



AUGUST 21, 2018

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What social enterprises in Aotearoa can learn from Māoritanga

Steven Moe and Wayne Tukiri | Guest writer
Opinion

Social enterprise is a global phenomenon but, write Steven Moe and Wayne Tukiri (Tainui, Ngāti Whaawhaakia), New Zealand should be using Māori cultural practices to better understand what social enterprise is – and what it could be.

Until recently, not many people knew what a social enterprise even was. But in the last few years there's been a growing awareness of companies that pursue "for purpose" objectives beyond the traditional profit motive. Often, these companies are able to reinforce and grow the communities they operate in, often meeting social needs which might otherwise have resulted in state-sponsored intervention or social programmes. Simply put, they do good.

While the term 'social enterprise' itself is relatively new, the fundamental concepts behind it are not. We are still at the early stages of the growth of the social enterprise sector here in Aotearoa. What better time to think about how Māoritanga – Māori culture, practices and beliefs and way of life – can help flavour our particular recipe?

By examining some of the key principles of Māoritanga, we can better understand what social enterprises are – and what they could be.

Here are some examples:

Kaitiakitanga

Kaitiakitanga is the guarding of treasures and the concept of reciprocity and giving back. When creating a social enterprise it is vital that the purpose is well defined,

understood and articulated for others. That purpose then needs to be closely guarded so that there is not a slow creep away from the core values in the midst of either success or failure – either extreme lends itself to a reframing of what the entity stands for. Keeping a sharp focus on the purpose of a social enterprise is a discipline: guarding the treasure.

Mōhiotanga

Mōhiotanga is the sharing of information, the building up of knowledge, and the provision of new information and strategies. In order for a business to succeed there is a lot of information which needs to be absorbed – and this is particularly true of social enterprise, which challenges the traditional way of doing things. The early days of a social enterprise are critical as the right structures are chosen, the team is assembled and the vision cast.

Tuakana/Teina

Tuakana/teina refers to relationships between older and younger people, and in particular the experienced helping those who are less experienced. This is reflected in many social enterprises with community elements where more experienced people work alongside – and support the career growth of – those who have less experience.

Manakitanga

Hospitality, kindness, generosity and support. The process of showing respect and care for others directly relates to the altruistic and community focus of social enterprises. Often these social enterprises exist to meet some need in society through the business operation itself – for example, the type of person who is employed or the kind of product made.

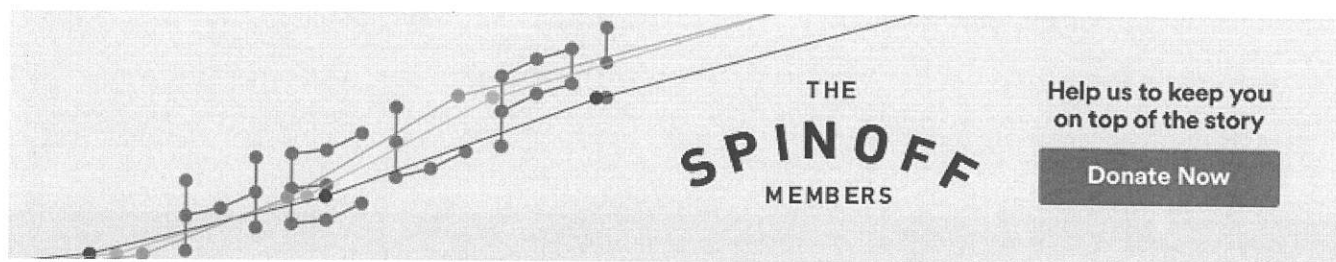
Wairua

Wairua is spiritual well-being that involves a connection to our whenua (land), ngahere (forests), moana (sea), maunga (mountains) and awa (rivers). Many social enterprises consider natural resources and how they use them (or don't). From the first, they focus on their impact on the environment and how they can operate in a sustainable way.

Mātātoa

Mātātoa is the Māori concept of being fearless, courageous and energetic. In a similar way, social enterprises need to be open to embracing new and innovative ideas that generally go against an established way of doing things. They often challenge the

inbuilt assumption that a business is all about making a profit as they strive to also fulfil their purpose, which is usually the real driver.



Social enterprises have a unique opportunity to do something different here in Aotearoa; embracing the perspectives of Māoritanga and understanding their full breadth and impact could help us achieve just that. Instead of doing things the same way as every other country, we should try a new way of operating. The result could be a truly homegrown version of social enterprise which acknowledges and learns from our own rich cultural heritage and embraces it fully as a means to explain what we do and why we do it.

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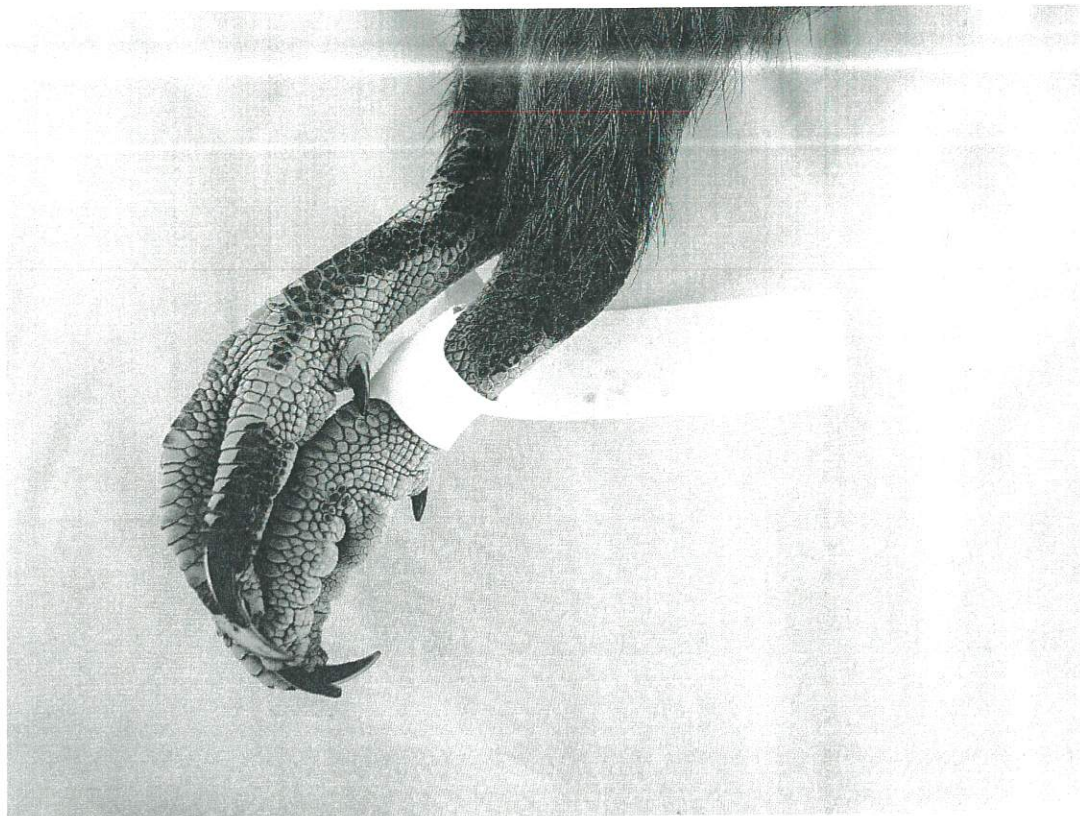
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