

INVESTING IN CULTURE – THE 4TH BOTTOM LINE

Business can promote and learn from indigenous culture; thereby creating economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits. **Rodger Spiller** and **Chellie Lake** report on the New Zealand experience with Maori.



Dr Rodger Spiller and Chellie Lake undertake ethical investment research through Rodger Spiller & Associates and the New Zealand Centre for Business Ethics and Sustainable Development. Chellie's Maori tribal affiliation on her mother's side is Ngati Kahungunu, from the east coast of the North Island of New Zealand.

At the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development New Zealand (NZ), Prime Minister Helen Clark called for the global community to add a fourth pillar, the cultural, alongside the economic, environmental and the social pillars of sustainability. Maori leader Tahu Potiki, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Ngai Tahu – NZ's third largest tribe with over 30,000 members – spoke at the indigenous peoples' gathering at the Summit and both there and in New Zealand has argued for extension of the triple bottom line to the quadruple bottom line.

Clark and Potiki reflect the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) report from the Summit that called for a world convention to 'protect and revitalize traditional knowledge coming from local and indigenous communities, leading to the protection and recognition of natural and indigenous territories that have for generations and centuries been the core of wisdom and knowledge on the natural environment and its sustainable use.'

MAORI CULTURE AND THE BUSINESS CASE

These concepts can be informed by New Zealand's indigenous culture, Maori. Learning from Maori can benefit the international community, including business. There is significant untapped potential to harness the power from Maori insights to add additional value to the way businesses have conventionally approached concepts of business ethics and sustainable development.

Maori culture is characterised by spiritual and social values of generosity, sharing, caring and service. It is an oral tradition in which knowledge is passed through dialogue. Hundreds of years of practice of these values and a unique approach to

dialogue offer another rich dimension for businesses seeking to be more values-based.

However, this also requires that Maori culture and people are vibrant and successful. Sobering social statistics indicate that the culture may be under threat:

- Maori unemployment is 12 per cent
- Over 50 per cent of the prison population are Maori
- A Maori woman is ten times more likely to be in jail, and a Maori male over seven times more likely to be in jail
- Maori have three times the risk of gambling problems.

Such statistics could be improved by bringing these people back to their culture. To assist this process business can employ and promote Maori people. They can also encourage Maori language through training and development programs. Indigenous employees can also better enable the business to attract and retain indigenous customers. The case extends to building stronger relationships with other indigenous community stakeholders. Business sustainability is also enhanced through greater insight into environmental stewardship provided by Maori.

This can counter the concern expressed by Potiki that globalisation 'can devour micro-entities not out of malice but out of mass and momentum'. He is wary of the potential for multi-national business and consumerism to overwhelm Maori culture, and so contribute to the reduction of cultural biodiversity. By focusing on localisation and moving to 'glocalisation', business may answer some of the criticism of globalisation.

ENCOURAGING MAORI LANGUAGE

In 2002, paper mill, Norske Skog, won The Top 200 New Zealand Business Ethics Award for its leadership in providing learning and development opportunities to its employees through Te Whare Ako (The House of Learning).

Historically, employees at the mill, 45 per cent of whom are Maori, were recruited primarily for their physical and practical capabilities. But 16 per cent had reading difficulties, 25 per cent had maths difficulties and 25 per cent had writing difficulties. Employees had low educational self-esteem and a fear of learning and assessment.

In 1994, the company embarked on strategy to become internationally competitive. The challenge was to design a process that brought new educational opportunities and learning to adults and that treated them with dignity and respect.

An on-site learning centre was created to reach into every part of the paper mill and has helped staff gain nationally recognized qualifications, supported a shift in company culture and resulted in cost savings for the company. The National Centre for Workbase Literacy & Language, Workbase, initiated Te Whare Ako and continues to manage the centre on a contract basis. Te Whare Ako offers the option of tuition and assessment in Te Reo Maori or English and recognizes employees' tribal affiliations.

The curriculum was identified through a formal needs analysis and included literacy, numeracy, computing, enabling (communication, presentations, assertiveness), Te Reo (Maori language), health and safety. The results were dramatic. In 1995, there were 100 learners, in 1997 there were 400 and in 1999 there were 700 learners. The project was 100 per cent company funded (\$300,000 p.a.).

Commitment from senior management has been integral to what has become a case study of a successful learning centre respecting and encouraging indigenous culture. The social and cultural benefits extend to parents reading with children in Te Reo Maori.

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Phone penetration averages only 84 per cent in Maori homes, with some areas as low as 25 per cent. Maori families are less than half as likely as non-Maori to own a computer at home. Only 35 per cent of Maori have ever used the internet.

Wairoa Dot Com is a partnership between the local community, central government and business including New Zealand's largest listed company Telecom New Zealand. It bridged the digital divide in one of New Zealand's lowest-income regions, in the predominantly Maori rural township of Wairoa on the east coast of the North Island.

The communication facility provides a wide array of training and 'connectivity' services within a 24-station community centre. It is structured and operated as a revenue producing business

with a goal of economic sustainability.

A Wairoa Dot Com case study was produced by the Boston Consulting Group and presented to the World Business Council for Sustainable Summit and at the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE AND THE INDIGENOUS CULTURE PERSPECTIVE

Westpac Banking Corporation held a series of stakeholder dialogues in major New Zealand centres recently in a process that invited 130 stakeholder entities to provide their views on how the bank could fulfil expectations of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Westpac described the forums as addressing their need for a 'social license to operate' which 'ultimately depends on the goodwill of the community'. The undertaking of a performance review with regard to CSR was the result of 'growing understanding of the responsibilities we have as a large corporate, not only to shareholders but to society as a whole'.

The Auckland forum included discussion about the importance of the bank's relationship with Maori. Expectations were expressed about steps the bank could take to strengthen this relationship.

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CONSENSUS BUILDING

Maori have a spiritual relationship with the environment and resources. Waste Management NZ, as one of New Zealand's leading providers of waste and environmental services have taken steps to build consensus with local Maori in Wellington. The company's subsidiary, Living Earth, is a composting operation, which diverts and utilizes the organic components from the overall waste stream.

A key feature of the consenting process for the Wellington composting plant was consulting with the Maori communities of the region, and negotiating on a range of significant cultural issues relating to the composting of biosolids. The first issue was whether it was acceptable for

composted human bodily waste to be applied on land on which food would be grown. Another question was whether the re-establishment of a natural, composting cycle would be more in harmony with Maori traditions and beliefs than the alternative: namely, to dispose of the biosolids in the Owhiro Valley landfill.

These are vital questions for Maori, and Living Earth facilitated dialogue within and between the communities involved. A key characteristic of Maori culture is the process of consensus decision-making. While a range of viewpoints was advanced during the debate, all the Maori groups involved eventually decided that they would not object to the biosolids composting plant.

GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP

The New Zealand government is taking a lead role in encouraging the 'fourth pillar' by including this in its Sustainable Development Programme of Action, published earlier this year. The programme features a set of operating principles for policy development that require government to take account of the cultural consequences of its decisions, as well as the economic, social, environmental impacts. These principles include respecting cultural diversity and working in partnership with appropriate Maori authorities to empower Maori in development decisions that affect them.

At a local government level, legislation introduced this year requires councils to plan and work on the basis of the 'quadruple bottom line' approach and undertake quadruple bottom line reporting – considering social, economic, environmental and cultural impacts.

New Zealand's foundation document, the Treaty of Waitangi, set in 1840 and enshrined in the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975, codifies the relationship between the Crown and Maori. John Tamihere, whose portfolios include Associate Minister of Maori Affairs and

Associate Minister of Commerce, described the progress and potential for Maori: 'We've got an international, indigenous network that marvels at what New Zealand has done... Over the next 10 years, Maori will own an increasing share of New Zealand's natural resources, its lands, forests and fisheries. Ownership of these resources, if managed properly, will ensure economic



development of Maori that will bring increasing security. Economic development is the key to accessing better health, housing, education and business opportunities. It will also underwrite Maori culture.'

Tamihere added: 'Already we have seen marked improvement in Maori economic development in the last decade. Maori commercial assets were worth more than \$5.2 billion in 2000, mostly concentrated in the primary industries of farming, forestry and fisheries, with significant Maori investment also in property and tourism. Maori economic success stories exist in almost

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every business sector, from primary production to IT. So the situation I see Maori in – or hope to see Maori in – in 10 years is one of greater equality, vitality, prosperity, success and participation'.

The Treaty of Waitangi principles of Kotahitanga (Partnership), Kaitiakitanga (Protection) and Urunga-Tu (Participation) provide guidance, not only for government but also for business, about the potential for a profitable partnership with the indigenous culture. These case studies show that business can learn and benefit from incorporating culture in their business development and management process.♣