

An evaluation of the cultural supervision prototype undertaken within the Department of Corrections, Hamilton.

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Disproportionately high rates of offending and recidivism among Māori are well documented. As part of its attempt to better meet the needs of Māori offenders, the Department of Corrections is developing cultural supervision for staff in the Community Probation Service, the Public Prisons Service and the Psychological Service. The aims of cultural supervision include improving staff members' knowledge of Māori cultural values, providing support for staff in managing complex cultural issues, and ensuring safe practice and culturally appropriate behaviour. During 2002, the Māori and Psychology Research Unit was contracted to conduct a survey of current practices in relation to cultural supervision and a process evaluation of a prototype of cultural supervision being trialled in the Waikato among probation officers (Hamilton Area) and sentence planners (Waikeria Prison) (Karapu, Masters, Robertson, Trynes, & Waitoki, 2002). Findings from the survey indicated that most staff had informal cultural support or advice available to them. Usually, this was in the form of Māori colleagues within the Department. Less commonly, support was sought from Māori in other organisations, from knowledgeable non-Māori within the Department, kaumātua and kuia, and whānau members. About a third of Corrections staff were receiving some formal cultural supervision, most of whom regarded it positively. Among other staff, both Māori and non-Māori, there was a high level of interest in cultural supervision, and a view that it would be beneficial to their professional practice. Overall, staff felt that the support and advice currently available to them was inadequate. Findings from the evaluation of the prototype suggested that while many of the participants viewed cultural supervision as important for their job, fewer considered that the supervision they were receiving was meeting their needs. Some experienced non-Māori staff seemed to be resistant to the idea of cultural supervision, feeling that they already knew how to relate to Māori offenders. Māori staff were generally enthusiastic about cultural supervision but wanted it to focus on their personal safety as Māori within a "mainstream" institution rather than on their practice. However, both Māori and non-Māori staff generally felt that the cultural supervision sessions provided a safe environment. The prototype appeared to be a good beginning and the model should be stronger when modified in the light of experience.¹

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Māori have disproportionately high rates of conviction and imprisonment compared to non-Māori (McFarlane-Nathan, 1999). A disparity that has increased over the last 10 years (Doone, 2000). Of particular concern is the high rate of recidivism among Māori (Department of Corrections, 2003).

The Department of Corrections is committed to reducing re-offending by Māori. In recent years, it has implemented several initiatives to improve its cultural responsiveness, including in-service training, the introduction of a measure to assess Māori culture-related needs (MaCRNs), the development of a Treaty of Waitangi Strategic Plan, and the establishment of Māori Focus Units in prisons (Department of Corrections, 2003; Huriwai, 2001). Thus, cultural supervision needs to be seen within the context of numerous efforts to address re-offending among Māori.

Cultural supervision was defined by the Department as a formal process in which staff meet with a cultural consultant who provides cultural support and knowledge to ensure a client's cultural needs are met (Department of Corrections, 2002). It was expected that cultural supervision would lead to:

- Improved interactions between a case worker and his/her clients
- Enhancement of caseworker practice
- Increased organisational responsiveness and effectiveness in service delivery (Department of Corrections, 2002, p.2).

National email survey

At the time the research was commissioned, some cultural supervision was occurring within the Department. Various arrangements were in place, varying in formality and focus. Our first task was to conduct a survey of current practice, in order to determine the extent to which cultural supervision was being undertaken, the content of such supervision, and the perceptions of staff regarding their need for cultural supervision.

Method

We distributed an email survey to staff members in each of the three services of the Department. Within Psychological Services, the survey was sent to all 54 psychologists. Within the Public Prisons Service, the survey was sent to all 80 sentence planners (staff responsible for case planning). Within the Community Probation Service, the survey was sent to a randomly selected sample of 107 probation officers (of a total of 349) and a slightly modified version to all 81 service managers (who, as line managers, were in a unique position to provide an overview of the current practices of their staff).

The survey sought information about the training and experience of staff, the types of cultural support and advice available to them, experience of formal cultural supervision and their perceived need for cultural supervision.

Results

Responses were received from 20 sentence planners (25% response rate), 16 psychologists (30%), 29 probation officers (27%), and 43 service managers (53%), giving an overall response rate of 34%. Respondents were reasonably representative of the staff population in terms of ethnicity (Māori 26%, non-Māori 74%) and gender (male 42%, female 58%).

Provision of cultural support and supervision

The survey revealed that 21% of probation officers, 30% of sentence planners, and 44% of psychologists had experienced formal cultural supervision. Group supervision was more common than individual supervision. Supervision was generally on either a fortnightly or a monthly basis, but for some, it was on an "as needed" basis. Both external and internal supervisors were involved, in approximately equal numbers.

While overall less than one-third of the practitioners were receiving cultural supervision, a much larger number reported using other sources of support and advice to help them meet the cultural needs of Māori offenders. Most commonly, this was a Māori colleague within the Department (see Table 1). By definition, such informal

support and advice is not a part of the job description of the individuals involved. The burden this places on Māori staff is something that may need to be addressed.

Table 1.
Informal Sources of Support Generally Available to Practitioners (n=65).

Role	Number	Percentage ¹
Māori colleagues within Corrections	59	91%
Māori staff in other organisations	36	55%
Knowledgeable non-Māori colleagues	35	54%
Kaumātua or kuia	32	49%
Members of own whānau or family	24	37%
Others	1	2%

*Note*¹: Respondents could give more than one response.

The use made of cultural supervision

The reasons for initiating cultural supervision and the issues typically covered in cultural supervision varied. Among non-Māori, supervision was commonly viewed as an important source of information about Māori cultural practices. For example:

(Cultural supervision) helped me understand aspects of (Māori offenders') presentation better, helped me understand and differentiate between distortion and cultural realities for client, helped me link it to offending behaviours, helped me learn some te reo and generally upped my knowledge base about cultural traditions, principles. (Non-Māori Psychologist)

This was often believed to have been of direct benefit in practitioners' work.

(Cultural supervision) has given me a larger knowledge and resource base to work with. Increased my confidence in my work. Has improved general responsiveness in my work with Māori offenders. (Non-Māori Psychologist)

Some practitioners suggested that cultural supervision provided an opportunity for some staff to review their

own practice and discuss specific cases. An example noted by one practitioner suggests that the issues canvassed at cultural supervision were typically to discuss,

...any cultural concerns that we may have in dealing with clients or any issues that the clients have themselves. Also any clarifications and further information we need to have. (Non-Māori Probation Officer)

Again, this was considered helpful.

It has improved (my) personal confidence to work with Māori issues knowing that there is sound backup if required. (Non-Māori Probation Officer)

While non-Māori practitioners tended to report that cultural supervision increased their cultural knowledge and ability to work with Māori, some Māori practitioners saw it as necessary for their own safety. It provided a place for reflecting on the overlap between personal and professional roles. One Māori practitioner said she had sought cultural supervision to deal with:

Stress (personal and professional) and a strong belief that cultural supervision is an important safety component in my role. Without it I would be suffering from disillusionment. (Māori Probation Officer)

The majority of those who were receiving cultural supervision gave positive feedback about it and considered that cultural supervision played an important role with their work with Māori offenders. This was particularly true of psychologists. However, a third of respondents who had received cultural supervision indicated that it had little or no impact on their practice. Typically, these less positive comments seemed to reflect the practitioner's belief that they were already competent. For example:

Not much, as I believe I was/am already at a reasonable level of commitment and understanding. (Māori Sentence Planner)

The need for cultural supervision

While the informal and formal arrangements described above were generally viewed positively, only a small proportion of respondents to our survey felt that they currently had adequate support and advice to help them meet the needs of Māori offenders (see Table 2). Moreover, there was a strong consensus that having such support available was important: 78% considered it very important while a further 19% considered it important.

Table 2.
Adequacy of Current Support and Advice (n=63).

Rating	Number	Percentage
1. Very adequate	9	14%
2. Somewhat adequate	13	21%
3. Neither adequate nor inadequate	13	21%
4. Somewhat inadequate	12	19%
5. Not at all adequate	16	25%
Mean rating	3.2	

Those staff who were not receiving cultural supervision were asked how useful and relevant such supervision might be to them. The responses indicated a high interest in cultural supervision. On a 5-point Likert scale, three quarters of practitioners expected cultural supervision to be very relevant to their work, and a similar number expected that it would be very useful. In the case of the Community Probation Service, these responses were consistent with those of Service Managers, the majority of whom (60%) rated their staff as only somewhat prepared to meet the needs of Māori offenders. On the whole, only those managers whose team comprised entirely or mainly of Māori probation officers rated their staff as very prepared to meet the needs of Māori offenders.

Evaluation of the prototype

The cultural supervision prototype included a number of objectives that were designed to further staff knowledge and safety in relation to cultural matters. These

objectives (Department of Corrections, 2002) were:

- Building staff knowledge of Māori cultural values
- Providing a supportive context for staff to manage complex cultural issues
- Ensuring safe practice and culturally appropriate behaviour
- Enabling staff to be clear about roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities
- Promoting professional development by building skills, knowledge, confidence, and competence in understanding Māori attitudes, behaviours, and responses to offending
- Providing opportunities for staff to appraise their responsiveness to Māori within their practice
- Supporting staff learning by linking practice to cultural knowledge.

The prototype was trialled with probation officers in Hamilton and sentence planners at Waikeria Prison over a 3-month period. The specific aim of this part of the research was to determine staff perceptions of cultural supervision including the extent to which cultural supervision was perceived as: beneficial, practical, enhancing staff competency, increasing staff confidence and motivation to address their cultural competencies, and the prototype's impact on other areas of supervision.

Method

During the evaluation we observed a sample of group supervision meetings and met several times with the Cultural Supervisor. Towards the end of the prototype phase, the probation officers and sentence planners who had taken part completed a short questionnaire and we conducted interviews with them. Generally, these were group interviews. In addition, we interviewed the relevant service managers.

Of the 39 practitioners involved in the prototype, 26 responded to the survey, a 67% response rate. Of those 26 respondents, 12 were European/Pākehā and 11 Māori, two practitioners selected both categories (Māori and Pākehā), and 1 respondent used the 'other' category to describe their ethnicity.

Results

From our observations, it became quite apparent that there was considerable diversity in the way the supervision groups were functioning. This seemed to reflect their composition in terms of ethnicity and experience. That is, where Māori were in the majority, the supervision sessions were characterised by high levels of involvement and animated discussion. The discussion often focused on participants' own safety as Māori within a "mainstream" institution and on the cultural appropriateness of current practices. On the other hand, in some Pākehā-only groups, especially those comprising of mainly very experienced practitioners, discussion seemed much more restrained. In particular, group members rarely volunteered case-specific information for discussion. In response, the Cultural Supervisor developed a more didactic approach to the sessions, covering important aspects of Māori values, beliefs and practices. For these groups at least, the sessions were much more like training than supervision as that term is usually understood.

General impressions of cultural supervision

Overall, views of the prototype varied quite widely. Some of our interviews elicited very positive comments about cultural supervision while others were quite critical. This diversity seemed to reflect the variation in the way the groups were functioning, as well as differences in participants' expectations of cultural supervision. Summary ratings of the prototype are reported in Table 3 below.

Table 3.
Overall Rating of Cultural Supervision (n=25).

Rating	Number	Percentage
Excellent	1	4%
Very good	8	32%
Satisfactory	11	44%
Unsatisfactory	5	20%
Poor	0	0%

One theme to emerge from the interviews, and which no doubt contributed to the more negative evaluations of the prototype, was a view of the prototype being "imposed from above." This was

probably exacerbated by the fact that the prototype was being trialled while some staff were still coming to terms with the huge changes associated with the implementation of Integrated Offender Management. It became clear to us that some practitioners were simply weary and resentful of the changes they were experiencing. In addition to this generalised resistance to change, in some cases, there was resistance to cultural issues, especially among experienced non-Māori staff, some of whom clearly regarded themselves as being already skilled in relating to Māori offenders.

On the other hand, some Māori practitioners were disappointed because cultural supervision did not deliver what they expected. That is, they were disappointed that cultural supervision was oriented towards offender needs. They had expected it to be oriented towards the needs of Māori staff working within a "mainstream" institution. As one put it,

I thought it was about how we were feeling, because for a lot of us, we are Māori first and then probation officers, but the Department seems to think we are probation officers first, then Māori.

While the ratings reported in Table 3 are not overly positive, in the context of a prototype resented and resisted by a significant minority of staff, the ratings can be seen as a promising start. Moreover, it is worth noting that the cultural supervision sessions were a safe environment for a majority of participants (Table 4), including most of those who gave the prototype a negative rating overall.

Table 4.
Perceived Safety of Group (n=25).

Rating	Number	Percentage
Always	14	56%
Usually	8	32%
Sometimes	2	8%
Seldom	1	4%
Never	0	0%

Impact on practice

A 3-month prototype cannot be expected to have a major impact on practice. Certainly, our group interviews

tended to be dominated by quite negative views about the extent to which cultural supervision was contributing to good practice.

One theme to emerge here was that a significant minority of staff considered that cultural supervision was teaching them things they already knew. Undoubtedly, this was sometimes the case and a reflection of the diversity of life and work experience within the supervision groups. In other cases, it may be naive to accept claims of expertise at face value. For example, one (non-Māori) practitioner who expressed the view that cultural supervision covered old ground also noted that certain Māori phrases used by the Cultural Supervisor “went over my head”. Members of a dominant cultural group are not necessarily aware of what they do not know about non-dominant cultures. This point was made by the Cultural Supervisor in a discussion about our draft report.

Some staff members said (in the draft report) that they have been working with Māori clients for a number of years, but that doesn't actually tell me that they are skilled in working with Māori. All that tells me is that they have worked with a lot of Māori.

A second theme to emerge was that many practitioners believed that cultural supervision would have a limited impact on their practice because what they were learning seemed to be inconsistent with current policy. For example, some practitioners, both Māori and non-Māori, described the protocols for assessing criminogenic needs as an inflexible “tick box” approach which required practitioners to follow a set script. In their view, the assessment process lacked transparency. It was seen as incompatible with whanaungatanga and the establishment of a reciprocal, transparent relationship between practitioner and offender. Indeed, discussions about the cultural appropriateness of processes associated with Integrated Offender Management became a major focus of discussion in some cultural supervision sessions.

More positively, other participants felt that cultural supervision had been helpful in

confirming their existing knowledge. The opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification was valued. Some non-Māori practitioners thought cultural supervision had enhanced their practice by “helping make connections with Māori” and to avoid making assumptions. For example, one participant reported learning

Not to assume anything... that if a person looks Māori they may not identify as being Māori, and if they look Pākehā they may be Māori.

One service manager reported that his team (predominantly non-Māori) had begun to re-evaluate some aspects of their practice. Concerned that the cultural supervision prototype may become “lip service” they were examining how aspects of Māori protocol might be incorporated into daily practice. Examples included, karakia to begin and end meetings, and appropriate welcomes at inductions into group programmes.

Interestingly, while the general tenor of the interviews was that cultural supervision had not really enhanced practice, a more positive view emerged from our analysis of survey responses. Nearly all participants reported that the sessions had benefited their practice in at least some way. These responses are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5.
Extent to Which Cultural Supervision was Considered Beneficial (n=25).

Rating	Number	Percentage
Always	3	12%
Usually	10	40%
Sometimes	8	32%
Seldom	2	8%
Never	2	8%

Future considerations

Our email survey identified a number of ways, both formal and informal, in which probation officers, sentence planners and psychologists were getting support and advice on cultural matters. Typically, staff were relying on Māori colleagues within Corrections. A third indicated that they had experience of formal cultural supervision. While such supervision and other sources of support were valued, overall, staff felt

that they had insufficient support and advice available to them. Moreover, there was a strong consensus that cultural supervision was important and relevant to their work.

It is possible that our survey over-estimated the strength of positive views towards cultural supervision. It is likely that those staff members who did not return our survey form were less interested in cultural supervision and/or viewed it less positively than those who did. Indeed, as a minority of responses indicated, there is at least some resistance to the idea of cultural supervision among practitioners.

This was the context into which the prototype was introduced. It is thus not surprising that among those participating in the prototype there was quite a range of

views as to its value. Negative views seemed to be related to the fact that the prototype was imposed, came at a time when staff were still coming to terms with other changes and, in the case of some experienced staff, a view that they were already knowledgeable. As we have reported, the model of supervision had to be considerably modified in some cases in response to the reluctance of some staff to engage fully in a supervision process.

This is precisely the purpose of a prototype: to experiment and refine a concept before wider dissemination. There were sufficient positive evaluations of the prototype to suggest that as the model develops, it should make a significant contribution to enhancing the Department's responsiveness to Māori offenders.

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