Creative Counting: What makes an Indigenous business Indigenous?

Diane Ruwhiu

PhD candidate, Otago University

Nga Pae O Te Maramatanga Doctoral Stipend

Introduction

Tensions in Characterising Indigenous Business

Theoretical Framework

Characterising Indigenous Business

Conclusion
Introduction

• **Research proposition** - improved Māori firm performance and sustainable advantage are not merely an outcome of economic activity, but are also a corollary of the value derived from combinations of distinct Māori socio-cultural resources and capabilities.

• The question *What is a Māori business?* inevitably draws attention to the question *What makes an Indigenous business Indigenous?*

• **Dominant organisational research paradigms** perpetuate a world view that alienates and disassociates many indigenous communities (Bishop, 1996; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2003) … *Pale reflection* of Indigenous reality – romanticised or idealised vision.

• **Bourdieu’s examination of practice** - Māori business cultural field and habitus – relationship between social, cultural and economic forms of capital.
Tensions

• **Broad spectrum** of Māori business – definitions ranging from the criterion of ownership – style of governance – underlying Māori values (Durie, 2003).

• **Privileging of dominant interests**, - misrecognition and reproduction of social inequalities through institutional arrangements and policy development (Bourdieu 1977).
  – **Policy**: creating a set of criteria which perpetuate hierarchical and formalistic criteria for authority, representation and accountability (Burrell and Morgan 1979; Bryman 1989; Bishop 1996).
  – **Identity**: bound up in criteria set by definition, denying whakapapa, romanticising, homogenising, essentialising.
  – **Practice**: access to resources, (in)validation of practices and competencies not considered to be mainstream.
Theoretical Framework

- Bourdieu’s ‘Theory of Practice’ - a useful lens to examine Maori business practice enabling a multifaceted analysis suited to the pragmatic logic of an Indigenous worldview.

- Recognise the intertwining roles of society, culture and economy.

- Notions of cultural fields, habitus and forms of capital.
Māori world view through the lens of Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986; Mauss, 1970; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Said, 1993; Sahlins, 1999)

Institutional arrangements, iwi corporations, runanga, marae, whanau, custom, norms, etc..

Cultural Field

Informs practice

Habitus

Forms of capital

Identity, values, attitudes, etc..

Collective relations, koha, utu, reciprocity, matauranga and mohio, taonga, mana, financial investment, etc..
Characterising Indigenous Business

- Maintaining the integrity of the Indigenous world view
  - It falls to the agents that practice within the cultural field to identify and define what it represents.
  - Acknowledge multiplicity and complexity inherent in Indigenous business
  - Recognise the temporality of the field – practice is modified over time.
  - Take into account broader social concerns and the implications for Maori business
  - Indigenous paradigm requires an Indigenous methodology

- The Kaupapa (guiding principle) of the business
  - What the business does, how it does it, why it does it that way

- What is the purpose of definition?
  - Need to acknowledge and understand the role (measurement, advising policy, research) and its limitations
Conclusion

• **Defining Indigenous Māori business** – simple, but not easy! The question of **what is a Māori business** can only be addressed by understanding the characteristics of **what makes an Indigenous business Indigenous**.

• **Understand tensions and limitations** evident in identifying Indigenous business.

• **Characterising Indigenous business** in contemporary conditions requires researchers to ‘unshackle’ themselves from mainstream paradigms and embrace creative, innovative and new experiences in research and analysis.

• Bourdieu’s ‘Theory of Practice’ provides a framework for **examination of practices**, and in doing so **field** and **habitus**, insight towards understanding and characterising Indigenous businesses.