



Article 7

An inclusive digital community

Equity through design

Digital services are a key part of how 21st century New Zealand society operates. Public and private sector organisations are increasingly investing in digital service delivery, and many digital services are contributing to our wellbeing, such as simplifying tax compliance or helping those with newborns access the right support.^{1,2}

Until recently, little attention has been paid to whether digital services and platforms are designed for, and most importantly with, Māori. In general, even New Zealand-based digital services are prioritised, designed and developed from a Pākehā worldview. This does not prevent those services from delivering significant benefits, including to Māori, but it is limiting.

We are only just starting to consider inclusiveness in the way we build our digital community. How can we strengthen digital inclusion through te ao Māori? ➤

By James Clarke



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Māori principles are not cultural adornment, and are not relevant only to digital services for Māori. Instead they should be seen as a way to add richness and value to our whole digital community.

The Digital Inclusion Blueprint

The Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) recently led the development of the Digital Inclusion Blueprint, providing a useful lens on the critical elements needed for all New Zealanders to benefit from digital opportunities. See below a detailed look at the elements.³

The four digital inclusion elements are:

1. **Access** – having access to digital devices, content, applications and services that meet New Zealanders needs at a cost that everyone can afford. This also includes being able to access an internet connection in multiple ways – at work and for leisure.
2. **Skills** – knowing how to use digital technology correctly and for personal benefit.
3. **Trust** – being able to trust what you see and do online, avoid misleading information and knowing enough about technology and platforms to be able to rely on them to perform functions easily and cheaply.
4. **Motivation** – understanding how digital technology can help New Zealanders both personally, but as whānau, iwi, and communities to connect, learn new things, or access information and long-term opportunities. Motivation requires an understanding in order to have a meaningful purpose to engage with the digital world.

We can look at the first element in relation to Māori as an example.

Access

Unequal access to the internet is a real and well-known issue. Māori are less likely to have easy access to digital services than the wider population.⁴

Many iwi, hapū, community and government organisations have spearheaded initiatives to improve digital access and engagement.⁵ These initiatives, such as the Marae Connectivity project partnering with Te Puni Kōkiri, and the Inclusion Blueprint itself, have made some gains in digital access for rural Māori, civic hubs and marae.^{6,7,8} Since the announcement of Government investment in reliable digital access for regional communities in early 2019, further benefits are anticipated for isolated Māori communities, such as increased social inclusion, cultural connectivity and participation by Māori in the wider community.⁹

Although these initiatives have delivered some improvement, service consistency, cost and uptake in rural areas are still challenges.¹⁰ These challenges can cause major problems for both user and agency alike. For example, the Report of the Independent Review of the New Zealand 2018 Census suggested that some communities were unable to complete the Census due to lack of internet access or provisions for Māori and Pasifika families, requiring 'paper packs' of Census documentation.¹¹

Digital inclusion for all New Zealanders will require ongoing investment in access to the internet. Worse, if access is not properly considered in our investment decisions and service design then we risk building a digital community that reinforces current inequities in our society.

Clearly access is an important element. The same goes for skills, trust and motivation. However they tell us more about the individual user and their environment, rather than the nature of digital services themselves.

A more inclusive approach

Though useful, the four digital inclusion elements give us only a partial view. We think there is an opportunity to add Māori principles for a richer and more inclusive perspective. Combined, we can better inform the prioritisation and design of digital services.

Figure 1: Combining Māori principles and the four digital inclusion elements for improving digital products and services

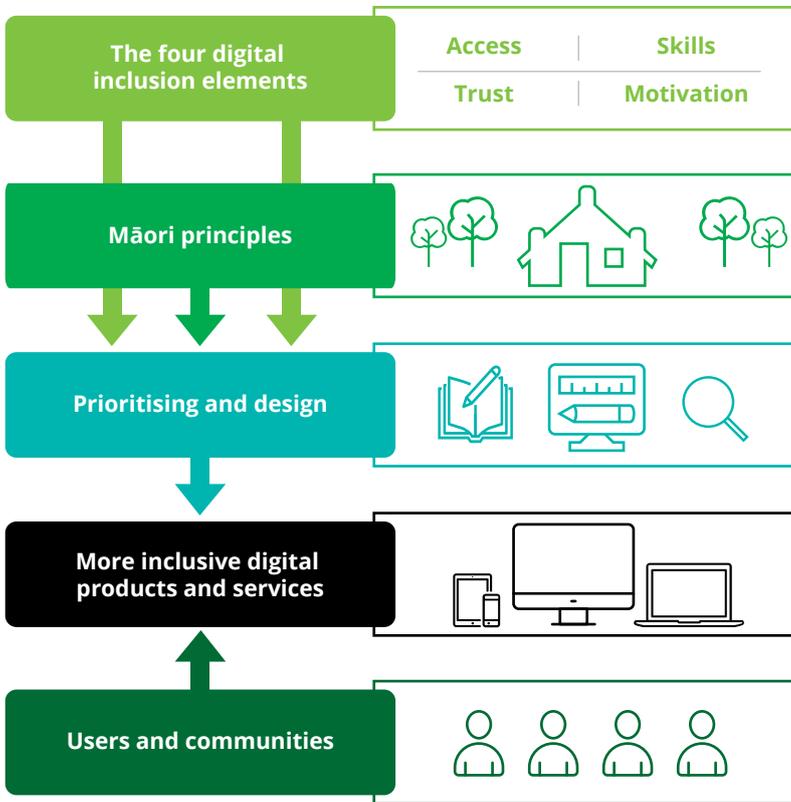
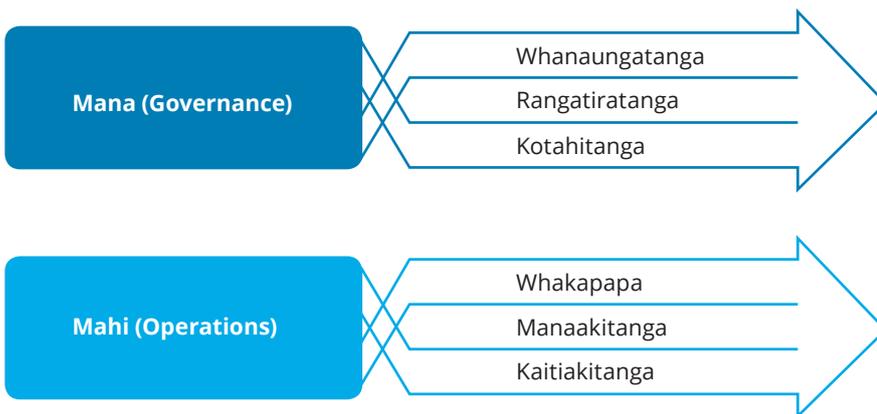


Figure 2: The Mana-Mahi Framework¹³



Innovative solutions

One example of the Mana-Mahi framework in actions is with a Māori-led startup, Āhau. They are looking to bolster Māori digital inclusion through a blockchain solution; finding digital ways to manage identity and access whakapapa, while maintaining trust.

These Māori principles are not cultural adornment, and are not relevant only to digital services for Māori. Instead they should be seen as a way to add richness and value to our whole digital community. Principles such as accountability, stewardship and respect are important to all New Zealanders – and they are well described in the Māori principles.

Te Mana Raraunga has defined Māori data sovereignty principles that we can consider alongside the elements, see Figure 2.¹² Though they are not perfectly complementary with the elements, we think that together the two frameworks provide a good way to make inclusion an explicit part of our digital thinking.

If we can use the combined elements in our prioritisation and design of digital services we could:

- Better elicit customer needs – producing better services for New Zealanders
- Allocate our time and money to the most impactful services
- Identify constraints and dependencies that are limiting our digital community
- Reinforce our Māori heritage, values and language across business and technology sectors
- Create richer and more distinctive digital services and approaches in New Zealand, adding a more valuable perspective to global digital development

Not only will we create better digital services, the way we do it will be more beneficial. We can support the 2019 Wellbeing Budget goal of furthering the aspirations of Māori, while also building a better digital community for all New Zealanders.

Endnotes

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