikanga vary across contexts and often occur within broader organisational systems shaped by historical, institutional, and commercial influences.

At a practical level, tikanga in sport extends beyond visible cultural expressions. Concepts such as manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and kotahitanga shape how athletes interact, how coaches lead, and how teams define collective success [38]. These values can contribute to trust, accountability, and collective responsibility, which are increasingly recognised as important dimensions of team functioning and performance environments [38].

This can be observed in high-performance environments such as the New Zealand national men's rugby union team, the All Blacks and the New Zealand national women's rugby union team, the Black Ferns, where cultural practices, including haka (posture dance), waiata (song or chant), and collective values, form part of daily preparation and team identity [39]. These practices are not separate from performance; they are integrated into how teams build cohesion, manage pressure, and prepare for competition [38]. Research on collective rituals in sport supports this, showing that shared pre-performance behaviours can enhance emotional synchrony, collective efficacy, and readiness to perform [40,41].

The most recognisable expression of tikanga in sport is the haka, a longstanding feature of New Zealand sport that became internationally associated with the Original All Blacks and represents identity, whakapapa, and collective intent [39,42]. Within team environments, haka contributes to a shared sense of belonging and reinforces group identity, both internally and externally [42]. From a performance aspect, haka can also act as a mechanism for psychologically priming by heightening arousal, focus, and collective intent prior to competition [40]. This is particularly notable given New Zealand's small population (~5 million), yet the All Blacks have maintained one of the highest winning percentages in international sport, exceeding 75% since 1903, highlighting the potential contribution of cultural cohesion and identity to sustained high performance [38,43,44].

Its widespread use highlights how tikanga has moved into mainstream sporting environments, including community and semi-professional contexts such as rugby league and basketball settings, where collective identity and connection with community have become central to performance narratives. However, there is also a growing awareness that these practices must be grounded in cultural integrity. Issues of misuse, commodification, and tokenism have been identified, particularly where haka is removed from its whakapapa and cultural context [42].

Beyond what is seen on the surface, tikanga is also beginning to influence how sport organisations are structured and led. Māori approaches to leadership emphasise relationships, shared responsibility, and long-term thinking [43]. These approaches align with broader Indigenous governance frameworks and are recognised as being important for creating inclusive, sustainable, and high-performing sport systems [45].

Sport, therefore, provides an example of how tikanga may move beyond formal policy settings and become enacted within everyday practice. Sport also illustrates the complexities involved in translating Indigenous values into institutional environments. Questions concerning authenticity, cultural integrity, and implementation remain, highlighting that incorporation is often a process of negotiation, rather than straightforward adoption [42,45].

## 7. Future Potential for Greater Incorporation of Tikanga

Environmental challenges including climate change, soil erosion, overfishing and pollution have emerged through complex social, political, economic, and cultural processes. Many scholars have argued that dominant approaches to development have often prioritised extraction, economic growth, and human-centred relationships with environments, contributing to unsustainable ecological outcomes [4,27,46].

It has been argued that interpretations of Judeo-Christian traditions, particularly readings emphasising human dominion over nature, have historically been used to justify extractive relationships with environments [27]. These interpretations also intersected with colonial projects that positioned land and resources as objects for ownership and development. However, relationships between religion, colonialism, and environmental ethics are complex and contested. This idea of domination over nature is deeply embedded in societies where Christianity has been the norm, even if the number of practicing Christians has diminished. It is based on the origin story in Genesis Chapter 1.

26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Interpretations of these passages vary considerably. Contemporary perspectives, such as Pope Francis’ concept of “integral ecology” in *Laudato Si’*, emphasised interconnected relationships among people, communities, and environments and, in some respects, align with relational approaches evident within many Indigenous worldviews [47]. Whilst there have been attempts to reinterpret the story to be consistent with our current reality amongst progressive Christians [48], the largest proportion of Christians err towards a literal interpretation of the Bible [49]. Even if there were no Christians remaining, the legacy of 2000 years of an origin story encouraging domination would remain.

Within tikanga, environmental relationships are understood through genealogical and relational connections. Māori cosmology positions people within networks of whakapapa extending across lands, waterways, ancestors, and atua, creating responsibilities of care and reciprocity rather than relationships based solely on ownership or use [28]. No right in resources can be sustained without the right holder maintaining an ongoing relationship with the resource. No relationship; no right. The term that describes the legal obligation is kaitiakitanga. This is the idea that any right over a human or resource carries with it a reciprocal obligation to care for his, her or its physical and spiritual welfare [28].

This concept has entered statute law. The Whanganui River is recognised in statute as a legal person, “Te Awa Tupua,” with all the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of legal persons [29].

These differing worldviews should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive categories or fixed cultural positions. Contemporary societies involve overlapping and evolving systems of knowledge in which values and practices continue to interact and influence one another [50]. One change in New Zealand has been that despite the country becoming more secular, it has become common practice to precede eating together with a karakia giving thanks to the gods of the forest land and seas.

From a tikanga perspective, environmental challenges may be understood not solely as technical or regulatory problems, but also as disruptions within relationships among people, communities, and environments. Addressing such challenges therefore may

involve strengthening responsibilities of care, reciprocity, and long-term stewardship alongside technological and policy responses. In this way, tikanga contributes a relational perspective that may complement broader conversations concerning environmental sustainability and collective wellbeing [27,28].

## 8. Tikanga and the Rule-Based International System

Williams observed that “It must be remembered that tikanga Māori is law designed for small, kin-based village communities. It is as much concerned with peace and consensus as it is with the level of certainty one would expect of normative directives that are more familiar in a complex non-kin-based community.” [28]. While contemporary international governance operates within vastly different political and institutional contexts, Williams’ observations highlight broader principles concerning the importance of relationships, consensus, and collective responsibility. Institutions such as the United Nations were established to facilitate cooperation and peaceful resolution across increasingly interconnected societies [10]. However, contemporary geopolitical challenges illustrate the ongoing difficulties involved in maintaining consensus within complex global systems [10]. Rather than suggesting that tikanga provides a direct model for international governance, relational principles emphasising dialogue, reciprocity, and collective responsibility may contribute useful perspectives for considering how cooperation and peace-building processes are approached.

The term for leader in Te Reo is rangatira, formed from the words ranga and tira. Two derivations have been proposed: that Ranga is referring to the word raranga (weaving) of the tira (group) or referring to ranga (shoal or sandbar) and tira (shark’s fin, referring to the shark role as guardian). Both terms suggest that a Rangatira holds their people together and does not exist without them, for what is a sandbar without the sand. A leader is the person who weaves the people together [51].

While such concepts emerge from specific Māori contexts, they provide an example of leadership approaches grounded in relational accountability and collective wellbeing. These perspectives may contribute to broader discussions regarding leadership and governance within increasingly interconnected societies [51].

## 9. Tikanga and Refugee Movement

Global forced displacement has increased substantially in recent decades. Current estimates indicate that over 117.3 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide, with large proportions originating from a relatively small number of countries affected by conflict, instability, and humanitarian crises [52]. Displacement emerges through complex and interconnected factors including armed conflict, political instability, environmental pressures, economic inequalities, and historical processes associated with colonialism and state formation [52].

Responses to refugee movement vary across nations and reflect differing political priorities, economic capacities, geographical contexts, and understandings of responsibilities. Such differences highlight ongoing tensions between national interests, border governance, humanitarian obligations, and collective responsibility [52].

From a tikanga perspective, displacement may be understood not solely as a matter of borders or security, but also as relational responsibilities between peoples and communities. Concepts such as manaakitanga and whanaungatanga emphasise obligations of care, connectedness, and collective wellbeing. While these principles do not provide straightforward policy solutions, they may offer useful perspectives for considering how responses to displacement and humanitarian challenges are framed [22].

## 10. Tikanga and Internet Communication

The development of digital communication technologies has transformed how people connect, communicate, and access information across local and global contexts [53]. These technologies have enabled opportunities for maintaining relationships and strengthening connection. However, digital environments have also generated substantial challenges including misinformation, harmful content, unequal power relationships, commercial exploitation, and impacts on wellbeing [53,54]. Responses to these challenges have often relied on legal regulation, individual responsibility, and contractual approaches to governance. However, scholars have noted difficulties in applying these mechanisms within digital environments characterised by uneven power relationships among users, corporations, and institutions [6]. Such complexities raise broader questions regarding responsibility, accountability, and collective wellbeing within increasingly interconnected digital spaces.

From a tikanga perspective, digital environments may be considered through relational concepts emphasising responsibility, reciprocity, and the maintenance of relationships. While such approaches do not offer direct solutions to technological challenges, they may contribute alternative perspectives concerning how digital communities and responsibilities are understood and governed.

## 11. Conclusions

In 1989, Fukuyama [16] proposed that liberal democracy represented the endpoint of ideological evolution and become the framework through which societies would organise political and social life. Contemporary global developments, however, suggest that questions concerning governance, identity, inequality, environmental sustainability, and collective wellbeing remain unresolved. These challenges have generated interest in alternative and complementary ways of understanding relationships between people, communities, and environments. Within Aotearoa, tikanga is influencing legal, health, educational, and societal practices through ongoing interactions between Māori and wider societal institutions [21]. This process has not been straightforward or uniform and continues to involve negotiation, adaptation, and ongoing tensions associated with broader historical and structural realities [17,21].

Many of the relationship concepts discussed within this paper are also evident across other Indigenous knowledge traditions internationally [55–57]. Rather than presenting tikanga as a universal framework or replacement for existing systems, this paper has argued that tikanga offers one relational perspective through which contemporary challenges may be interpreted and understood.

Importantly, tikanga should not be viewed as a static or idealised Indigenous framework removed from history and context. Contemporary expressions of tikanga continue to evolve through lived realities shaped by colonisation, revitalisation, institutional engagement, and social change [17,22]. In this way, tikanga contributes not a singular solution, but an ongoing invitation to reconsider relationships, responsibilities, and collective approaches to complex global challenges.

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