Vision, Verbs and Tipu Ake
Potent Visioning and Program Leadership Tools for growing Living Organisations

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Abstract

What can the exceptional performances of a tiny school and indigenous Maori community in the backblocks of New Zealand teach us about organisational visioning and real world program and project leadership? – Step outside the square and into their rainforest to find out.

An organisation that confines itself to linear analytical processes to define its vision and manage the portfolio of projects it needs to move towards it, can struggle in the real environment of complexity, apparent chaos, interconnectedness, intense competition, change, uncertainty and ambiguity. Too often we treat organisations as a machine and try to micro manage at levels of detail far below the ambient noise levels of our world.

Tipu Ake is a leadership model that can helps us see organisations, teams and individuals instead as living organisms. It helps us learn to surf in the real world's turbulence and manage above its noise levels. It spans almost all the PMBOK / OPM3 knowledge areas, surrounding our conventional project processes with very proactive organisational, project team and individual leadership behaviours that promote communication, teamwork, growth and innovation. It helps extend our traditional project risk management thinking through zero into the positive area of opportunity.

Introduction

In this presentation we will:

- Look from a quite different cultural perspective at those organisms we call projects and how we can use them to make a new future happen. This case study will raise some questions about what leadership really is and suggest ways you can grow your project team's effectiveness.

- Use the Tipu Ake lifecycle to identify those project, leadership, team and organizational behaviours that are detrimental to performance and know how to replace them with much more proactive team empowering actions that encourage innovation (Resources available at www.tipuake.org.nz).

- Compliment our conventional linear PM processes with some more organic and agile tools that allow organizations to clearly describe and communicate their vision, then, by looking backwards get commitment to and lead a program of projects that will deliver real customer outcomes.

Lessons from the rainforest

In 1999 the presenter and other management lecturers from the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) discovered that the tiny Te Whaiti School in a rainforest in the backblocks of New Zealand had self transformed itself in a few short years from an educational disaster to the top of its class.

That sparked an active research project to find out how they did it and to see if their model could be applied to projects in other mainstream organisations.
They had none of the process tools of PMBOK™ or OPM3™, instead they told us "We just did things the best way we know how".

We applied SEI CMM™ Capability Maturity Model thinking and found them operating off the scale – they seemed to add new levels above and below the process level thinking of conventional organisations. Theirs is an oral culture, so in their organisation almost everything is told in stories.

We asked them if we could help them documents their secrets to share with others. They suggested we forget all the flowcharts, boxes and arrows and draw it as a tree growing from a seed in the rainforest, continually interacting with all the other species in its environment. Through their stories….

- They told us about the pests, those negative behaviours that turn us downward and block growth if we do not name and control them.
- They reminded us about the recyclers that turned dead material into compost, finding opportunity even in adversity and death.
- They warned us about the poisons, those enemies within our own minds that sap the courage we need to germinate anything new.
- They sang the praises of the birds, the entrepreneurs of the forest, that pollinate and spread the seeds of new ideas
- They told us about the sun, that external energy and experience that illuminates our blind spots and questions our assumptions.
- They used the rich rainforest ecosystem where all species are highly interdependent to demonstrate what happens when we collaborate and use all our diversity.

They recognise that life is a cyclic, organic and highly interconnected complex system and seem to have found some simple ways of working with it. They concentrate on behaviours: facing the issues, sharing leadership, exceptional teamwork, effective processes, sensing what is happening around them and exploiting their collective wisdom. Most importantly all agreed on the outcomes they sought; "Giving our children the choice to be anything they want in life".

Together we documented the intuitive model that had driven their organisation in a form more understandable and applicable in mainstream organisations. This became an active research programme where we trialled and developed our prototype it as we went on Project Management Workshops at The Auckland University of Technology. http://www.projectmanagement.co.nz and elsewhere.

Tipu Ake – An Organic Leadership Model for Innovative Organisations

Tipu Ake ki te Ora - growing from within ever upwards towards wellbeing is the name they gave it. That tiny word "Ora" embodies the wholistic Maori concept of Wellbeing; a high state of balance with the earth and all its richness that accounts for the past, present and the future. (Perhaps the balanced scorecard and triple bottom line business speak is a first step in this direction with a long way to go)

"The Tipu Ake Lifecycle – A Leadership Model for Innovative Organisations" © 2001 Te Whaiti Nui-a-Toi www.tipuake.org.nz
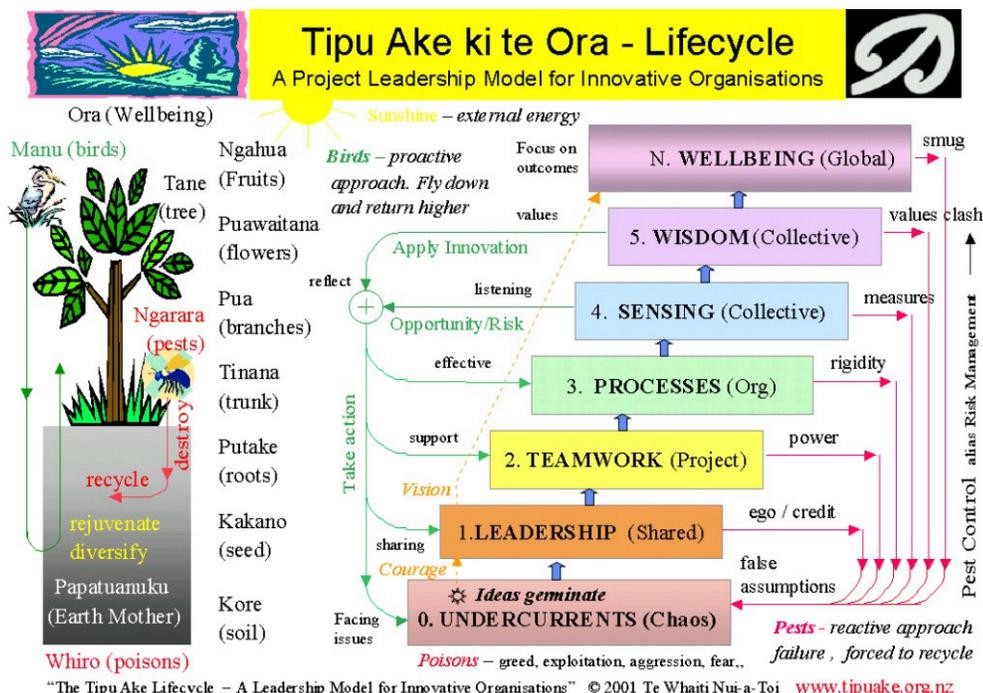
The ground level we call the undercurrents, that exciting place of turmoil and apparent chaos where energy abounds to sustain the germination of new ideas.

It takes courage to go down into the undercurrents and sometimes even more to grow a new idea out of it. Courageous leadership that champions a change attracts a team around it like a magnet, provided they all can agree on the second phase – a common vision of the outcomes sought.

Tipu Ake encourages our team to grow to operate at the higher collective sensing and wisdom levels, above the process level with all its analytical and often contradictory Key Performance Indicators KPIs. Here we keep asking the common sense question, "Is our process effective? Is it taking us to where we really want to go?"

Pest control is the process of naming and controlling those behaviours that would otherwise return our team to the undercurrents. For example; a project hero with a big ego who claims all the credit, keeps a team in the undercurrents; constantly in reactive mode, fighting fires. That becomes a drip feed poison that breads dependency. No one bothers to try anything new, believing they will just get shot down.

By comparison a team that operates in the collective sensing and wisdom level, proactively identifies the issues and deliberately goes down to the undercurrents to resolve them, exploiting all the diversity and strengths of the team to test assumptions. Be a smart bird, get to love going there, go with the flow, harvest ideas in the turmoil and resist for a while the temptation to escape to the supposed comfort of our conventional linear process level thinking; to organise our way out of it. That will follow in its own time.

Implications for Project Managers, Projects, Leadership, Organisations, Teams and Programs?

- **With Tipu Ake decisions are made from a collective sensing and wisdom perspective:**

Imagine you are in a project meeting with all parties involved; all with widely different backgrounds and experiences, bringing information both (factual and assumed) from the area they represent. Now imagine that in this team everyone shares a common vision, openly shares their information whether it seems good or bad, treats each other person with respect, treasures alternative views, celebrates diversity, recognises opportunity, applies innovation, uses effective tools for collaborative decision-making and communicates clearly.

Now ask yourself, could such a team answer the following questions?

1. What is the probability (% chance) that we will deliver the specified project output (deliverable) on time and within budget?

2. What is the probability (% chance) that when and if we deliver this, that it will provides the customer outcomes expected? Will it satisfy the business or other case that justified it being started?

If the answer to both questions were agreed to be close to 100% (or better), everyone's eyes would be sparkling, the project would be going well so we could terminate the project meeting and have a drink!

If probability 1 was dropping, then people would tell us why, we would test this against the knowledge of others in the team and know what additional information we needed to collect and then what actions to take.

If Probability 2 was dropping, then the message is that we are wasting out time going down the current track and if we can't find a way to get back, our team (or its enthusiasm) will start disappearing onto other projects, so we may want to terminate or suspend it now.

The good thing about effective sensing is that it is immediate; we need not wait for reporting to drive action. Groups of people each connected closely to their own diverse environments, networks and knowledge, but with their heads tied together by good communication, create a multi-processing engine of immense power. The team can resolve the problems that our real world of complexity, apparent chaos, uncertainty and ambiguity throws at us. Some call this the ability to "surf on the edge of chaos".

Our first task is to look at ways we can grow a team that knows how to control the pests and poisons that would otherwise prevent it reaching these high levels of performance and give them tools to exploit opportunity.

- **Some Tipu Ake Team Groundrules:**

We distilled some of the sayings and stories that they shared with us into the following groundrules for Tipu Ake style team and leadership behaviour.   They are modelled on the values of their ancestor Toi, a renowned Pacific explorer, sharer and community builder. These are the same values that the school, Te Kura Toitu o Te Whaiti Nui-a-Toi, uses internally and what they aim to instil in their students. Try these with your team:

Sunshine (Te Raa)	*Let the sunshine into our team* - connect with external energy - in networks and old wisdom to test assumptions
N. Well-being Ngahua (fruits)	*When we focus on outcomes, nothing becomes a barrier* - have a clear and agreed vision of why we all are all here
5. Wisdom Puawaitana flowers	*We have no room here for matapiko (stingy) gatekeepers* - share all our knowledge freely, step across boundaries, respect others
4. Sensing Pua (branches)	*Taringa whakaaro, keep our ears [and mind] open* - trust your senses and intuition, check out our own perception against others
3. Process Tinana (Trunk)	*Own our own processes and keep them simple* - make sure we are in control of them, not them over us.
2. Teamwork Putake (Roots)	*We leave all our hats at the door* - don't let external power or agendas destroy our teamwork, build trust , respect
1. Leadership Kakano (Seed)	*A kumara (sweet potato) never calls itself sweet, that's for the eaters to say* - keep individual egos out of the way, share the leadership and credit
0. Undercurrents Te Kore (Chaos)	*Love the undercurrents – surf in the turmoil of our diversity, be positive* - the courage to question self, face issues and grow strengths. Go with the flow
Poisons (whiro)	*The greatest enemy is the one within us, conquer that one and the rest are easy* - don't let personal baggage or past experiences poison our team relationships

All this questions our conventional view of leadership

- **In Tipu Ake Leadership is not equal to "the leader"**

Too often we equate Leadership (Leading people) with Management (Managing things). These are two separate dimensions and if we want real success, both need to be in balance.
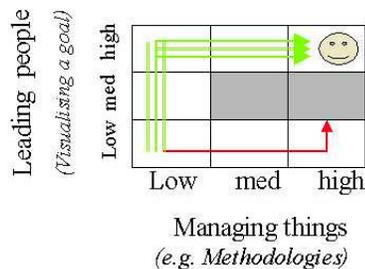
It was interesting to hear at the PMI Global Forum in Anaheim Oct 2004, that the Project Management Institute should change its name to PLI to accentuate the new focus on Project and Organisational Leadership.

Taking a managing things approach alone is a 'no go' path to exceptional organisational performance. We are used to splitting the tasks up and allocating the "Managing Things" work to multiple people operating in parallel – that's what Work Breakdown and responsibility matrixes in PMBOK are all about.

However, the when we talk about leadership, too often we look for only one leader to supply it. With Tipu Ake leadership is not an individual thing, anyone can display and contribute to it.   How often have you been in a team, complete with a Project Manager (maybe you even), where everyone knew the real leadership was coming from others? Why not use this and see leadership as a parallel thing as well

An irony: The most powerful leaders are those who know how to give away their power and recognition!

Much of our organisational activity and the preoccupation of those who claim to manage it are tied up with managing risk. Perhaps we could consider a more positive and proactive approach.

- **Tipu Ake takes us beyond our preoccupation with Risk Management:**

Traditional Project Management focuses on identifying risks (Pests) in the execution phase of a project then reducing their probability and impact. Tipu Ake turns the conventional Risk matrix upside down and encourages us to think beyond the origin into the positive sector of opportunity (Birds), particularly during the initiation phase - opening opportunities early.
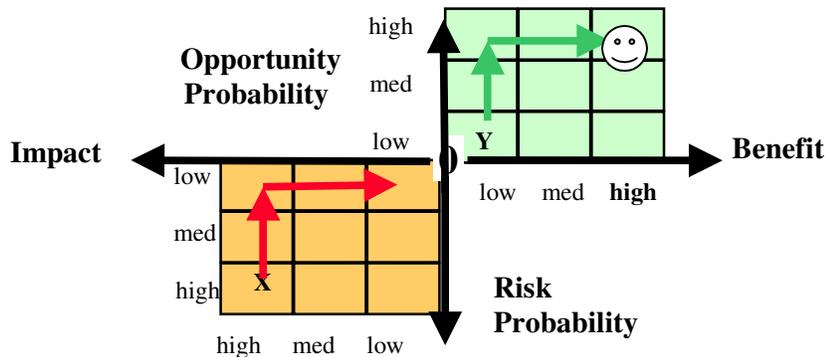
Could we now assess our organisations from this perspective?

- **The Tipu Ake Organisational Self Assessment Tool**.

Tipu Ake is a cyclic model full of loops. We can and should be operating at all levels simultaneously. Don't for one moment confuse this organic cyclic behavioural model with the linear process based approach of conventional Capability Maturity Development Models.

We do the Tipu Ake Organisational Self Assessment using our collective sensing and wisdom. The scale is course (0, 1 or 2) and our own opinion does not count, instead we try to assess how the organisation collectively would respond to the statements by pretending we are a fly on the wall of the cafeteria. The self assessment tool tells us for each of the levels whether we are operating reactively; always responding and fire fighting on the 'pest' side, or proactively; seeking out opportunities on the 'bird' side. Here is an example of the undercurrent level assessment statements: You can download the rest from www.tipuake.org.nz

Answer these questions in sensing mode: put aside your own opinion and sense what the collective wisdom of your organisation would say. (Be a fly on the wall in the cafeteria) In cases of wide disagreement, try to find out what different experiences the other person has that makes their answer to the same question so different.

Model Levels	Behaviours that characterise our organisation's culture (0 = disagree, 1 = agree, 2 = strongly agree)		pests	birds
Poisons		Our growth is blocked: eg by greed, exploitation, aggression, abuse, retribution, dishonesty, put downs, fear		
Level 0	pests	We tend to exclude those people who challenge the established point of view and thus cause conflict		
Undercurrents:		We always like to be ordered and in control with firm targets and a clearly defined path ahead of us		
Kore (unfruitful)		Our new directions mostly come from those who manage the organisation and it' s funding		
	birds	We face issues; often looking outside the square to question our assumptions and gather in new ideas		
		We appreciate our people's diversity, and use all our talent and ideas to address the issues we face		
		We learn from our mistakes or experiences and have the courage to try new things again		
		0. Undercurrent Totals:		

When you do the full self assessment you will find that it forces us to ask some somewhat difficult questions about our organisations vision, so a few tools to help us define this may be useful.

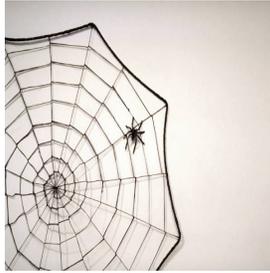# Tipu Ake Organisational Visioning Tools

An Organisation that applies Tipu Ake ki te Ora must start by defining its vision of Ora, the destination state of wellness it aspires to, which in reality will never reach as it changes as we learn more. It then works backwards to breaks this down into outcomes, indicators and projects. This adds some practical tools that support The Natural Step process of backcasting http://au.naturalstep.org/framework/framback.html

Here is an example that was used to initially scope the community sustainability program that was used to pilot and develop Tipu Ake visioning processes and tools. You will see how this has since organically expanded as the program proceeds at http://www.kaitiakitanga.net/projects/index.htm

WELLBEING (ORA): *Where do we want to be?*	OUTCOMES: *What would need to be in place there?*	INDICATORS: How will we know we are close?	PROJECTS: How could we make it happen?
"Our grandchildren will cherish Whirinaki Forest and the culture of its people; thanking us for preserving its richness and diversity for them to share with their grandchildren and all future peoples" *Note that this Nth state of wellbeing is a timeless one, not just the output of our generation's projects.* *For more information on this program including how it is being managed using Tipu Ake principles see www.kaitiakitanga.net*	Kaitiakitanga - responsibility for guardianship is accepted and in place (GUARDIANSHIP)	Others will see Ngati Whare the tangata whenua (local people) caring for the forest and sharing its taonga(treasure/wealth/knowledge)	Re-establish indigenous Maori conservation values and processes Have local people be responsible for local activity in partnership with the Department of Conservation.
	High public awareness of the richness uniqueness and fragility of the forest. (AWARENESS)	Sacred historical places will be identified and respected. Visitors will treat the area as sacred and relish the rich experience of visiting it. Many will put their time and resources behind the projects that preserve and restore it.	Create much richer interpretation, signage, protocols and experiences Establish its status as a international natural heritage area Establish a website that will allow people anywhere to visit and experience its richness – with no environmental impact Grow a "Friends of Whirinaki" support network, and run volunteer projects for river restoration, re vegetation etc.
Another powerful vision of Ora from the Waitaha people: *When we raise our children with the wairua [spirit] to hear the plants grow and open their minds to touch the stars; that is Waitaha. When our gardens cover the nakedness of Papatuanuku [the earth] with the peace of Rongo Marae Roa [God of Peace] and the Kumura [sweet potato] are abundant; that is Waitaha. When the waters are shaped to nurture fish, and birds are plentiful; that is Waitaha. When Arai Te Uru [sharing / trading canoe] sails again and again with Kumura for the Nation; that is Waitaha.. from Song of Waitaha, p133*	The love of Whirinaki and the privilege / responsibility to care for and share it, will be passed by each generation to its (and all) mokopuna (grandchildren's) (LEARNING)	The forest and things related to it will again become a vocation and lifeforce for people living in the valley	Establish Whirinaki as a place of learning - for people seeking to better understand indigenous Maori values in relation to nature and community Start more student projects at / with Te Whaiti Nui-a-Toi School to help them share their knowledge with other schools, young people and the public
	The destructive pests will be under control (PEST CONTROL)	Bird, plant and diverse species populations will again be plentiful Whirinaki will become renowned for the innovative methods of environmental protection developed here.	Establish an ever widening pest control buffer zone around the Whirinaki river basin Develop new pest control methods Combine control of stoats, cats and other pests Establish monitoring and incursion response plans for all pests.
	New, sustainable and very appropriate business opportunities will be exploited to help support this programme (ENTERPRISES)	Other knowledge economy income streams will be feeding the valley People will receive a holistic learning experience and a meeting of minds rather than just day walks Intellectual property will be protected under the UN draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples	Develop new environmental protection processes and expertise for our world Establish a possum fur industry / brand Promote and grow Tipu Ake thinking Run marae learning experience retreats Provide outdoor education opportunities Provide accommodation, tourism, arts

Adapted from that originally published in the 2004 PMI Global Congress Proceedings – Anaheim, California

Tipu Ake – New tools for program management in "Living Organisations"

Organic program management:

The Tipu Ake ki te Ora visioning process, because it is driven from the destination state of Wellbeing (ORA) that we seek, results in many individual project paths that could lead towards this. (Compare with backcasting at www.naturalstep.org)
We make no attempt to limit or prioritise our projects at the start. Instead we emulate nature in the rainforest, which allows all manner of seeds to germinate under, in and even above the canopy, all of which are highly interdependent on all other species in the ecosystem and just waiting for the particular conditions (opportunity) that allow them to grow and flourish. Individual projects do not exist in isolation; they all find themselves as a part of a highly interdependent parallel program where everything is organic. (Others may call this Systems Thinking, Boundary-less Operation. Complexity or Chaos Theory.)

**Compare this with conventional project management:**

In conventional project thinking, we often look at the present situation, find one or more opportunities to solve a problem or to improve something, prioritise those that we want to focus on, then plan to get down to doing it, largely in isolation from everything else that is going on around it in its environment. Projects are run in silos and the focus is on sticking to the plan for each individual project and delivering it's pre-described, tightly specified, "output". The result may be "outcomes" that do not always meet our or our customer's real expectations.

Program teams in a Living World environment:

The school told us "We formed a circle, a very tight circle. We said we will work hard and play hard and the circle will be so tight that if anyone wants to get in they will have to fight to do it. Because we will make sure we succeed and will enjoy ourselves doing it, and what it will create is that other people looking in will say What's happening?, What's Te Whaiti doing? and they will want to come in. That's how we did it - we had ourselves, our spouses and our children and worked it. We played - and it created an environment, and other people started to look, and say; Can I come in for a look? - and that started the ball rolling"
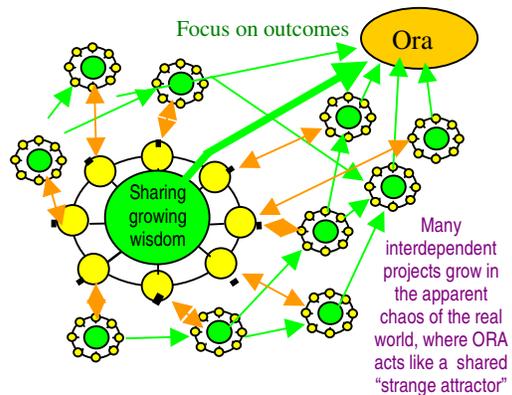
(a) The noses facing inwards team:
example: a conventional "problem solving" project team in a linear (machine like) environment
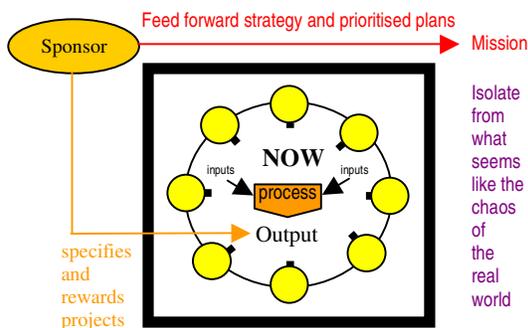
(b) The noses facing outwards team:
example: a program team interacting in a living organisation with many projects and partners

Teams with noses inwards and noses outwards are both appropriate depending on the situation (just as are the Newtonian and quantum theory). If we think with noses inwards we see a program as the algebraic sum of a number of projects, whereas with noses outward thinking a program is exploiting a world of external opportunity with win-win partnerships where progress is unconstrained by our internal resource supply.

Program and Project Roadmaps:

With Tipu Ake we don't talk much about project plans or confuse ourselves with the term Strategic Planning.

Instead we talk about Roadmaps that describe the multiple paths that lead to our destination and focus more on the interdependencies between these activities and the dynamic real world environment we all work in. Milestones on these roadmaps allow us to keep track of where we are up to on each path. All along the route we continually sense opportunities, changes in environment, constraints, and risks, then use our collective wisdom to make decisions that will maximise the "outcomes" the whole program will deliver. Here is an example of a roadmap – perhaps it looks complex and highly interconnected to you. Sorry, that's real life!
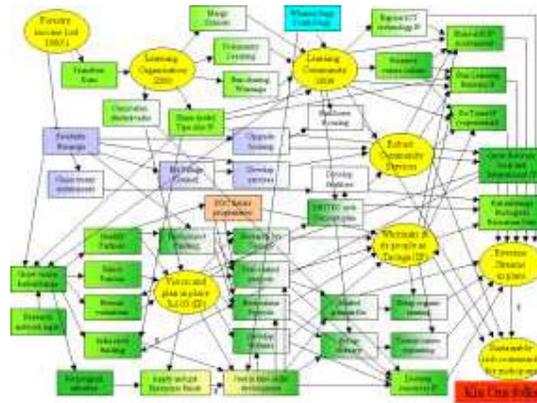
See this Roadmap example in real time at: http://www.kaitiakitanga.net/program/roadmap.ppt

Organisational (Partnership / Alliancing) Process Map:

With Tipu Ake we don't bother drawing organisational hierarchy charts as they put up more barriers and do little to help us understand the processes and interactions needed to implement a complex program. (These also normally put those who provide or control the funding at the top. In Tipu Ake terms money is treated as just another tool like a hammer or a spade, and what is really important are those who put their energy behind it.)

So instead we draw Organisational Partnership Maps, which show the relationship between all parties involved, and what they can each contribute. This allows us to seek the win–win opportunities that will flow from their participation. Central to this is the Maori concept of Ohu - A group of representative volunteers working together with the interests of the wider community and its future at heart.
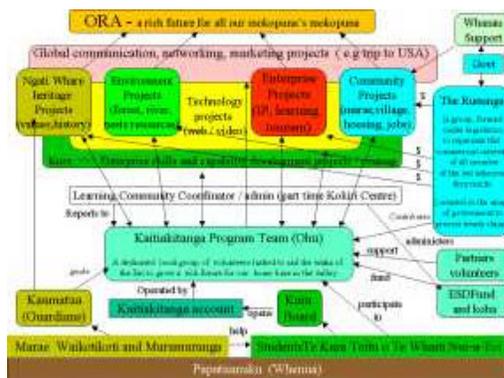

Fig 8:

See this Organisational Map in action at http://www.kaitiakitanga.net/program/structure.ppt

If we look up in the rainforest we see the branches of the trees try not to touch each other, whereas under ground we find a network of microscopic mycorrhyzae (root fungi) that exchange nutrients between all the diverse species and the earth. The most effective collaborative networks seem quite invisible, they are under -ground

The concept of Ohu – going far beyond ordinary project team thinking.

We learnt about this in a historical document Te Whaiti 1950.   http://www.ngatiwhare.iwi.nz/who/history.htm

"The building of a carved house was a job of extreme importance. Tree felling was tedious work, taking a long time with the stone tools they had. Incantations had to be said to appease the anger of the God Tane before the tree was felled. Then the timber had to be manhandled to the site of the house. Neighbouring tribes gathered at the pa to give a hand not only in the felling and splitting operations but also in the carving and building. Food was donated both by those participating as well as the tribes unable to come. It is here that "Ohu" – working together in communal spirit – is seen at its best. Indeed the Maoris are noted as the greatest exponents of Ohu. Their very existence was based on it, and it made them great in their day. Nothing was impossible. The great migration was possible only by co-operation or Ohu; the broad Pacific Ocean became a pond to those explorers of old. They had faith in themselves and their ability to work together; and knowing this all things were possible".

The concept of Ohu was further explained to us by Peter Ruku Te Korako – Waitaha as:

"A specific group taken out of the main group, accepting the responsibility of a big challenge which should they win through, becomes the effort of the group alone - a humbling experience for brave people who will be in deep water right over their heads. You can' t be appointed to it, you must be a volunteer.It is pivotal in advancing the cause of all the people."

Perhaps this leads to a different governance model for running programs in a living organisation operating in a complex and interdependent world, namely:
A circle of volunteers with their noses pointing outwards (see page 7), attracting others to the cause, but making it somewhat hard to get in – entry requiring acceptance of the Tipu Ake team behaviour guidelines (see page 4)

You may note synergies between this and the new form of alliancing contracts that increasingly are being used in major civil construction and similar projects. The alliance can be a team with strong behavioural groundrules but no independent legal status that integrates all parties in a project in a way that allows all to share the risks and rewards. For information on alliancing contracts as they are being applied in Australia and New Zealand (see http://www.pci-aus.com/)

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Conclusion:

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Our world is changing; our industrial age models for organisation structures and leadership may not be well suited for the information age with all its complexity.   In this paper we have considered a different approach:

- Vision – being determined and unified about where we would like to be,
- Verbs – doing the courageous things that will help take us towards it
- and Tipu Ake, a potent medicine that helps us and our teams grow courage from within.

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References:

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For more information on Tipu Ake visit www.tipuake.org.nz where you will find it shared in the public domain for the benefit of all the worlds future childrens. Here you can download the full model, stories, Powerpoint explanatories (in English and French) and its unique conditions of use.

For more stories about growing living organisations http://www.tipuake.org.nz/stories/supporting_stories.htm

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Acknowledgement is by koha, a gift in return based on its value to you.