

## **From Sovereignty to Flourishing: The Universal Transformation Journey of Te Poutama o te Ora**

### **Abstract**

This paper examines Steps 4-9 of Te Poutama o te Ora, the universal transformation sequence that deepens domain-specific sovereignty work into integrated flourishing. Building upon foundational steps (Te Tūāpapa) addressing awareness, authority, and resistance, these universal steps guide individuals through sovereignty reclamation, mastery development, journey honouring, purpose clarification, integrated internalisation, and complete flourishing. Grounded in Māori concepts of mana, kaha, tau (settled ness), and taha Tuakiri (identity as central pillar), the framework provides structured pathways applicable across nine wellness dimensions. This analysis explores how the nine-cycle structure mirrors natural rhythms, how restoration of Tuakiri (identity) serves as the goal, and how the principle “when I am tau, te Ao Mārama is tau” operates as foundational wisdom for sustainable transformation.

### **Introduction**

Sustainable behaviour change requires progression beyond initial practice establishment into deep integration, purpose alignment, and skill internalisation. While domain-specific interventions address wellness dimensions (digital, financial, nutritional), universal transformation principles enable integration across life domains (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983). Te Poutama o te Ora provides such universal framework through Steps 4-9, which deepen foundational sovereignty work into sustained flourishing.

Steps 1-3 establish domain-specific sovereignty: awareness, authority, and resistance capacity. Steps 4-9 universalise this work, providing pathways applicable across all nine wellness dimensions (digital, financial, food/gut, physical, identity/cultural, spiritual, relational, mental/emotional, environmental). This paper analyses the theoretical foundations, practical applications, and transformative potential of this universal

sequence, examining how it positions taha Tuakiri (identity) as central organising principle and tau (settled-ness) as both process and outcome.

## **The Universal Progression: Steps 4-9**

### *Step 4: Te Whakamana i tō Mana (Reclaiming Sovereignty)*

Te Whakamana i tō Mana transforms experimental practices into tikanga (personal protocols). This progression from tentative boundary-setting to confident sovereignty reflects stages of change research demonstrating that maintenance requires identity integration of behavioural patterns becoming definitional of self rather than external impositions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The nine-day sovereignty audit provides structured examination of how each practice entered one's life, what it promises versus delivers, and whether it aligns with authentic values.

The framework emphasises boundary enforcement without apology, addressing socialisation patterns (particularly affecting women and colonised peoples) toward excessive accommodation and justification (Alberti & Emmons, 2017). Authority statements transform from tentative explanations (“I’m trying to...”) to declarative sovereignty (“I am...” or “I do not...”). This linguistic shift represents cognitive reframing whereby identity incorporates new patterns (Kross & Ayduk, 2017).

### *Step 5: Te Taunga Pūkenga (Developing Mastery)*

Te Taunga Pūkenga distinguishes mastery from perfectionism. Rather than complete control, mastery represents skillful navigation of ongoing relationships with wellness dimensions. The five universal mastery domains: awareness, planning, skillful action, systems, and recovery provide comprehensive framework addressing cognitive, behavioural, and systemic factors (Bandura, 1997).

Recovery mastery proves particularly crucial. Research demonstrates that relapse constitutes a normal component of behaviour changes with successful maintainers distinguishing themselves through rapid recovery rather than relapse absence (Marlatt & Donovan, 2005). The framework's recovery ritual (notice, breathe, ground, assess

needs, take aligned action, return without shame) provides concrete protocol preventing shame spirals that typically follow setbacks.

The nine-day deep focus practice leverages sustained attention and power for skill development. Research on deliberate practice demonstrates that focused, sustained engagement proves more effective than sporadic effort for expertise development (Ericsson & Pool, 2016). By dedicating first daily attention to chosen practice for nine consecutive days, individuals develop automaticity while strengthening meta-skill of sustained focus itself.

### *Step 6: Te Whakahōnore (Honouring the Journey)*

Te Whakahōnore addresses cultural tendency toward perpetual striving that dismisses achieved transformation while fixating on remaining growth. This reflects the capitalist logic that constructs individuals as inherently deficient consumers reliant on external solutions (Han, 2015). Honouring practice represents counter-cultural act acknowledging sufficiency and celebrating accomplishment.

The structured reflection comparing current state with initial assessments provides empirical evidence of transformation. Self-efficacy research demonstrates that reviewing mastery experiences significantly increases confidence for future challenges (Bandura, 1997). The nine-day gratitude practice structured across self, support systems, and possibilities created by transformation addresses multiple gratitude dimensions shown to increase wellbeing (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

### *Step 7: Te Kaupapa (Clarifying Purpose)*

Te Kaupapa shifts focus from compliance with external standards toward alignment with authentic values and purposes. This progression reflects self-determination theories emphasis on autonomous motivation as crucial for sustained behaviour change (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The framework distinguishes between purposes imposed by systems (productivity, consumption, conformity) and authentic purposes emerging from values inquiry.

Crafting Kaupapa statements provides clarity regarding values, larger purposes served, non-negotiable boundaries, and wholistic vision. This structured articulation enables evaluation of whether current practices genuinely serve stated purposes or represent vestigial compliance. Research on implementation intentions demonstrates that clear value-behaviour linkages significantly increase follow-through (Gollwitzer, 1999).

### *Step 8: Te Tū Rangatira (Standing in Power)*

Te Tū Rangatira addresses power embodiment not merely intellectual understanding but somatic experience of sovereignty. Body-based cognition research demonstrates that physical experience significantly affects psychological states and decision-making (Niedenthal et al., 2005). The framework encourages noticing bodily sensations accompanying boundary-setting and sovereign choice-making, using these sensations as a compass for future decisions.

Crucially, the framework distinguishes between standing in personal power and extending that power for collective benefit. This reflects indigenous collectivism whereby individual flourishing serves communal thriving (Durie, 1998). Practices include calling out manipulation when witnessed, sharing sovereignty learnings, supporting other, boundary-setting, and strategic organizing for systemic change. The Rangatira commitment formalises intentions regarding power use.

### *Step 9: Te Ao Mārama (Living in Full Flourishing)*

Te Ao Mārama represents integrated flourishing whereby wellness feels natural rather than requiring constant effort. Characteristics include ease (automatic choices), presence (full engagement), integration (dimension supporting whole life), contribution (capacity to support others), peace (challenge navigation without overwhelm), and purpose (clear alignment). This aligns with wellbeing research that increasingly distinguishes meaning-based outcomes from those pleasure-based (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

## **Taha Tuakiri as Central Organising Principle**

Te Poutama o te Ora positions taha Tuakiri (identity) as central pillar (Pou Tokomanawa) supporting and supported by all other wellness dimensions. This structural positioning reflects both Māori worldview and contemporary identity research demonstrating that coherent self-concept proves foundational for psychological wellbeing (Erikson, 1968). When identity fragments, all other dimensions suffer; when identity strengthens, all dimensions find support.

The framework identifies colonisation's primary harm as identity fragmentation. Digital platforms curate identity for engagement maximisation rather than authentic self-expression (Turkle, 2015). Economic systems measure worth through productivity and consumption rather than inherent value (Kasser, 2002). Food systems disconnect individuals from tacit knowledge through processed convenience (Pollan, 2008). Each dimension's reclamation ultimately serves identity restoration.

The principle "when I am tau, te Ao Mārama is tau" encapsulates this understanding. Tau denotes settled-ness, balance, peace; not as a passive state but as active grounded-ness in self-knowledge. When identity is whole (not fragmented across competing demands and manipulations), one experiences settled-ness that radiates outward. External circumstances need not change for internal peace, though internal peace frequently catalyses external change through clarified decision-making and boundary maintenance.

## **The Nine-Cycle Structure and Natural Rhythms**

The nine-step structure mirrors multiple natural cycles: lunar phases (approximately 29.5 days), traditional Māori time-keeping through the Maramataka, and universal symbolism whereby nine represents completion before new beginning. This cyclical framing contrasts with linear progress narratives that depict transformation as a one-directional movement from deficiency to achievement (Brown, 2015).

The framework organises nine steps into three trinities: Steps 1-3 (recognition and establishment), Steps 4-6 (reclamation and grounding), Steps 7-9 (integration and embodiment). This triadic structure appears across wisdom traditions recognising that transformation requires multiple passes at deepening levels (Campbell, 1949). The

spiral metaphor proves to be particular for individuals to return to familiar territory with increased capacity and understanding.

Maramataka integration throughout the framework acknowledges energy fluctuation across lunar phases. Rather than imposing constant productivity expectations, the framework encourages aligning activities with natural capacity variations. Research on biological rhythms demonstrates that honouring circadian and ultradian cycles improves performance and wellbeing compared to rigid schedules (Foster & Kreitzman, 2004).

## **Discussion and Implications**

Steps 4-9 of Te Poutama o te Ora provide comprehensive universal framework deepening domain-specific sovereignty work into integrated flourishing. The progression from practice establishment through sovereignty reclamation, mastery development, journey honouring, purpose clarification, power embodiment, and complete flourishing addresses multiple transformation dimensions while maintaining cultural grounding.

The framework's positioning of taha Tuakiri as central organising principle distinguishes it from interventions treating wellness dimensions as separate domains requiring independent management. This holistic approach aligns with indigenous worldviews emphasising interconnection while finding validation in systems theory demonstrating that complex systems require attention to relationships between components rather than components in isolation (Capra, 1996).

The emphasis on recovery mastery rather than relapse prevention represents sophisticated understanding of behaviour change processes. By normalising setbacks while providing concrete protocols for rapid return, the framework reduces shame that typically follows lapses while building resilience (Neff, 2011). This proves particularly important for populations carrying intergenerational trauma whereby shame operates as primary barrier to healing (Brave Heart, 2003).

For Māori specifically, the framework provides culturally grounded transformation pathway honouring traditional knowledge while addressing contemporary challenges. The integration of concepts like mana, kaha, tau, tikanga, and Rangatira within evidence-based behaviour change methodology exemplifies cultural adaptation that

maintains integrity while incorporating useful approaches from other knowledge systems (Durie, 2004).

Future research should examine framework effectiveness across diverse populations and settings. Longitudinal studies tracking individuals through complete nine-step sequences across multiple dimensions would illuminate sustainability patterns and identify optimal sequencing. Investigation of whether collective versus individual implementation affects outcomes could clarify community support roles. Additionally, examination of how taha Tuakiri strengthening affects other dimensions would test the framework's theoretical model empirically.

## **Conclusion**

Steps 4-9 of Te Poutama o te Ora provide universal transformation pathway deepening domain-specific sovereignty into integrated flourishing. Through sovereignty reclamation, mastery development, journey honouring, purpose clarification, power embodiment, and complete flourishing, individuals develop capacity for sustained wellbeing across life dimensions. The framework's positioning of taha Tuakiri as a central pillar and 'Tau' as both process and outcome reflects sophisticated understanding of how identity coherence enables sustainable transformation. As individuals and communities navigate increasing complexity, frameworks like Te Poutama o te Ora offer crucial pathways for reclaiming sovereignty, developing mastery, and living in te Ao Mārama, the world of light, consciousness, and full flourishing.

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