



te ara
hihiko 
by tuanz

The Unfiltered Truth: Building Courage, Dismantling Barriers, and Unlocking the Potential of Aotearoa's Rangatahi.

A report created by the Te Ara Hihiko programme of the
Technology Users Association of NZ. November 2025.

Contents

Page 3 ... Introduction

Page 6 ... Chapter 1: The Strategic Imperative

Page 8 ... Chapter 2: Beyond the Stereotype

Page 10 ... Chapter 3: How Current Industry Practices
Reinforce Exclusion

Page 12 ... Chapter 4: A Roadmap for Change

Page 15 ... Chapter 5: The Transformation to Authentic
Connection

Page 18 ... Chapter 6: Call to Action

Page 20 ... Conclusion: Foresight for the Future

Introduction

Te Ara Hihiko is the name of the TUANZ member initiative, previously a member working group. Te Ara Hihiko was established to actively support members' goals of encouraging more Māori and Pasifika talent to pursue careers within the digital technology sector of Aotearoa. The name Te Ara Hihiko, was gifted to the mahi with 'Ara' meaning path or passage and 'Hihiko' meaning energy, to be inspired, lively. Simply, a kaupapa centred around creating pathways and connections, to inspire and energise rangatahi right through to the decision makers within our digital sector of Aotearoa.

This roopu has held a number of in person hui with TUANZ wider member organisations over the last 18 months. Attendees have been cultural advisors, HR managers, senior operational managers, senior executives and general people leaders who all have a passion for closing the digital divide and equity issue still facing Māori and Pasifika at all stages of their education and employment journey within the digital technology sector.

These hui identified a number of concerns and questions:

- Mis-conceptions and and lack knowledge of the wide variety of opportunities in the digital industry and in digital roles in the wider business sector
- Lack of awareness around the various accessible study and employment pathways
- Are the hiring processes in our organisations from interview to induction safe and culturally inclusive and appropriate
- Are we providing the right level of support to our Māori and Pasifika staff; and
- Is there fair and equal growth opportunities to continue to thrive once employed

At the end of 2024, the roopu identified the need to hear directly from rangatahi on these concerns and issues rather than making assumptions that may be incorrect. This could only come through direct engagement with rangatahi (youth).

To achieve this, we partnered with Pukekohe High School to identify a panel of rangatahi to work with. We specifically asked for up to 10 Māori or Pasifika rangitahi that were mid-stream students, who had to this point shown no interest in a career in digital technology. This panel commenced meeting at the beginning of term two in the 2025 school year and finished in the third week of the final term of the year. The engagement was guided by the whakataukī, "Mā te kimi ka kite, mā te kite ka mōhio, mā te mōhio ka mārama!" (Seek and discover, discover and know, know and become enlightened!), the mission, along with our own understanding of it, shifted dramatically.

The Te Ara Hihiko Rangatahi Panel uncovered that the core challenge preventing youth from considering a future in the tech sector was a profound, "emotion based" feeling of exclusion, mistrust, and emotional risk. They did not feel the sector was 'uncool', instead it was deemed 'unsafe'. Progress going forward, demands that we move past superficial solutions or quick fixes, we must rebuild and reimagine what's broken, and create a culture founded on understanding, trust, and safety.

The purpose of this report is to provide industry leaders, stakeholders, and TUANZ members with a clear strategic roadmap for change. It advocates for a fundamental shift in approach: away from marketing-based initiatives that speak at youth, and towards trust-based, culturally responsive engagement that builds psychological safety with them. By truly listening, we can move beyond our flawed assumptions and begin the necessary work of building a sector that is not just innovative in its products, but in its people.

This report was written utilising the Google AI Tool, NotebookLM to query various input sources including informal notes from all meetings of the panel, presentations, and audio recordings from key sessions.

Final writing and editing was done by Megan Matthews, Chair Te Ara Hihiko and Craig Young, CEO of TUANZ.



The Te Ara Hihiko Panel visit to BNZ Auckland Head Office on Tuesday 21 October 2026. Speaking to the group is Jo McNaughton, Head of Māori Colleague Strategy at BNZ.

Chapter 1: The Strategic Imperative

Accurately diagnosing the root cause of youth disengagement is of strategic importance. Flawed assumptions lead to ineffective strategies, wasted resources, and the perpetuation of the very barriers we seek to dismantle. Most of the Aotearoa tech sector has suggested that the problem is a lack of interest or awareness among our rangatahi –a perception that technology is simply "uncool." This section dismantles that long-held belief by presenting direct evidence from rangatahi and their whānau. This feedback reveals that the primary barrier is not one of appeal, but of perceived emotional and cultural risk, framing the sector as a profoundly "unsafe" space.

The Starting Point: An Industry That Feels "Scary and Unsafe"

When asked for their unfiltered perception of the tech and digital sector, our panel of rangatahi provided "visceral and deeply negative" descriptions. The core finding is that the sector is perceived as fundamentally "**unsafe**," "**unwelcoming**," and a place where they would feel "**too vulnerable**". Organisers were "stunned by the intensity of this feedback," realising they had been operating under a false assumption: " we've been thinking it was boring... no, they have a really strong negative, heavy perception of our industry". This deep-seated negative perception is reflected in four key themes:

- **Hostile Culture:** Students described an environment that is "scary," "condescending," and "competitive". They anticipated a culture where people would "just talk down to you" and "act above us".
- **Exclusionary Imagery:** The sector is imagined as being "Full of city slickers," "smart white people," and "white collared men". This creates a powerful impression that it is a "male dominant field" and lacks diversity, making Māori and Pasifika youth feel they "**wouldn't be wanted**" and that there is "no support" for people who look like them.

- **Isolation and Limited Scope:** The work is perceived as "isolating", "stressful", "unhealthy" and "exhausting," often limited to "coding and gaming". This is reinforced by media imagery of "people in a bunch of cubes".
- **Lack of Support:** Underpinning all these perceptions was a deep-seated belief that they would be unwanted and unsupported. They expressed a feeling that there would be "no support" and that, ultimately, "people won't want to help us."

Before opportunities can be showcased, the industry must first dismantle this fundamental fear, shifting focus from awareness campaigns to **prioritising psychological safety**.

The Whānau Barrier: When Technology is Stressful

Parental and whānau perceptions are critical influences on a young person's career choices. This mahi uncovered that many families do not only withhold support due to a lack of awareness around the sector, but also due to having an **active negative association** with the industry.

- **Negative Association:** Whānau see the tech sector as "Part of the household stress" and "part of the bill pressure," associating it with being "expensive".
- **Loss of Trust:** Technology companies are often linked to negative consumer experiences, such as "people that will cut my service and connection," creating a visceral association with financial and service stress. This mirrors the stress associated with the "energy sector that might cut their power".

This creates a powerful negative cycle within households, passed on from generation to generation. The industry is seen through the same lens as a utility company, generating a visceral association with entities like **"the energy sector that might cut their power."** The core analytical finding is stark: **"Whānau won't support what feels stressful."** They feel technology companies hold "too much power over their household". To ensure rangatahi receive the essential support they need during their decision-making phase, the industry must strategically pivot to rebuild trust and reframe its identity—from one associated with stress and service cuts to one seen as empowering and full of opportunity for parents to guide their children toward.

Chapter 2: Beyond the Stereotype

A superficial understanding of youth motivation is insufficient for designing effective support and recruitment systems. To truly engage with rangatahi, we must move beyond corporate platitudes about "passion" and "ambition" and appreciate the powerful dual forces that shape their decisions. This section explores the complex interplay between their powerful personal aspirations and the significant, often crushing, external pressures they navigate daily.

Aspirations and Ambitions: Breaking Stereotypes and Building Pride

The students are driven by a powerful set of intrinsic motivators that fuel their desire to succeed and challenge the world around them.

- **Desire for Knowledge:** A core driver is the simple, powerful desire to gain knowledge and acquire new skills.
- **Competitive Spirit:** Several students are motivated by a competitive spirit and the "thought of winning and succeeding."
- **Challenging Perceptions:** A profound mission for many is "to show them that Māori and Pasifika can be anything," actively working to break negative stereotypes.
- **Family Pride:** A near-universal motivator is the deep-seated desire to make their families proud and validate their support.

Real-World Pressures: Financial Contributions and Family Obligations

Contrasting these personal aspirations are the heavy external responsibilities many of the students carry, which add a layer of urgency and consequence to their career choices.

- **Financial Burdens:** It is a stark reality that some students "are or will be financial contributors to their home," placing immense pressure on them to secure stable employment.
- **Family Expectations:** Several feel the weight of meeting "older siblings standards" and the duty to ensure that "family sacrifices" are not made in vain.
- **The Need for Stability:** For one student from a single-parent household, the pressure is so acute that she might "not go to university because of the financial pressures," forcing her to prioritize a "decent job somewhere" over personal exploration.



The Te Ara Hihiko Panel visit to Google's NZ Head Office on Tuesday 21 October 2026. Speaking to the group is Steve Smith, Education Programme Manager NZ

Chapter 3: How Current Industry Practices Reinforce Exclusion

Good intentions are consistently sabotaged by biased and outdated systems. While the tech sector may genuinely seek to attract diverse talent, its traditional recruitment and interviewing processes often act as systemic barriers that disproportionately screen out the very Māori and Pasifika rangatahi it claims to want. This section deconstructs how these conventional practices reinforce the perception of the sector as an exclusive and unwelcoming space.

The Broken Gate: The CV as an Inequitable Measure of Potential

The foundational tool of modern recruitment—the Curriculum Vitae—is a significant and inequitable barrier. The core message from facilitators and youth alike is that a CV should never be the sole judge of a candidate. A poorly written resume is far more likely to reflect a lack of resources and support than a lack of potential. As one facilitator noted:

"A CV might look s*** doesn't mean the person is. It might mean that they lack that support system to make something look marketable and flashy. Doesn't mean that they're not going to be your best employee in 12 months time."

Furthermore, these paper-based evaluations are susceptible to unconscious bias, where candidates are often dismissed based on their name or perceived gaps in their employment history, filtering out promising individuals before they even have a chance to connect.

Cultural Blindspots in the Interview Process

The standard interview format represents another critical systemic failure, as it is often blind to crucial cultural nuances.

- **Misinterpreting Respect as Disengagement:** As one example highlighted, Pasifika youth may appear "shy" or "disengaged" during an interview. An uninformed interviewer might interpret this as a lack of confidence or interest, when in fact, the candidate is demonstrating a culturally ingrained sign of respect for authority.
- **The Bias of "Selling Yourself":** The expectation that a candidate must aggressively "sell themselves" is a Western corporate norm, not a universal value. For many Māori and Pasifika youth, this practice is not culturally ingrained or acceptable. A standard question like, "Why should I pick you?" can be ineffective and culturally biased, penalizing those who demonstrate humility and collective identity over individualistic self-promotion.
- **The Hidden Inequities of Interview Preparation:** An often-overlooked barrier is the lack of accessible support systems to help rangatahi prepare for interviews. Without guidance on how to interpret job descriptions, research companies beyond the listed role, or understand expectations around professional dress and communication styles, candidates may be unfairly judged as unprepared or uninterested. These gaps do not reflect a lack of ability or motivation, but rather an inequity in access to social and professional capital—further reinforcing biased hiring outcomes.

These practices actively sabotage stated diversity goals. To make meaningful progress, the industry must move beyond these broken systems and adopt a new model of engagement founded on trust, not judgment.

Chapter 4: A Roadmap for Change

These findings have profound implications for employers. The standard corporate onboarding process—a "module online tick box"—is wholly inadequate for a new hire who is waiting for their first paycheck to help keep the lights on at home. A young person navigating this complex web of personal ambition and external obligation cannot be treated as just another employee. True support requires a holistic approach that acknowledges and accommodates this reality. It means building systems of pastoral care, providing mentorship that extends beyond job tasks, and fostering a workplace culture where it is safe to be a whole person, not just a potential asset.

However, even if an organization understands these motivations, its own standard practices and in some cases limited approach to diversity may be actively preventing these talented individuals from ever getting through the door.

The Internal Landscape: Headwinds to Progress

Professionals within TUANZ member organisations tasked with equity work face significant internal and external challenges, as revealed through a series of hui facilitated by Te Ara Hihiko.

- **Sentiment of the Mahi (Work):** The work is described as a complex mix of "Rewarding," "Complex," "Stretched," and "Exhausting". It is also seen as "Tricky" and "Developing".
- **Operating Environment:** A majority of respondents (83%) feel the current wider political environment for achieving equity goals is "Getting more difficult". While 55% feel they have management support, they noted "it takes effort to maintain".

- **Identified Barriers:** Key challenges include resource scarcity (funding and time), organisational hurdles (constant change, and leadership's fear of failure), and "Incredible opposition to anything Māori".
- **Personal Challenges:** Māori and Pasifika employees are often expected to carry the weight of cultural representation in their workplaces, resulting in feelings of tokenism, overload, and burnout. When initiatives designed to support them are repeatedly cut due to changing strategic priorities, it signals to staff that the industry's commitment to diversity is superficial rather than sustained.

Actionable Insights: A Direct Call for Systemic Change

The students and facilitators offered clear, actionable recommendations for employers seeking to genuinely engage, retain and nurture diverse talent.

- **Prioritise Psychological Safety:** The primary goal of all youth engagement must be to address and change the perception of the sector as "unsafe" and "unwelcoming". This must precede any focus on career pathways. Employers and recruitment partners need to focus on building genuine connections rather than simply "ticking the box"—including by rethinking how and where they first meet or interview candidates, ensuring these interactions take place in environments that feel open, comfortable, and non-corporate. Thoughtful, tangible gestures—like welcome gifts (e.g., notebooks and pens) or event tickets (e.g., Warriors tickets which "blew their mind")—can reinforce the message that **"this brand supports this kaupapa"** and demonstrates genuine investment and want of authentic connection.
- **Rethink Recruitment and Value Transferable Skills:** Employers must expand their approach and look beyond desirable industry experience during recruitment. Skills gained in roles like food service (customer service, organisation, handling money) directly translate to essential business skills. The advice is to **"think about the skills that come with where they've worked"** and assess candidates holistically.

- **Simplify Communication and Be Approachable:** Job descriptions should use simpler, more accessible language so potential candidates don't rule themselves out unnecessarily.
- **Take Corporate to Community and Collaborate:** Implement initiatives that allow industry leaders and employees to engage with the work on the ground, within the communities they wish to serve. The sector must also actively unify efforts, as a cohesive, collaborative approach creates a more powerful and sustainable impact than multiple, disconnected programmes. Reducing duplication of work and instead learning from and refining what has already been done by our peers.
- **Prepare Industry Representatives:** Any industry professionals engaging with rangatahi or Māori and Pasifika candidates, whether it be as mentors or employers, must be properly briefed and prepared to ensure every interaction is a positive, welcoming, and confidence-building experience.



The Te Ara Hihiko Panel after graduation with Megan Matthews, Chair of Te Ara Hihiko.

Chapter 5: The Transformation to Authentic Connection

This chapter focuses on the successful methodology of the Te Ara Hihiko programme, which systematically dismantled negative assumptions by focusing on building emotional courage.

The Breakthrough Moment: It Was Never About the Facts

The pivotal insight emerged when students were asked what support they needed to prepare for their graduation from the Te Ara Hihiko rangatahi panel, where they would present their feedback in person to the TUANZ member community. Every single student privately wrote down the same answer: **"self-confidence"**. This was a "massive revelation" for the sector.

This confirmed that their needs were primarily "emotion based" rather than "fact-based". They were not lacking information; they were lacking the internal belief, trust, and sense of safety required to step into unfamiliar environments. The goal shifted from providing information about technology careers to actively building the inner belief and courage needed to consider pathways outside of what they know. As one participant noted, "it took me a lot to go to the first te ara hihiko meeting but if I didn't, I wouldn't have the courage to go to the next meeting".

The Three Big Lessons: A Toolkit for Building Your Inner Strength

The Te Ara Hihiko journey was built around core life lessons that helped students transform their self-perception and unlock their potential.

Lesson 1: Get Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable

Genuine growth happens when you step into situations that feel awkward or challenging. The programme used continuous, supportive challenges, such as icebreaker speech games and charades, designed to put professionals and students alike in "uncomfortable positions" repeatedly. Over time, rangatahi came to understand that nerves and fear are normal parts of growth, and that trying something new leads not to failure, but to confidence and self-belief.

- **The Core Philosophy:** The principle is that "a big part of being successful is giving things a crack and not worrying about failing, worry about trying".
- **Student Summary:** "**You need to be comfy with being uncomfortable, that's where the most growth happens**".

Lesson 2: Your Voice Has Power

Building confidence involves mastering communication in all its forms: verbal, written, and body language.

- **Finding Presence:** For teenagers, understanding body language is crucial in coping with this stage of life where they are still exploring their identity, social roles, and self-confidence. At this age, much of their communication is still developing—they may struggle to express thoughts or emotions clearly, and they are highly sensitive to how others perceive them. Through practical activities, students discovered how posture and facial expressions significantly affect first impressions—communicating confidence, interest, and professionalism long before a single word is spoken. By becoming aware of their body language among other versions of communication, rangatahi can better understand how they react in social situations and the signals they unintentionally send. This awareness allows them to adjust their non-verbal cues to communicate more effectively, connect with others, and express themselves clearly. At the same time, it builds confidence, reducing anxiety in new or challenging situations and helping them engage more authentically.
- **The Power of Asking:** The transformation was perfectly embodied by one of the students, Sina, who, despite being initially incredibly shy and quiet to the point where she would whisper when talking, found the courage during a corporate visit to ask the CEO of TUANZ a direct, challenging question: "Why did you want to advocate for Māori and Pasifika?". This demonstrated that having self-belief means having the courage to ask important questions and share your perspective despite fear and nerves.

Lesson 3: Turn Up and Back Yourself

This lesson focused on commitment and self-belief. Students consistently committed to difficult after-school sessions on Tuesday and Friday nights 4 to 6 p.m choosing to invest in themselves.

- **Commitment and Self-Worth:** They turned up, even when tired or facing home pressure, making a powerful commitment to their own worth and development.
- **The Message to Peers:** The core message from the students is: **"To back yourself... to prove to your employers and even to yourself that like you can do anything you want to do if you just go for it,"** and "You have to take every opportunity given and TURN up for yourself".

The Transformation: From Exclusion to Aspiration

Through authentic exposure (site visits to BNZ, Google, Spark) and internal confidence building, the negative perceptions were systematically dismantled. The profound shift from alienation to aspiration is a powerful outcome.

Initial Perception (Before Programme)	Evolved Perception (After Programme)
Unwelcoming; people will "talk down to us"	A recognition of "how welcoming the space is"
Lacked diversity; "no job growth available for modern Pasifika"	The powerful experience of seeing "so many modern Pasifika" in professional roles
Limited to "coding"; "isolating" work	An awareness that there are "so many pathways" and that "We can be creative here"
The sector felt "unsafe and unhealthy"	"There is space for us and we're wanted!" and "I can see myself here"

Chapter 6: Call to Action

Understanding the problem is not enough; meaningful change requires decisive and collective action. The insights gathered from the rangatahi and the success of the pilot programme provide a clear, evidence-based direction for progress. This section presents a strategic roadmap for industry leaders, TUANZ members, and any organization committed to building an inclusive and sustainable talent pipeline for the future.

Redesign Recruitment for Cultural Responsiveness

Companies must fundamentally overhaul their hiring processes to assess true potential, not just 'perfect on paper' potential. This means looking beyond industry experience and learning to "think about the skills that come with where they've worked," including non-paid roles they may hold within their culture, churches and/or communities. Interview methods must be adapted to be culturally safe and inviting, moving away from a rigid reliance on aggressive self-promotion, which is not a universal cultural norm.

Move from Corporate Outreach to Community Immersion

Authentic connection cannot be built from a boardroom or marketing pack. The sector must "take corporate to community" by creating meaningful opportunities for leaders and employees to engage with mahi on the ground. Participating in community-led initiatives fosters genuine understanding of the future workforce and builds trust far more effectively than traditional school visits or career expos, which often unintentionally reinforce existing power dynamics and rely on one-way communication rather than genuine engagement with young people who need to be seen, heard, and understood before they can truly connect with your opportunity.

Prioritise Psychological Safety in All Engagement

The primary goal of all youth engagement efforts, including those involving young adults, must be to tangibly change the perception of the tech sector as "unsafe." This should be the lens through which every interaction is planned and executed. This can be achieved through thoughtful gestures that demonstrate genuine investment and care. As the pilot programmes showed, tangible gifts like **drink bottles and pens** and experiences like **Warriors tickets** that "**blew their mind**" had a powerful impact, sending a clear message that "this brand supports this kaupapa" and that the young people are valued. For many rangatahi, who have felt overlooked by corporate or institutional spaces, these acts demonstrate authenticity and follow-through or proof that words about inclusion are being matched by action. This builds trust by showing commitment in a way that feels personal and relational, not transactional, helping young people see the industry as something that sees them in return.

Prepare Industry Representatives and Unify Sector Efforts

No interaction should be left to chance. Any industry professional engaging with rangatahi as a panellist, mentor, or host must be properly briefed to ensure every touchpoint is positive, welcoming, and confidence-building. This is especially important because the "usual" person chosen to represent an organisation—often someone senior, highly technical, or accustomed to corporate environments—may not be the best fit for connecting with young people. Without cultural awareness, empathy, or an understanding of how to communicate in a way that feels authentic and relatable, well-intentioned interactions can unintentionally create distance or reinforce power imbalances. Choosing the right people—those who can listen, connect, and reflect the values of manaakitanga and genuine engagement—is key to building trust and ensuring rangatahi feel seen, respected, and inspired rather than intimidated.

At the same time, the sector must collaborate to unify its disparate initiatives. A cohesive, collective approach will create a more powerful and sustainable impact than multiple, disconnected programmes working in isolation. Committing to these actions is not simply about corporate social responsibility; it is a strategic commitment to building a system that can finally unlock the immense potential of the next generation.

Conclusion – Foresight for the Future

The path to attracting and empowering the next generation of Māori and Pasifika talent is not paved with slicker marketing campaigns or a more polished social media presence. It requires the deeper, more meaningful work of dismantling fear and building a foundation of genuine trust. The core challenge facing the Aotearoa tech sector is not that it is perceived as "uncool," but that it is perceived as "unsafe"—a world where diverse youth feel they do not and cannot belong.

The insights shared by the rangatahi in these programmes are not just feedback; they are a strategic roadmap. They show us that by prioritizing emotional safety, modeling vulnerability, and engaging with the whole person, we can systematically transform fear into aspiration. Their journey from viewing our sector as an intimidating space to seeing it as a welcoming environment with real opportunities is a powerful testament to what is possible.

The courage of these rangatahi is not a finding to be noted, but a mandate for action. We have a strategic and moral responsibility to build a system worthy of their potential, securing a more vibrant, diverse, and innovative future for everyone in Aotearoa.

The Te Ara Hihiko rangatahi panel's final advice to their peers is a powerful message for the industry itself:

"Take every opportunity given to you... just go for it and be more open minded to everything. Like you could find something you love for the rest of your life. Even if you didn't think that would be your thing."

By committing to authentic, emotion-focused engagement and addressing the systemic barriers identified in Chapter 2, we have the responsibility and the opportunity to build a truly inclusive, welcoming, and vibrant technology sector for the next generation in Aotearoa.

TUANZ: Championing a Brighter Digital Future for every New Zealander

The Technology Users Association of New Zealand (TUANZ) is the voice of technology users in Aotearoa New Zealand. Established as a not-for-profit organization, TUANZ acts as the independent group representing the interests and needs of individuals, businesses, and organizations as they navigate the evolving technology landscape.

Our membership encompasses a diverse range of technology users, from small businesses and innovative startups to large enterprises and public sector entities. This broad network connects those who utilise technology to achieve their goals, fostering a community dedicated to understanding, adopting, and maximising the benefits of digital tools and services.

TUANZ plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between technology providers and end-users. We work collaboratively across sectors, engaging with government, industry, and the wider community to ensure that technology deployment and policy decisions are user-centric and contribute to a thriving digital ecosystem for all New Zealanders.

Our focus is on empowering technology users through education, advocacy, and the facilitation of meaningful connections. We strive to ensure that New Zealanders can confidently and effectively leverage technology to enhance productivity, innovation, and overall quality of life. We provide a platform for an informed and influential user voice, advocating for policies and practices that support positive technology outcomes for our members and the nation.

[Join us in our mahi here.](#)



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