

CHAPTER 13

SPIRITUAL DYNAMICS IN SYSTEMS OF EVALUATION

Māori and Pacific Models for Process and Application

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ABSTRACT

At the core of the word “e-valuation” is “value.” Hence, evaluation is considered to be the systematic determination of the value, merit, worth, significance, quality, or importance of something.

Evaluation is regarded as a rigorous, scientific research process undertaken by experts on projects, programs, services, providers, and people. Evaluations are often conducted with respect to groups, organizations, cultures, activities, conceptions, creations, programmes, policies, designs, processes, outcomes, institutions, and systems.

Relationship models for evaluations portray hierarchies representing the relative power of various stakeholders, including government ministries (often as contract funders and managers), project staff, programme clients, and communities.

Drawing on over a decade of experience as an evaluator, in this chapter I ask, “How has evaluation changed for Indigenous peoples? Do contemporary evaluation processes and practices allow for alternative views of evaluation?” My examination highlights the challenges of contemporary evaluation from an Indigenous perspective.

This chapter begins with stories of evaluation embedded in traditional narrative. I then build a picture of the contemporary context in which evaluation now occurs, making reference to specific Indigenous circumstances. Next, I contribute two models of evaluation: “Hakamana” and “Fale Lotu.” As rigorous methods of evaluation, they reference Native science and Indigenous ontologies. To illustrate, I provide two current cases that offer insight into the centrality of spirituality in these evaluation models.

Manini waka!

A hi!

Kānapanapa ake nei

Ko ngā wai hihi wai haha o Tangaroa

Hī nana ki runga

Hī nana ki raro

Hī nana ki roto

Hī nana ki waho

Oti ra he pounamu, he pounamu, he pounamu

Puawai mai he maramatanga

Ki Te Whai Ao

Ki TeAo Wānanga

Ki TeAo Mārama

Tihei Mauri Ora!

Hei tikitiki e HAKAMANA

(Wānanga—Tohunga Puroku Tawhai)

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous worlds, cultures, and knowledge systems developed over millennia and continue to be expressed through social structures, languages, symbols, art, science, technologies, and diverse enterprises. Many of these knowledge systems have nurtured and sustained Indigenous peoples and their environments across time, space, and place through robust evaluation processes. Evaluation has thus been a challenging endeavor recorded and expressed through multiple and dynamic sites of life-long learning. While

a natural part of living and growing, evaluation can, within different contexts, demand the expression of heroic characteristics of those involved and impacted by the evaluation.

However, evaluation also has an appalling history, particularly as a tool of imperial oppression and colonization. This has required a deliberate replacement of local evaluation systems with structures, institutions, and processes of evaluation of the colonizing forces and entities. Centuries of such evaluation mechanisms, including testing, examination, assessment, benchmarking, grading, analysis, ranking and rating, and so forth have taken their toll on these colonized groups.

Given the above, I highlight that evaluation is not value-free. Central to its design and exercise is “value.” Thus the values of the designers and developers of evaluation systems and tools are indelibly stamped into them, making evaluation inextricably linked with power and control.

Hence, for those who have been subjected to colonization, a deeper knowledge of their own potential and power, and a greater awareness of how they can navigate through their complex relationships within dynamic environments and contexts, is an important starting point as they embark on their evaluation journeys.

BACKGROUND: STORIES OF EVALUATION

Stories of creation, ancestry, and heritage of Indigenous peoples are enthralling. They have been recounted over thousands of years, maintaining knowledge systems and traditions from generation to generation. There are many stories of evaluation to be learned, and I draw critical insights from two Māori creation myths.

The Separation of Rangi and Papa

When the world was being created, Papa, Earth Mother, lay on her back, and Rangi, her husband the Sky Father, rested upon her. Over time they begat many children to be guardians of nature in its wondrous forms. The young gods, however, lived in cramped darkness between their parents, struggling for breath and being forced to crawl about like lizards. One day the gods were startled by a gleam of light they glimpsed as their parents moved, and immediately they longed for more of it. Fierce discussions raged among them for a long time about how they might achieve living in that wonderful light.

One brother, Tu, the God of War, wanted to kill their parents, but his siblings vehemently disapproved. Then Rongo, the God of Peace, and

Tangaroa, the God of Oceans, tried first to separate Rangi and Papa. However, none of the children could push them apart. Finally all of them, except for Tāwhirimātea, the God of Winds, agreed that Tāne, the God of Forests, would separate their parents.

After a few failed attempts, Tāne planted his head on the earth, thrust his feet against the sky and with much heaving and pushing, and forced his parents apart. Thus, Rangi took his place high above Papa, and Te Ao Mārama, the light of day, entered into the world.

This creation story of the separation of Rangi and Papa by their children contains many evaluative aspects. These include the sharing of foundational values, such as light and warmth, with a core stakeholder group—in this instance, the children of the gods—and the agreement of an outcome, namely the separation of their parents. There was disagreement regarding the methods and processes to be employed, most of which continued to cause contention. Of note was “Ko te nuinga, ko te roanga,” *the multitude of thoughts and the length of time* it took for the siblings to debate their course of action. Power dynamics and politics, competing agendas, and a wide variation in ethical positions were all at play.

Tāne and the Baskets of Knowledge

Tāne, the God of Light, was chosen by Io, the Supreme God, to introduce knowledge into the world. He was to journey through many heavens and endure numerous trials and battles with his brother Whiro, the God of Darkness, during his travels. When Tāne arrived at Io’s sacred marae, he entered the temple and was given three kete (baskets) of knowledge and two sacred stones. The first was *Kete-Uruuru-Matua*, the basket of peace, goodness, and love; the second was *Kete-Uruuru-Rangi*, containing prayers, incantations, and rituals; and the third was *Kete-Uruuru-Tau*, containing knowledge of war and peace, agriculture, and earth and stonework to tend to the well-being of humankind. The *whatukura* or sacred stones were *Huka-a-tai* and *Rehu-tai*. These stones would add mana, authority, and power to what was taught, seal the teachings, and impress them on the minds of those learning.

The return journey was fraught with perils instigated by the angry Whiro that were overcome by Tāne with the help of Tawhirimātea and his companions. Tāne’s triumph in securing the *wānanga* was widely celebrated, with the sky flushing crimson as a sign of his victory. On returning to earth he entered the *wharekura* (sacred place of learning), where he suspended the baskets of knowledge and deposited the stones at the back of the sacred house. Tāne remained as the custodian of the *wānanga*.

Importantly, this story of Tāne brings to the fore the importance to Māori of knowledge and learning, the thirst for such knowledge requiring

great effort and the ability to overcome many hardships. Ethical protocols and practices were integral to the task and each step of the evaluation process provided an opportunity for feedback and learning. The eventual outcome of this great undertaking was to bring knowledge to Māori, such that it would span every element of the lives of humankind and would include the mechanisms by which such knowledge would be attained, evaluated, and retained.

The legends of Tāne attaining the three baskets of knowledge also contain important values, including the attainment of knowledge for the benefit of humanity, the objectives and outcomes, and the processes and procedures for the attainment of this knowledge.

Such stories and themes have played out again and again across generations and within multiple contexts. At the collective level, manifest within families, groups, organizations, tribes and nations, we have seen forces of life and death, creation and destruction, collaboration, and disconnection battle with each other. At the individual level, such challenges and dynamic interactions are evident at the psychic and intrapsychic levels of the self, both conscious and unconscious, where we are, all at once, the child, the parent, the sibling, the risk-taker, the healer, the leader, and the follower.

We are both hero and villain, concurrently seeking growth on the one hand, while developing “things that hurt, sting, and bite” to inhibit and restrict that journey of transformation. Hence evaluation, while a natural part of living and growing, can demand within challenging contexts that people manifest their heroic characteristics. A deeper knowledge of their own complexity as individuals, a recognition of who they are as members of diverse collectives, and a greater comprehension of themselves as subjects and objects within multiple structures and systems is an important starting point in any evaluation journey.

This is an endeavor that requires courage, fortitude, and resilience!

CONTEXT: EVALUATION AS A TOOL OF OPPRESSION

As noted, for millions of Indigenous people worldwide, evaluation has widely been experienced as a tool of oppression and supremacy. For example, Māori, having been subjects for almost two centuries of Eurocentric values-laden evaluations. As a consequence, Māori and increasingly Pacific peoples are over-researched, over-evaluated, and audited with greater frequency than Europeans across multiple sectors. Now, they often feel that they are targets of criticism and blame for issues often beyond their control, such as noncommunicable diseases, inadequate housing, rising unemployment, and failures of the education system. In education for example, Māori and Pacific school students are frequently branded “failures”¹ and,

they are continually constructed as the “other” compared to non-Indigenous “normal” persons. Hence Māori and Pacific peoples are often marginalized and judged as failing to reach acceptable standards of whatever is being valued and measured.

However, evaluation is often regarded as a rigorous, scientific research process undertaken by “experts” on projects, programs, services, providers, and people, including *whānau*, *hapū*, *marae*, tribal groups, and Indigenous organizations. Relationship models for these types of evaluations portray hierarchies representing the relative power of various stakeholders, including government ministries (often as contract funders and managers), project staff, programme clients, and communities.

Evaluators are often contracted by government entities and organizations to observe, gather information, review, analyze and interpret data, make judgements, and report on their findings while remaining independent and nonpartisan. This relationship model makes several assumptions. For example, they assume there are formally defined roles and responsibilities, power differentials, strict communications protocols, heavily prescribed evaluation and research methods and processes, and evaluators who write for and report back to project funders.

In addition, the United Nations (2005) states that evaluation has been a mandated activity of the United Nations’ program and budgeting system since the early 1980s and is to “focus on whether the Organization’s activities provide value to the Member States and other stakeholders.” As set down in Regulation 7.1 (p.4): The objective of evaluation is:

To determine as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Organization’s activities in relation to their objectives; To enable the Secretariat and Member States to engage in systematic reflection, with a view to increasing the effectiveness of the main programmes of the Organization by altering their content, and if necessary, reviewing their objectives. (United Nations, 2005)

However, in reality, an evaluation set up with these assumptions leaves clients, *whānau*, communities, and Māori providers anxious, wary, and suspicious of the evaluators who are often, rightly or wrongly, viewed as “agents of the government” and what it stands for. While the notion of equalizing relationships by “empowering” program providers and clients while simultaneously “disempowering” the evaluators and government funders has been proposed, the reality of hierarchies of power and control remains.

Evaluation is always political, at times with many competing agendas. For example, a Māori research study of a health initiative would need to balance at least three components: cultural integrity, academic rigor, and safe clinical interventions. Values are prioritized and accorded relative measures of importance and influence by different stakeholders. They are seeded from

the outset of the evaluation in terms of the prioritization of (1) what counts as values or valuable outcomes, (2) the framing of the evaluation questions, and (3) the methods chosen to answer those questions.

Therefore, considering competing value systems both explicit and implicit in evaluation processes, it is important to continue to ask the following questions. Whose values and voices are privileged? Whose perspectives are valued as more *or* less important than others? Do the values of the funding agencies outweigh the values of service providers and subsequently their clients' values?

DECOLONIZING EVALUATION

Indigenous communities have been attempting to address the evaluation process through taking ownership of and reclaiming evaluation as a critical tool based within their own worldviews and contextualized within their own realities.

There are an increasing number of Indigenous persons trained in research and evaluation who have been arguing for the right to develop their own evaluation methodologies. Inspired by the work of Linda Smith (1999) and others in decolonizing research methodologies, efforts continue to decolonize evaluation methodologies. This process requires that Indigenous peoples recenter themselves within their own worldviews and regroup and recharge as they rediscover, redevelop, and adapt practices that are “of, for, by, and with us” (Kawakami, Aton, Cram, Lai, & Porima, 2007, p. 323).

Drawing from Smith (1999), engaging a Kaupapa Māori approach integrates in various configurations (not necessarily linear) three key concepts: resistance, conscientization, and transformative praxis. In terms of evaluations, this approach enables evaluation processes that honor the values found within Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies. This enables the creation of systems and construction of frameworks for carrying out evaluation without being “limited by the legacies of previous” research and evaluation. This approach affords freedom of feeling, thought, and expression, providing spaces and frameworks for both deconstructing colonizing hegemonies and reconstructing/co-creating Indigenous knowledge and systems of evaluation and research.

THE RATIONALE FOR INDIGENOUS EVALUATION SYSTEMS

As we create a new future, we need to create new tools that can help to project us into that future. For how do we know, at any point in time, whether what we are imagining is what we are realizing, and what we are realizing is what we are imagining?

The process for determining and articulating—indeed even thinking about—“values” is complex and multifaceted. Its reaches deep into the psyche, the spirit of an individual, is shaped by the individual’s familial relationships, informed and fashioned according to the individual’s culture and worldview, and further developed by systems and structures both local and global. Even the words and language for those values and concomitant behaviors and activities will further shape one’s awareness, understandings, and experiences of them.

In addition, identity is fundamental to the concept of value in these communities. Indigenous identities are located in physical, spiritual, and emotional connections to land and water, from the highest mountains to lowest valleys, from vast oceans to small streams, all having a special place in hearts, minds, and souls. Therefore, identities encompass complex systems and structures that include all aspects of life, including genealogies, family and social relationships, community living, health and well-being, learning and education, creativity and arts, corrections and justice, economics and trading, and so forth.

In order to convey these concepts, the following section brings into focus two case studies that highlight Indigenous evaluation models that I have developed and applied. The first evaluation model is called “Hakamana” and the case used is the Te Ha Academy, a global academy of creatives, scientists, academics, and voyagers. The second evaluation model is called “Fale Lotu” and the case offered is “Aere Ki Mua,” the Waikato Pacific Churches’ health program.

HAKAMANA AS A MODEL FOR EVALUATION

What can we learn about evaluation from legends, histories, stories, and from cultural experts and traditional knowledge holders? How do we honor, gather, and analyze this wisdom to co-create a cohesive system of evaluation that is (1) founded within Indigenous value systems, (2) complemented by contemporary knowledge, and (3) applicable to Indigenous contextualized contemporary realities?

The development of *Hakamana* is guided by an understanding that Indigenous peoples have always had ways of assessing merit based on traditional values and cultural expressions.

Hakamana—Informed by Sounds/Relationships/ Stories of Creation

The Polynesian kupu/word *hakamana* contains many important elements, including:

- A—the light of oneself; the world of light expressed as “Ko Au Te Ao . . . Te Ao Ko Au”
- HA—the breath of life; the divine breath that connects all living—
“all our relations”
- KA—the fire that burns within us; the energy expended for future transformations
- MA—the presence of all of one’s “light”; knowing oneself/one’s world/one’s connections
- NA—the relationships we have with each other and with the world at large; respect kinship
- HAKA—the “dance of life and energy”; expression through animation and activation
- MANA—the power, strength and authority one has; effectiveness, prestige; leadership; thunder
- HAKAMANA—the creative process of bringing one’s power and authority to light and being.

Co-Creating the Hakamana Evaluation System

The recognition of evaluation as integral to learning is the foundation upon which the *Hakamana* Evaluation System is co-created. An exploration of the values, ethics, protocols, and practice of evaluation within, with, and across Indigenous peoples, including *whānau* (families), *pou* (pillars; totems), *marae* (sacred cultural epicentre of family and community), and *waka* (canoe; vehicle of conveyance), have informed the organic design and development of *Hakamana*.

Foundational to this development are values that remain strong yet are also flexible and responsive to local traditions and culture. Principles upon which *Hakamana* is built include respect, recognizing the inherent value of each other, being conscious of and responsive to cultural values, being inclusive, having meaningful engagement and participation, affording protection and safety, being reflexive and evaluative, and assigning roles and responsibilities: in sum, being reciprocal and generous, useful, and valuable.

Introducing Puorooro—The Sounds of Hakamana

These *puorooro*, I – O – E – A – U, are sounds of the Polynesian language and communicate states of relationship, creativity, and potentiality (see Figure 13.1). For example, Te Reo Māori expresses and manifests the reality of Te Ao Māori, Te Ao Mārama (the world of light) and Te Ao Hurihuri (the changing world). These words, which are simultaneously verbs and nouns,

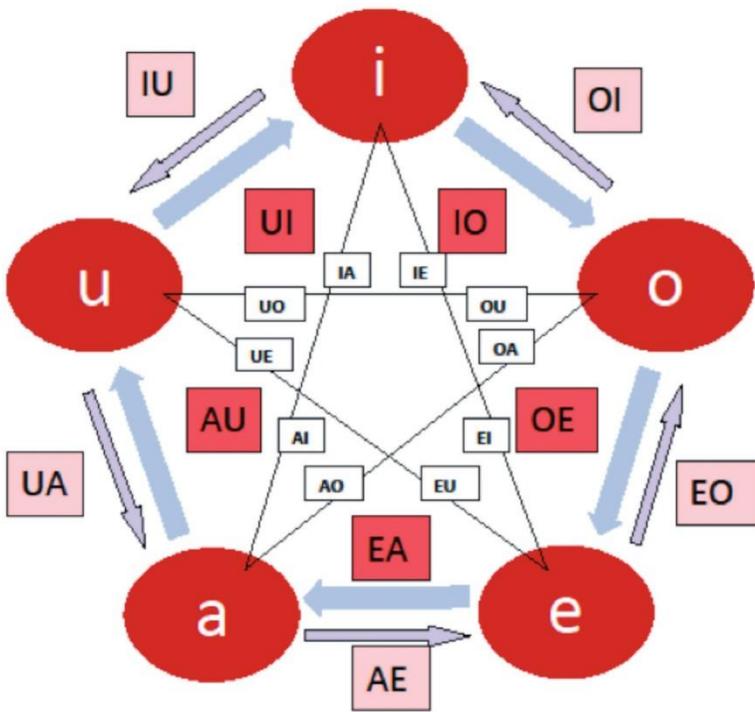


Figure 13.1 Hakamana—Informed by sounds/relationships/stories of creation.

or processes and outcomes, provide both constancy on the one hand, and dynamic change on the other.

The *Hakamana* Evaluation System is a dynamic evaluation system that animates values that enhance the mana and power of “all our relations,” past, present, and future.

Ethical spaces are negotiated and experienced at many levels: within the psyche, in relationship with others and the collective, and in relation to the world at large. Ethical boundaries established by collective principles, such as knowledge systems and rights to traditions, remind communities of what is important in life and what they value.

Systems’ thinking continues to shift the focus from individual parts to their interactions as they are configured by a complex and dynamic web of relationships, both internal and external. Thus, in most cases, “the whole” has properties that cannot be known from analysis of the constituent elements in isolation. Co-creating the *Hakamana* System of Transformative Evaluation as an integrated whole, including mechanisms, processes, and procedures for effective practice, continues to be an interesting and exciting endeavor.

Critical theory allows us to name and frame our situation

... gives us a sense of present realities.

Now the onus is on our shoulders to create

... to essentially imagine a possible future for us.

This requires our creative processes to kick in

... as they do when we create an art piece.

Professor Gregory Cajete, Aotearoa, New Zealand 2009

Mātauranga Taketake, ancient wisdom, Indigenous knowledge, and “original instructions” for how to live on earth in ways that highlight the interconnectedness of the spiritual, intellectual, social, and physical worlds have been gathered through *wānanga* and *hui* with *tohunga*, traditional knowledge holders and Indigenous experts across various fields of endeavor. The Indigenous worldviews expressed by them have highlighted the interconnectedness of their spiritual, human, and physical worlds.

Implicitly honored within *Hakamana* are *Mauri* (life-force; the life principle intersecting light and dark), *Wairua* (the divine spirit within oneself existing across space and time), *Tapu* (intrinsically sacred elements requiring special care) and *Mana* (enduring spiritual power infused at conception).

APPLYING THE HAKAMANA EVALUATION SYSTEM

To explain how the *Hakamana* Evaluation System works I draw on the case of Te Ha Academy. Te Ha translates as “Breath of Life and Creativity.” This academy creates and transmits traditional and contemporary knowledge through teaching and learning; research and creative work; and sustainable environmental, ecological, and economic advancement. It is networked with institutions around the world that have similar aims and aspirations.

Te Ha Indigenous Centre of Ancient Knowledge and Living Culture supports the aim of tribes and Indigenous peoples of the world to participate fully in the knowledge society and economy by enhancing learning and education, stimulating innovation, and identifying opportunities for creating spiritual and material wealth from ideas, knowledge, and understanding.

Te Ha energizes and empowers traditional knowledge holders, scholars, educators, practitioners, and artisans to come together and collectively expand the horizons of knowledge and practice. With research, dialogue, writing and action projects, Te Ha supports making the natural native worlds visible through their cultures, arts, and sciences.

Te Ha projects currently include:

- Pacific Guardians/World Tribe Canoe: This aims to revitalize and reinvigorate Pacific and California tribes' water cultures and includes canoe design, construction, and carving.
- Teaching/Learning: Teaching of both traditional and contemporary science and art, language revitalization, and health and wellbeing systems are provided locally and globally.
- Research and creative work: This increases the Indigenous presence in the dialogue of sustainability and includes cultural expression of both issues and solutions through multiple media, spanning arts and technology.
- Indigenous enterprise and leadership: This fosters opportunities for entrepreneurship aimed to advance the economic self-determination of Pacific/Indigenous peoples.
- Fanau Ola / Whanau Ora: Design and develop Family-Centred health and wellbeing systems / processes / toolkits / technologies, based within Indigenous cultural values.
- Tangaroa Code—Creation/Re-Creation of Proto-Oceanic linguistic symbols based on ancient and traditional carving and sculpture/ sculptural 'texts'.

Hakamana allows for each part of the story or element to be evaluated as part of their creative development, acknowledging the dynamism of life and variability of circumstances, while encouraging mutually beneficial processes that progress towards achieving the vision of Te Ha (see Table 13.1).

THE FALE LOTU EVALUATION MODEL

Building on the faith, hope, and strength that Pacific peoples find in their spiritual lives, the Fale Lotu² evaluation model also encompasses many domains (Figure 13.2). It starts with a dream, vision, and goals. Good planning is required for the Fale Lotu to be designed, developed, built, and brought to fruition. It ought to be built upon good soil, within supportive environments. Six strong pillars are embedded in solid foundations. Bound around the ceiling and roof structures are coils of resilient and durable fibers. The end result is the realization of a dream, the co-creation of a beautiful Fale Lotu—one that represents the passion, vision, and commitment of caring, healthy, and happy Pacific families.

TABLE 13.1 Hakamana System for Te Ha Academy

		HAKA The Story of Creating <i>What we do</i>	MANA <i>What we achieve</i>	
HI	hiki	<i>The divine potential</i>	Vision of TE HA Integrating Knowledge Diversity for Sustainability	
	hihiri	<i>The seeking</i>		
	whiri	<i>The searching</i>		
		<i>The weaving</i>		
hio	<i>The divine creator</i>	Nurturing creativity	Creative design	
pio	<i>The forming</i>	Leadership/structure	Leaders/Champions	
tio	<i>The generating</i>	Establishing ethics	Ethics established	
	<i>The spaces of safety</i>	Intelligence/planning	Project plans	
HO	hoko	<i>The suspension</i>	Gathering knowledge	Good foreknowledge
	poto	<i>The gathering</i>	Content/systems	Communications
	roto	<i>The knowing</i>	Building expertise	Great teams built
		<i>The looking within</i>	Design/strategies	Design/Strategic plan
hoe	<i>The ploughing</i>	Grounding	Strong foundation	
koe	<i>The connecting to others</i>	Build good relationships	Strong relationships	
moe	<i>The imagining</i>	Transforming, redefining	Excellent co-created curricula/content	
	<i>The collective dreaming</i>	courses and processes		
HE	heke	<i>The struggle</i>	Innovating enterprise	Actions/Tactics
	rere	<i>The climbing</i>	Stimulating, vibrant	Operations
	tere	<i>The running</i>	Dynamic, transforming	Implementation plans/procedures
		<i>The moving</i>	Activities, tasks	
hea	<i>The unknown</i>	Identify, examine,	All components animate/activate Indigenous values and vision	
mea	<i>The questioning</i>	evaluate, revalidate,		
pea	<i>The enquiring</i> <i>The ambiguity</i>	utilize—develop from the core/central vision		
HA	haka	<i>The breath of life</i>	Making a statement	Honor Indigenous knowledge system— authentic/expert Active local & global
	mana	<i>The fire and energy</i>	Strengthen identities	
	ra wa	<i>The power and authority</i>	Acknowledge authority	
		<i>The day, light, space, time</i>	Activating local/global	
hau	<i>The self as the world</i>	Being self-reflective	Higher Education systems—based on Indigenous knowledge system	
kau	<i>The winds of change</i>	Having work reviewed		
mau	<i>The bright burning</i> <i>The world as the self</i>	Thinking about future directions		
HU	pua	<i>The blossoming</i>	Completing aspects	Learners achieve within Indigenous knowledge system/ structures/processes
	tupu	<i>The growing</i>	Celebrating achievement	
	ruru	<i>The standing</i>	Recognition	
		<i>The sheltering</i>	Protecting self & work	
hui	<i>The sharing</i>	Sharing learnings	Knowledge is shared with the world— local and global sustainable success	
nui	<i>The expanding</i>	Knowledge transmission		
tui tu'i	<i>The faith; the binding</i> <i>The ultimate leader</i>	Dissemination		
HII	Divine potentiality . . . the miracle look at other dimensions . . . start again from higher level . . .			



Figure 13.2 Fale Lotu model.

The Fale Lotu Model honors the principle:

“The Fanau³ ... a Fale Lotu”

VISION	Heavens	Shared Vision/Goals/Objectives
CONTEXT	Land/Water	Environment/Community/Systems
FAMILY	Pillar	Relationships/Caring Connections
CULTURE	Pillar	Worldview/Tradition/Language
BODY	Pillar	Physical health/Conditions/Risks
HEART	Pillar	Emotional Well-being/Love/Support
MIND	Pillar	Learning/Intellect/Skills/Education
SPIRIT	Pillar	Spirituality/Religion/Church
RESOURCES	Bindings	Resources/Housing/Income/Transport
LEADERSHIP	Roof	Building leadership skills

APPLYING THE FALE LOTU EVALUATION MODEL

In the following section, I draw on a recent case study, Aere Ki Mua, to provide explanatory power to this model of evaluation.

Vision

*Aere Ki Mua is about giving Pacific people,
their families and communities,
a fresh look, hope and brighter future in life
and to instill positive thinking towards
improving lifestyles, health and wellbeing.*

*Guided by spiritual values,
Aere Ki Mua aims to achieve its goals
through love and respect,
nurturing growth and positive changes,
in culturally safe environments.*

In the first part of this evaluation, we explored *fanau* dreams for their future, their goals and objectives and their plans for achieving these shared aspirations. K’aute Pasifika, the lead Pacific health provider of Waikato, agreed that “using the churches was a good idea” for implementing Aere Ki Mua, because “life revolves around church.” Fanau spoke of how the churches were able to provide some social cohesion, whereby ministers played an important role in articulating and sharing the vision—essentially getting buy-in for the vision from their congregations.

This is a good model for Pacific people . . . we can relate to it, and appreciate all parts of it. (Pacific Mother)

Many families were encouraged through envisioning a future where they could be healthier and have improved well-being. Multiple facets and experiences of their lives were explored and families were helped to analyze these so that they could inform the planning. They all agreed that Aere Ki Mua provided them with a balanced approach that brought their families together.

Our project has three objectives and the guiding principles of our focus are related to a person’s total wellbeing—their body, mind, and soul. So throughout our program we have tried to align our objectives to these principles. (Samoa Assembly of God Implementation Plan, 2011)

Contexts / Environmental Dimensions

This dimension relates to the social / cultural / economic contexts and environments and the realities lived and experienced and subsequent meanings they have for Pacific people, including their ability to provide healthy *kai* for their families. While for many families there was an awareness of the need to be healthier, some spoke of having competing priorities

that they had to balance continually. With many families facing unemployment and financial constraints, food has become a much greater issue in the lives of many Pacific families in New Zealand. This was true for both island-born people who now live in New Zealand and New Zealand-born Pacific peoples.

Pacific families were thus faced with programmes for new foods, new diets, and new lifestyles, within systems of food that were poorly understood. Access to good quality, affordable, healthy food was always a challenge. With heavily competing costs including housing, electricity, water, telephone, transport, education, health, and so forth, food purchases became one of the costs that had to be carefully calculated. Often, a lack of money resulted in many Pacific families finding themselves in the unenviable position of buying any food available, often not healthy, quality choices.

Furthermore, some New Zealand-based Pacific families are socially and culturally isolated, disconnected from family and friends. In the islands they could readily access food from extended family, neighbors and friends, whereas in New Zealand, many families have found themselves with fewer networks from which to get food. Therefore, the churches provided protective networks within which some families felt more support, particularly from church leaders. Having *Aere Ki Mua* based in their local churches was important for families as they were able to access the program, with many of the activities linked to other church activities (e.g., choir practice following zumba).

While some families enjoyed growing their own food, others had problems that were beyond their control. One Minister said that for some *fanau*, “staying in short term rental properties was one of the barriers for motivation and maintaining vegetable gardening.”

K’aute Pasifika were also able to help some churches by providing them with opportunities for catering (e.g., providing healthy muffins and salads for various events), thereby helping families to see the potential entrepreneurial benefits of improved food knowledge and skills.

Family / Familial / Social Dimension

While the family is seen as the fundamental basis of social organization and support, Pacific families do not usually follow a typical Western definition. Usually they are large extended families with complex authority and status relationships between grandparents (both maternal and paternal), parents and children, siblings, brothers and sisters, aunts and nieces and nephews, and others. While providing structures for social cohesion on the one hand, on the other, competing family member priorities would often strain family relationships. It was also important that family champions

were identified, as they were usually the person who would often control the food, being both the buyer and cook for the family. For the main part, however, family members took great pride in their achievements.

I'm happy to say that my wife has lost weight, and went down from 137 kg to 116 kg. She started just swimming first, and then combined it with lawn mowing, and regular walking. (Samoan Minister)

Most Pacific people attend church as a family and have a Christian upbringing, and generally the whole family belong to the same religion. The congregations, comprising hundreds of families across Waikato, were made up of various ethnicities and denominations. Individuals of all ages and at varied levels of health participated and are now showing benefits of their involvement. Participants commented that *Aere Ki Mua* was “great for new families in the area” and it “was a great way to bring families together,” and through ongoing events such as Church Camps and Youth Camps, “helped to establish friendships with each other.” Many families talked about how much they enjoyed participating in the *Aere Ki Mua* activities including zumba, volleyball, regular physical exercise sessions, and the AKM Sports Day.

One Samoan Minister commented, “Physical activity and exercise continued to be encouraged. Our kids regularly do outdoor games, while the adults were involved in tennis and cricket. Members are aware of healthy eating and are looking good.”

Another Minister commented:

[Our Churches] continued to promote healthy lifestyle messages. . . . Community members were struggling to improve on cutting down portions of food; nevertheless, they continued to try. Increasing awareness and self-responsibility to maintain an individual and family's health by maintaining healthy weights have been observed in this church. Generally in this quarter, particularly after the long Christmas holiday break, no one actually gained much weight. (Cook Islands Minister)⁴

Culture / Cultural Dimension

Culture encompasses Pacific values, beliefs and behaviours, traditions, protocols and rituals and knowledge and traditions transmitted individually and collectively throughout generations. “Culture—it is like the way we use rope to stitch families together. We call it ‘afoi’ in Samoan . . . like weaving a mat,” reflected one Samoan Minister.

For many island peoples, food is one of the most important things in their life, and they will eat a wide variety of food, large quantities, and

frequently. Pacific peoples love to feast, spending a great deal of time preparing, cooking, and feasting for a huge variety of occasions.

Culturally and socially, food was often the “glue” that held family, villages, and communities together. Therefore feasting was required for all social events, and every occasion of any significance was an occasion for feasting, including birthdays, leaving, arrivals, conferences, workshops, funerals, and a wide variety of church-related activities. There is *mana* associated with the food and the act of preparing and giving food to persons of higher status, and the type and quantity of food is a tool to measure the status of the occasion. Providing for feasts can be fiercely competitive and depending on the occasion (e.g., whether a family birthday or a national coronation), families, villages, districts, and even islands would try to outperform each other in both quality and quantities of food as their status would be measured by what they provided.

To make ‘pola’⁵ is a cultural obligation . . . is a church obligation . . . but sometimes they have too much food on them. (Tongan Woman Participant)

While during the week people may eat less, the Sunday feast is an institution in many island nations and for many island families. This presented a challenge for some of the ministers, and one Tongan Minister noted,

We have a bad historical record for vast amounts of spit roasts—and last year we had twenty spit roasts . . . but since Aere Ki Mua we have had a big change—and have had none! Now our church menus are healthier and are prepared by the women who have attended nutrition training.

Eating patterns, however, have changed in island-born peoples over the past few decades with the advent of white sugar and flour and highly processed foods, precooked and easily prepared food, and an increase in takeaway outlets leading to eating behaviors that have resulted in higher rates of diet-related illness (e.g., diabetes, cardio-vascular disease). Many ministers have risen to the challenge of encouraging families to provide healthy options, even as they fulfill their cultural obligations for providing feasts.

In Kiribati, we now have high rates of diabetes due to a lack of land, dependence on imported Palagi food including white sugar, white flour, and white rice. (Kiribati Minister)

With regard to the physical activity elements of Aere Ki Mua, some participants noted that it was not usual to do “structured” exercise programs, except at school. However, hundreds of families enthusiastically supported the program, participating regularly in all of the fitness activities. Some also said that they were keen to receive resources in their own languages.

Church community members participating in the monitoring exercises were able to express themselves in their own languages during the activities including filling out of a baseline survey that required listings of personal goals, barriers to good health, and preferred participation means. (Community Development Officer)

Body / Physical Dimension

This dimension related to physical or biological well-being, including the self-awareness and self-care of the participants and how they put into practice their knowledge and skills about food and health for themselves and their families. Furthermore, it was about how they were able to manifest a sense of guardianship through practical application such as what food choices are made and what behaviors were undertaken in individual and family lives. Pacific participants certainly had some thoughts in relation to what they hoped to achieve in relation to their physical well-being, as evident in their baseline survey data.

Individual goals included:

- “To stay fit, lose weight, and be off medication” (Participant with diabetes diagnosis)
- “To lose weight and be fit”
- “To lose 10 kg”
- “Be a professional sportsman”
- “Get into the top rugby team in school and achieve my subjects”
- “For my weight to be proportional to my height”
- “Malosi ai le tino, taumafai e faamama le weight”

Perceptions of body type and the language used to convey those shapes and attitudes towards them were also captured in this dimension. Traditionally, larger people and therefore larger bodies in many Pacific societies were a sign of wealth, high status, and health, with their language often reflecting that view.⁶ If you were a good Pacific parent, therefore, you wanted your children and family to be considered healthy (and wealthy) within your own Pacific worldview. Other barriers to achieving goals were identified, including;

- “The cost of fruit and veggies being too expensive”
- “Shift work and eating at the wrong times”
- “Having too much commitment with family and work”
- “Eating junk food, watching TV, and spending lots of time on the computer”

There were many good outcomes for *Aere Ki Mua* participants, including:

- Family members doing regular physical activities together; enjoying and having fun doing zumba and hot hula; playing games, sports, and other fitness activities, including participating in the AKM sports days
- Having more energy (e.g., to walk around the lake, to play sports) and increased fitness level

We have started our walk around the lake on Sundays starting from 6:30 a.m., at least one round within an hour and keep cutting the time back. This week we aim to get it down to 50 minutes. (Samoan Minister – from AKM Advisory Group meeting minutes, 20/10/11)

- More people joining gyms, swimming, and enjoying aqua exercise
- Children improving at their sports with better fitness (e.g., netball, rugby)
- Some people who would normally use walking aids (e.g., walkers) no longer needed them. One Health Committee member said, “It’s really amazing to see that.”
- Better nutrition through eating healthy food, fruit, and vegetables: “We are banning fizzy drinks, smoking and drinking” (Church Minister)
- Weight loss and girth reduction: “I have successfully lost 18 kg since *Aere Ki Mua* started. I was 110 kg and now weigh 92 kg.” (Samoan Minister)
- Lowered blood pressure and better health in general: “Our families have had fewer doctor visits and hospitalizations. We have not had anyone die in our church because of bad health.” (Tongan Minister)
- More people being able to participate in brass bands, which was good for building lung capacity—especially for those people with asthma
- More family members thinking about caring for their bodies “as a temple”—not mistreating it or “throwing rubbish into it,” but keeping them “clean” (e.g., giving up smoking).

Generally, families identified in their baseline survey that the support they needed to achieve their health and weight loss goals included joining sports groups, zumba, cooking classes, personal coaching, aqua exercise, and help with setting up gardens. They also stated that they would participate in training and activities at church venues, meetings, fono, camps, and in online forums such as email and/or Facebook.

Overall, the empowering aspects of the *Fale Lotu* evaluation model were made salient in the *Aere Ki Mua* case.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I aimed to shed light on two streams of inquiry. Firstly, how has evaluation changed for Indigenous peoples? Secondly, do contemporary evaluation processes and contemporary practices allow for alternative views of evaluation?

In terms of the first question, I detailed how evaluation has changed for Indigenous peoples from an empowered and enlightened process of understanding, as detailed in traditional narratives, through to a tool of imperialist oppression. In terms of the second question, I highlighted the challenges of contemporary evaluation from an Indigenous perspective. In addition, I discussed how Indigenous peoples are beginning to overcome the oppressive way in which evaluations have been used to meet the needs of hegemonic regimes. In order to contribute to evaluations as a field of study and practice, I also detailed two models of evaluation informed by Native science and Indigenous ontologies, namely Hakamana and Fale Lotu. In addition, I illustrated the efficacy of these models, drawing on recent case studies which I have been involved in as an Indigenous evaluator. These two models offer insight into the centrality of spirituality in the evaluation process from an Indigenous perspective.

In conclusion, I offer the following thought as shared with me in a wānanga with Tohunga Te Uranga o Te Ra Kingi.

First there is aroha, “unconditional love”; an understanding that all people, all taonga; “treasures—tangible and intangible,” all things share the pathway of life; appreciating that all are connected to each other and all must be cared for in the spirit of love. Then there is a blossoming, a manifestation of the deepest knowledge that allows one’s thoughts to be made known . . . those thoughts, from the deepest recesses of the mind, realised in learning, study and evaluation, in other ways of seeking to know. (Wānanga—Tohunga Te Uranga o Te Ra Kingi, 2008)

NOTES

1. For example, in New Zealand ONE News 22 Sept 2012 news item: *Maori and Pasifika students are lagging behind others at school, national standards data released by the Government suggest . . .*
2. *Fale Lotu* are Pacific words that closely equate to “House of Prayer.”
3. *Fanau* is an ancient Pacific word that expresses many sounds of creation; *ha* the “breath of life” and *wa* implying “time and space” combine to sound the sound *fa*, a special number signifying the foundations of family life; *na* interweaving family relationships with others, and *u* manifesting the realization of

the family's potential. *Fanau* thus speaks of being born, bringing forth, having children, grandchildren, siblings, and extended families.

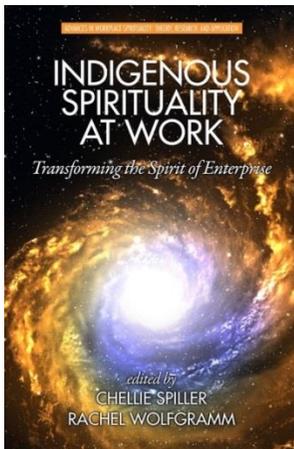
4. See Aere Ki Mua Quarterly Progress Report to 31 March 2012
5. In Tonga, feasts comprise of numerous *pola* made from large coconut fronds and banana leaves measuring several feet in length, loaded high with food. No longer content with single tier *pola*, now people provide two and three- tiered *pola*, the bottom tier laden with meat (e.g., suckling pigs, chickens, and beef) and root crops (e.g., yam, taro, kumara), the second tier with seafood delicacies, and the top tier with a variety of cakes and desserts.
6. In Tongan for example to call someone *sino* is a compliment and implies large, plump, and healthy; however, to call someone *tutue*, meaning thin, unhealthy, and sickly, is not a compliment. Furthermore, the word for slimming down is “fakamahamaha sino” implying the “emptying out of one’s healthy body.”

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Reference Citation:

Wolfgramm, T. (2015). Spiritual Dynamics in Systems of Evaluation: Maori and Pacific Models for Process and Application. In C. Spiller & R. Wolfgramm (Eds.), *Indigenous Spiritualities at Work* (pp. 209-232). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

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