

# MĀORI EXPERIENCES AND EXPRESSIONS OF LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE CHRISTCHURCH ŌTAUTAHI EARTHQUAKES

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## **Abstract**

The 2010 and 2011 earthquakes of Canterbury have had a serious and ongoing effect on Māori in the city (Lambert, Mark-Shadbolt, Ataria, & Black, 2012). Many people had to rely on themselves, their neighbours and their whānau for an extended period in 2011, and some are still required to organise and coordinate various activities such as schooling, health care, work and community activities such as church, sports and recreation in a city beset by ongoing disruption and distress. Throughout the phases of response and recovery, issues of leadership have been implicitly and explicitly woven through both formal and informal investigations and debates. This paper presents the results of a small sample of initial interviews of Māori undertaken in the response and early recovery period of the disaster and discusses some of the implications for Māori urban communities.

## **Keywords**

Māori leadership, emergency management, disaster response, disaster recovery

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## Introduction

The tragic events of 22 February 2011 have become a part of the history of Aotearoa New Zealand. In the seconds during, and minutes after, the shallow 6.3 magnitude shock, countless individuals acted across the city of Christchurch Ōtautahi with great courage wherever they found themselves, whether inside collapsed buildings or in the streets where many people were injured or killed by falling masonry. Emergency workers were quickly on the scene. Two companies of soldiers exercising near Christchurch joined two urban search and rescue (USAR) teams (from Auckland and New Plymouth), complementing the local USAR team, fire officers, paramedics, police officers and ambulance staff. Other emergency workers arrived from around the country, and triage and welfare centres were quickly established. A 73-strong search and rescue team arrived from New South Wales, Australia, on the day of the quake and were operating the next day; other international rescue crews arrived from Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States. At the end of the first week, 330 Australian police had been sworn in, contributing to the 1,200 New Zealand police on patrol and active duty (New Zealand Police, 2011). Services and infrastructure were obviously badly affected, but the airport was operational for emergency flights within 4 hours and commercial flights within 24 hours.

In this context, leadership was fundamental to the survival and security of tens of thousands of people. However, leadership itself sits within, and interacts with, a number of other spheres, such as communication, situational awareness, teamwork, and stress and fatigue management (Vallance, 2012), and it operates at various scales. Further, the performance of a range of formal and informal leaders is an emotional topic and has elicited ongoing passionate debate, such as is revealed by the second internal review of the performance of regional commanders in the Fire Service,

accused of serious failings in their leadership (New Zealand Fire Service, 2012; Tobin, 2011). Leaders of the “Farmy Army” and Student Volunteer Army complained of a lack of cooperation from officials and have since identified the empowerment of volunteers as being an important lesson leaders should learn from the recovery process (Hartnell, 2012). For the people of Christchurch, there has been a lack of transparency and confusion over roles between the council and government leadership.

The recovery phase is recognised as vital in emergency management and civil defence operations that seek long-term community resilience (Beckett, Wilkinson, & Potangaroa, 2010). So-called soft leadership is combined with technical management to frame effective post-disaster recovery, targeted towards achieving the right actions with minimal delay. While accepting that a disaster is, by definition, characterised by the general and extensive breakdown of systems, what follows is a snapshot of the words and experiences of 10 Māori leaders and managers through an urban disaster.

## Māori leadership

### *The immediate response*

While the 4 September 2010 quake was larger than the 22 February 2011 event (magnitude 7.1 versus 6.3), it struck early in the morning (about 4:30 am) and, while there was considerable disruption to the city, there were no deaths. The February quake occurred at 12:51 pm and immediately placed thousands of people in life and death situations, as was the case, for example, for one of our respondents in the Central Business District (CBD):

When I evacuated the office, my work colleague who was pregnant needed help ... As I was walking past Joe’s Garage, I could hear screaming in there. I helped this one lady out, I ended up carrying her. Both her legs were crushed.

Another interviewee was a team leader for USAR who spent many hours in the wreckage of a collapsed building, where one of his tasks was to help amputate a trapped man's legs, using a hacksaw and a Leatherman tool. A Māori policeman was naked in the showers in the police building and, after dressing, walked out into the CBD as a first responder, not knowing whether or not his only child was safe for 5 hours.

Many Māori managers found themselves in the terrible situation of fearing for their own lives and the lives of their staff: "Oh, I didn't have time to be affected by the EQ ... on the day we were in the CBD, I was more worried about my entire team dying in front of my eyes actually."

All those who were parents experienced harrowing delays in getting to their children; one mother waited 11 hours until she knew her "baby" (actually an adult male but the emotional ties remain, of course) was alive and safe.

### *The first few days*

Strong views were expressed on the actions of leaders in the days following the February event. Several interviewees were disparaging about Māori leadership. At an early hui called to discuss the Māori response, it was described by one wahine as a display of "peacocking" by some Māori men.

A Kaumatua, probably Ngāi Tahu, should have been [in charge] ... it takes away all the power from the little power piggies you know this is Ngāi Tahu's responsibilities in terms of how we feel about our responsibilities towards manaakitanga this is what we're doing.

The style of leadership, and organisational structures, came in for sustained criticism from some:

You never see a command post that's run by a consensual stylist. [It] doesn't work that way.

I mean they follow protocol and all the rest but you don't see somebody that's like look, should we have a bit of a, shall we have a, um, let's go outside and connect with nature and discuss the thing, you know, the blah blah, and then we'll go back and we'll dah dah dah. It's like *right* we're doing this, bang!

Interestingly, two of our interviewees returned to damaged buildings to collect laptops that contained databases and contact details necessary for their work. While this is counter to advice and even actual commands, it is an example of how many people acted in ways counter to "standard" procedures (which were reinforced by the first, non-fatal, earthquake of 4 September). When people could retrieve items considered necessary for their work, they did so. When they could not, or were prevented from doing so, considerable business disruption followed.

The role of tikanga was also an important theme, with some seeing aspects of Māori cultural practices adhered to beyond the point of utility:

The practicality of tikanga goes like this: any kaumatua will tell you if it's not working, if it's impractical, we're not doing it! They'll tell you where it's not the very best to be bloody honging people when there's a pandemic on and they'll say well actually we won't have big gatherings because actually everyone will get sick. The kaumatua know.

Kaumatua were seen as having important roles, sometimes in just reassuring others. One kaumatua, whose house and neighbourhood were badly damaged, drew positive comparisons with his younger years of rural poverty, using humour, which was seen as being important:

I think one of the things we do well is humour ... there's a bit of resilience that comes with that. That approach, there's a bit of integrity there. Doesn't seem like leadership but it gave me strength at the time!

### *The following weeks and months*

As aftershocks continued to rock the city, the stress and frustration increased for many people. Data on school enrolments show that Māori children moved schools, primarily out of Canterbury, at three to five times the rate of Pākehā (Lambert, Mark-Shadbolt, Ataria, & Black, 2012). As Māori providers and workers increased their presence and activities, various conflicts were evident, notably the need for official reports and data from head offices and government versus the demand for people on the ground who could doorknock and sit with frightened and disconnected people – Māori and non-Māori.

The recovery phase is now dominated by larger institutions – many of them offshore – that are injecting capital for the rebuild, a phase that is not the subject of this paper but is framed by serious difficulties in trying to secure and allocate financial capital. Capital flight is being recorded as developers receive insurance pay-outs and reinvest elsewhere in the country.

### **Future Māori leaders**

Leadership studies has developed as an increasingly important topic and strategy focus for the New Zealand public and private sector (see, e.g., Curtin, 2008), and for Māori (Mead, Stevens, Third, Jackson, & Pfeifer, 2006; Katene, 2010). The development of Māori leaders – for current and future challenges – was seen as important by our respondents:

I think we don't have enough skill in lots of areas ... it's about work force development and also succession.

I'm talking about people who can get things done, motivate people, give the whānau the sense of confidence that they need. [Someone] should have been up there and saying "now this is what we're doing, and we're going to

do this and we're doing that" ... that's what I mean about leadership.

You need the emergence of strong leaders [who] can say "cut the crap, let's go!"

### **Broader organisational context**

It is important to realise that much Māori leadership in the aftermath took place within a complex and often confused organisational context that was itself seriously impacted by the disaster: the Māori response could only be "nested" within a wider response. Several respondents noted the political landscape:

It's like of course the CBD is to protect the CBD first and foremost, and that's the city I guess, that's what it looked like. But then there were areas where it's almost like the rich get richer the poor get poorer, it was the same scenario. "The poor, oh we can hold them off", it almost looked like it came down to money.

I think this whole thing was a political thing. It's about who controls Christchurch.

Various initiatives are under way. Educational institutions in the city are required to investigate how they can work together; a strong initiative comes from Te Tapuae o Rehua, who are coordinating a trades training programme that aims to upskill 200 Māori trainees for the rebuilding of the city (Tarena, 2012).

### **Discussion**

As noted, a disaster is characterised by the extensive breakdown of systems, including communications, which severely challenges leadership. Power cuts and damaged infrastructure meant contacting staff, colleagues and whānau was difficult and sometimes impossible.

Also, many nominated leaders were themselves in damaged homes and subject to sleepless nights as the city was regularly shaken by many thousands of aftershocks. That individual first responders turn up at all is not guaranteed: up to 20% have been found to be technically derelict in their duties in some disasters, while many of these were actually searching for their own family members and securing their safety first (Linsdell, 2012).

For Māori leadership, wider governmental and non-governmental organisational structures often trumped Māori aspirations. Local officials struggled to balance issues of safety, planning regulations, and the need to engage stakeholders in the recovery of the CBD to aid businesses and mitigate direct and indirect costs of a prolonged closure.

Of course, the debate over the role of local and national government has been a fundamental challenge in other emergencies and disasters. The Pike River mining disaster (which occurred 19 November 2010, i.e., between the first quake of 4 September 2010 and the major quake of 22 February 2011) saw controversy over the performance of the police, who assumed the main role in the ultimately unsuccessful and possibly futile rescue attempts. Who, exactly, should be in charge of disasters?

In Christchurch, new and additional authorities were established, such as the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA), and reinsurers add layers of complexity to the recovery period, causing considerable distress and anger. While additional agencies are probably

needed, given the scale of the disaster, their role and relationship with local bodies must be clear and this is a role for the highest levels of government leadership. As the wider New Zealand economy has stalled, the social and financial pressures on Māori affected by the earthquakes look set to worsen.

## Conclusions

Leadership needed during the disaster experienced by Christchurch Ōtautahi can be split into two phases, correlating with the phases of response and recovery. Each phase requires different skills, with courage, initiative, and personal training and skills dominating the first phase; and networking, collaboration and professional managerial skills framing needs in the second phase. Fitting Māori communities for future disasters needs to concentrate on clarifying how Māori response(s) coordinate among Māori, and work in within the wider and predominant non-Māori response. The vulnerability of Māori to future disasters through ongoing economic marginalisation cannot be overstated.

Although this paper did examine the existing recovery phase, it is clear this is not progressing well for the city in general: the effects on Māori can only be negative. Improving how top-down approaches (emanating from central government) hybridise with localised bottom-up efforts will enable Māori to benefit from and contribute to the recovery of the city of Ōtautahi.

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