

## 5.2 Influential Māori<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, tangata whenua Treaty partners are very influential, but it is essential that Māori who are able to influence an organisation, or at least its key players, are involved throughout the process that leads up to establishment of Treaty relationships. Their knowledge and skills are often essential, and even more importantly, they motivate tangata tiriti to keep going through the inevitable difficult periods.

Sometimes Māori express frustration that tangata tiriti leadership in organisations is disinclined to be proactive about Treaty initiatives, but often that leadership is very conscious of not wanting to replicate past patterns of presuming to know what is best. Thus, it is particularly important that there be robust relationships between the organisation's leadership and Māori – for discussion about direction and overall approach as well as for working through particularly difficult issues.

The relationship needs to be strong enough to survive disappointments and changes of personnel on both sides. Shared experiences and good cross-cultural communication skills are essential.

Having influential Māori within the organisation can be both an advantage and disadvantage. The positives include familiarity with the culture and structure of the organisation, and regular presence and engagement. Negatives may include tensions arising from conflict between the roles of advisor and employee.

### Supporting Māori who support the organisation

Most people involved with Treaty application are painfully aware of the heavy burden placed on Māori, especially as staff because often their support is taken for granted. While they are usually more than willing to be involved, the work is usually in addition to their job description. There may be unrealistic expectations about the level of knowledge and skills they have, and usually there are only a few to share the load.

Whether Māori advisers and support people are inside or outside the organisation, they always carry a tremendous load, trying to reconcile the expectations of many interested parties. How to support them, with resources and otherwise, is a significant issue.

### Reflecting on Experiences<sup>2</sup>

- **Māori can support the work of the organisations in a variety of ways: by discussing issues**

It was very important for us to have Denis – it's very good to feel easy with someone who can lead you in this area, and not feel too cautious. You can say things and they can be discussed in an ordinary way. He's not been particularly demanding of us or dogmatic about anything, but he's assisted us. And as we've gone down a few directions we've realised are not quite the right and we've changed to another direction.

(participant from Development Resource Centre - DRC)

- **linking to other networks**

Outside of these forums I have my own networks, people that I hold in high esteem for advice and just some guidance. We can get together every now and then just to talk about what we were doing and where we were going. There's a lot of goodwill and impetus in the organisation and people know I'm here and can be contacted. Every now and then I'll drop an email or make a phone call. But I don't think it's up to me to push the organisation – it's got to come internally. And if I refer someone to the organisation and they don't work out it's my reputation on the line. I want to know if I'm bringing people into an organisation that it is going to get what it's after.

(participant from DRC – External Māori consultant)

---

<sup>1</sup> From: *Treaty Journeys: International Aid Agencies respond to the Treaty of Waitangi*. Council for International Development. 2007. Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> NOTE: The views expressed here are the participants' own, at the time of the interview, and do not necessarily represent their current views or those of their agencies.

- **and challenging thinking**

Organisations need to find mentors as well as kaum-atua. I was so lucky that we worked with a Māori woman who just taught me so much. She told me that she was once told on an interview panel, 'Oh, you can ask the Treaty questions', you know, get the brown face to ask the Treaty questions, and her response was, 'Well you're a partner in the Treaty too – you've got as much right to ask the question'. It's important to find people who can make you think about those things, who understand the organisation and are a good fit. I learnt from her in a mentoring, friendship role.

(participant from Volunteer Service Abroad - VSA )

- **but it helps if the relationship is on-going**

Compared with some other Catholic agencies we do more policy and advocacy work, which means we don't necessarily see Māori people on a daily basis. My direct contact with people is through the formal networks and channels of the Catholic Church. This gives me a really clear idea of the people to go to who know who I am, and I know who they are. We can be honest with each other because we are part of the same family. You don't want to be talking to someone who's never met you, and doesn't know if they could trust you.

(participant from Caritas)

- **Māori may benefit from involvement**

The hapū themselves say that being recognised by somebody was an important part of their own kind of identity journey, somebody coming to say, 'We want to talk to you about this'.

(participant from Caritas)

- **but be aware of the potential limits to that**

The local iwi said they were quite comfortable with the work that they did with us. The koha each time they had conversations with us was enough to cover the costs. They had the capacity to be able to talk to us without it being a big cost to them, but they gave us a very clear warning that there are many groups who just don't have the capacity to devote that kind of time to us. So we have to look at how we can find some money to support somebody doing the work.

(anon)

We had somebody on council who knew a kaumatua and felt that this person would be a great fit for the organisation. He had a great understanding of, and great interest in, the work of VSA and was somebody who the organisation could work with really comfortably, and hopefully vice versa. There is a real need for organisations to understand cultural safety before heading down that track. There are huge risks in saying, 'Oh great we've got a Māori staff member – let's ask them about everything Māori. Let's suddenly expect them to come up with a powhiri or get them speaking on our behalf in Māori at functions.' You can say that's great if that person is able to and wants to, but for a lot of Māori it may not be something they're comfortable with.

(participant from VSA)

<sup>2</sup> NOTE: The views expressed here are the participants' own, at the time of the interview, and do not necessarily represent their current views or those of their agencies.