

## **An Exploration of Cross-Cultural Differences in Time Orientations between Maori and European New Zealanders**

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### **Abstract**

In New Zealand, the interplay between Europeans and the Māori, create a unique dynamic with respect to time perspectives. With the rudimentary understanding of similar time orientations shared by cultures in the same geographic cluster, we can preliminarily acknowledge that the temporal orientations of European New Zealanders and the indigenous Māori will be different. In this paper we explore the concepts of sociocentricity and non-linear dimensions of time among Maori and propose differences between these two groups based on their cultural backgrounds. Ultimately, this discussion should promote increased cross-cultural understanding within New Zealand and promote smoother interactions.

# **An Exploration of Cross-Cultural Differences in Time Orientations between Maori and European New Zealanders**

## **Introduction**

Time is a common research topic in cross-cultural studies, international business, and the social sciences. It is a basic dimension of both national and organizational culture that provides clues about the values and norms of that culture. According to Hall (1981), time is part of a “silent language” that gives meaning to people and their behaviours. Knowledge and understanding of how time is divided, scheduled, and utilized provide these insights and can inform outsiders’ interactions with that culture.

At the national level, research on time generally supports the assertion that time perspectives in western, industrialized cultures are significantly different than those of developing, less industrialized cultures (Brislin and Kim, 2003; Hall, 1981; Levine, 1997). At the same time, researchers have found that organizational culture differs (Smircich, 1983). As organizational culture differs, so do perspectives on time (Schein, 1983). These two different levels of analysis can greatly inform international business activities. We believe that countries, such as New Zealand, which have a large, multicultural centers of business, such as Auckland and Wellington, offer intriguing possibilities for investigations of time perceptions. Furthermore, the distinction between the New Zealand European (Pākehā) and indigenous Māori peoples provides for an additional comparison that could be very valuable for domestic New Zealand business practices.

Several different dimensions of time have emerged out of research on time as a construct. Some of the more salient dimensions include Clock vs. Event time, Punctuality, and Pace of Life (Brislin & Kim, 2003; Levine & Norenzayan, 1999; Schriber & Gutek, 1983). These dimensions in particular come to the surface in cross-cultural interactions because they help to define cultural values and perspectives. We believe that these dimensions in particular have significant implications for international business. This paper starts to examine some of the cultural differences that create distinctions between Pākehā and Māori, particularly along the clock vs event time dimension.

At the level national culture, it is generally posited that a given culture has an orientation on each of these dimensions that give it a unique composite time orientation. Sometimes, it can be generalized that cultures from the same geographic region share the same time orientations, but such is not always the case. With some exceptions, North America, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand often cluster together on multiple dimensions of time. Conversely, South America, Africa, and the South Pacific Islands constitute another cluster. Smoother cross-cultural interactions can arise from an understanding of a given culture's time orientation and the resulting behaviours that might be accordingly expected.

In New Zealand, the interplay between two different cultural groups, the Europeans and the Māori, create a unique dynamic with respect to time perspectives. With the rudimentary understanding of similar time orientations shared by cultures in the same geographic cluster, we can preliminarily acknowledge that the temporal orientations of European New Zealanders and the indigenous Māori will be different. We examine the aforementioned dimensions of time and propose differences between these two groups based on their cultural backgrounds. Ultimately, this discussion should promote increased cross-cultural understanding within New Zealand and promote smoother interactions.

With each different dimension, we can ask some questions that get at the core of each time orientation. Not only do the answers to the questions reveal one's own orientation or the collective orientation of members of a given national culture on a specific dimension, it also helps to promote awareness of the difference in time orientations that exist cross-culturally. We now turn to these time dimensions to examine them in greater detail.

### **Clock vs. Event Time**

With respect to the difference between clock vs. event time, the question we can ask is: Does the clock and scheduled appointments govern one's appointments, or does the natural flow of events dictate behaviour? If people make appointments and organize their schedules according to pre-

designated times, they are said to operate on clock time. Conversely, if people organize their time around events and their natural flow, they are said to operate on event time. Generally, it is argued that more industrialized cultures operate on clock time, while less industrialized cultures move on event time (Brislin & Kim, 2003).

As a whole, New Zealand falls into the clock time category. However, this categorization should be more representative of European New Zealanders. Māori, as an indigenous culture, are likely to be more event time oriented. In our view two core aspects of their culture underpin a Māori cultural imperative towards event time. One feature is an essential tendency to defer to social relationships over personal aspirations, or what Love (2004) has called ‘socio-centricity’. The second is what some have referred to as a ‘past time orientation’ that is, the tendency to see situations, events, and people as comprehensible only in relation to the events and relationships that precede them (Barlow, 1991). In the next section, we explore these concepts in more detail.

### **Sociocentricity and Māori conceptions of time**

Sociocentricity refers a cultural tendency to give primacy to group interests over individual interests and is generally associated with collectivist cultures (Benedict, 1946; Nakane, 1970). While contemporary Māori society are culturally diverse (Durie, 1994) sociocentric values underpinned pre-colonial Māori society and the associated cultural beliefs and practices (tikanga Māori) that permeated Māori social institutions (Love, 2004).

These values need to be understood as emergent from traditional Māori social and economic organisation which was essential communal and comprised small communities organised according to three main social groupings: whanau (family units), hapu (sub-tribes), and iwi (tribes) (Williams, 1994). As Walker (1990) explained, whanau were a vital social unit within Māori society and harsh living conditions meant whanau were interdependent (Ramsden, 1994; Selby, 1999). The survival of each iwi relied upon mutually beneficial relationships between whanau, hapu, and tribe as the collective efforts of many families were required to successfully plant, harvest, and gather food

(Biggs, 1960; Liu & Tamara, 1998; Pere, 1982). Moreover as inter tribal warfare was a feature of political life commitment to whanau and hapu loyalties provided more protection and greater chances of survival for families when required to defend themselves from invading tribes (Walker, 1990). As a corollary, like other communally orientated cultures, Māori social expectations cohered around fairly clearly mapped out obligations to whanau and hapu (Best, 1924; Smith, 1948). Even in the present day many aspects of Māori social etiquette are designed to promote group harmony rather than personal independence and individuality. In testimony to this, several lines of research demonstrate core pre European values and beliefs remain remarkably consistent throughout Māori society although the social and economic circumstances that maintained these values have changed (Houkamau, 2006; Liu & Tamara, 1998; Statistics New Zealand, 2001).

Of relevance to the current discussion, Māori value orientations consistent with a preference for event time include: a priority given to the regulation of debts and repayments; deference to social status and authority figures and the completion of tasks according to the right processes rather than strict time frames. Activities held on traditional Māori meeting places (or marae) provide a useful illustration of how these values manifest in practice. In contemporary New Zealand each Māori tribe have their 'own' marae. These remain distinctively Māori cultural spaces and serve as a focal point for conducting tribal affairs and events such as meetings (hui), funerals (tangi), celebrations and political events. In practice, events such as hui held on marae are event time oriented. Several features of hui are important to note in this regard. For example, the notion of arriving, leaving and finishing 'on time' is subordinate to the concept of allowing enough time to complete the event in the 'right' way. The right way according to tikanga (custom) means; allowing contributors to meetings enough time to express all they need to say and therefore being flexible around agenda points and allocated speaking times. This means that not only are Māori relatively patient when it comes to waiting for others to arrive, speak, and leave (particularly those who are elderly), but also that attendees tend to remain politely tolerant of the needs of all members to 'air' their views in their 'own time'. It is, therefore, considered generally 'bad form' to rush speakers or impose strict time limits on those presenting. Being 'pushy' direct or overly concerned with one's own time

schedules/requirements is seen as impolite during hui while acting in accommodating and flexible ways to ensure fair treatment is socially endorsed or 'tika' (the right way to do things) (Barlow, 1991).

Overall, Maori views of time are not about being 'on time' but more on ensuring a degree of flexibility around the time needs of all parties. These practices can be seen as underpinned by the cultural imperative towards protecting social relationships. This is not to suggest that Māori allow each other to 'waste time' rather than notions of punctuality, expediency and strict adherence to agenda time slots take a back seat to ensuring fair and equal accommodation of all those present.

### **Past time orientation**

A second aspect of Māori culture relevant to intercultural communication is a tendency towards a past time orientation or seeing current situations, events and people as comprehensible in relation to the events and relationships that precede them. This perspective is encapsulated in the often cited Māori proverb: *I nga wa o Mua* which translates into English as "to turn to the times of the past" which in practice refers to the attendance of the past before the present (Barlow, 1991). In relation to this proverb, it is more accurate to say that Māori take a 'non linear' approach to time conceptualisation, whereby Māori tend to see past/present and future events as being inherently linked and therefore, difficult to conceptualise as being separate points in time (Mead, 2003).

This different perspective of time can become a source of conflict between Māori and Pākehā. While there has been little exploration in the intercultural conflict caused by divergent time perspectives in this regard, Nairn and McCreanor's (1991) study (which examined 220 written contributions from individual Pākehā to the Human Rights Commission in 1979 regarding their view of Māori protest) supports the view that many Pākehā believe that Māori need to 'move on' from the past and that Māori are too 'backward thinking'.

An example of how this way of thinking about time has been at odds with European perspectives was recently articulated by MacDuff (2006) who has noted an intrinsic divergence in attitude between Māori and Pākehā parties to the Treaty of Waitangi negotiation processes. To

contextualise this example a brief explanation of The Treaty of Waitangi ('the Treaty') is required. The Treaty was signed in February 1840 and founded New Zealand as a Colony under British Governance and opened the door for British colonisation of New Zealand. Rapid settlement ensued along with mass appropriation of Māori lands into settler ownership. Most Māori chiefs signed the Māori version (500) and only 39 signed the English version. Because the English and Māori versions are not direct translations this has created difficulties in interpretation (Orange, 1992, 2004) with many Māori believing their Treaty rights have been systematically ignored. The outcome has been a series of claims on the part of Māori to the New Zealand government in relation to breaches of Māori Treaty rights accompanied by on going negotiations in New Zealand between Maori and the Crown concerning compensation.

Treaty negotiations remain a sensitive topic for many New Zealanders (Orange, 1992, 2004) and provide useful insights into the social implications of conflicting time perceptions between Maori and Pākehā. For example, MacDuff (2006) observed that one source of Māori and Pākehā dissent which has hindered the resolution process is that Māori views of history are not just based upon the past but also in the future. In other words, Māori negotiators tend to view their role in Treaty negotiations not in terms of dealing with the past but protecting the rights of future generations.

From this research, it could be suggested that conflict between Māori and non Māori can emerge when Pākehā push for resolution (associated a desire to focus on 'the here and now' and look to the future) while Māori insist on adhering to protocol that ensures that processes are correct and tribal and ancestral memories are acknowledge alongside the needs of generations of Māori to follow. As the Māori focus is not on expediency but process Māori may require more time to gather input from kaumatua (elderly), attend to the needs of current generations and also, ensure that the rationale for present day decisions is consistent with the needs of future generations. If time restrictions are placed on this process Māori may be left feeling that their needs and rights to a fair hearing are not being honoured, while Pākehā may feel that Māori are 'dragging out' negotiations and ruminating on events in the past which cannot be changed.

While it is possible to argue that these perceptions relate more to a reluctance to see Māori compensated at Pakeha expense it is also possible to see these concepts as deriving from differing perspectives of time and the value placed on the uses of time and the priorities given to past, present, or future orientations. More insight into how each party perceives time may therefore support greater tolerance and goodwill from both sides.

### **Evolution and New Zealand perspectives of time**

While it is possible to discern resilient cultural differences between Māori and non Māori it is important to note that these are somewhat overstated at times. As a reflection of socio-historical processes and social integration (as well as a high degree of intermarriage) generations of Māori have been socialised into mainstream New Zealand culture and raised speaking English as their first language. Some Māori, mainly young and urban, are (at least superficially) physically and culturally indistinguishable from Pākehā and other non Māori and have very little knowledge of Māori culture (Callister, 2004; Meredith, 2000). In addition as being able to operate within mainstream culture is important for upward social and economic mobility many young urban born and raised Māori have had to become more acculturated and acutely aware of the 'clock orientation' of Pākehā and are able to manage themselves accordingly in Pākehā contexts. Some evidence for the development of cross cultural competence in this regard was found by Houkamau (2006) who demonstrated that younger Māori are beginning to acculturate to become more like main group Pākehā in terms of professional attitudes and views of appropriate social conduct. Thus it is important to recognise that cultural perspectives on time are also socio historically influenced with younger generations of Māori the capacity to draw from a pool of cultural competencies they have gleaned from their exposure to Māori and non-Māori social networks.

It could also be suggested that a high level of social integration could mean that Pakeha are just as concerned with social connections as Maori and that both Māori and Pākehā have a New Zealand cultural orientation of informality and 'laid backness' that leans towards a preference for

event time orientation. Research on young New Zealanders – which focuses on converging views of time use would inform how managers can best address tensions – and prioritise work activities. If places of convergence can be identified between Māori and Pākehā this can provide clues as to how smoother cross-cultural interactions can be nurtured. More information on this would help us understand how New Zealand culture is continually evolving and how we are working towards shared cultural norms.

### **Discussion and Implications**

In summary, Māori views of time, based upon sociocentric values support an event time orientation juxtaposed with the European New Zealanders who may be more clock time oriented. The unique intracultural time dynamic opens up several issues for managers.

The obvious issue relates to varying notions of punctuality and time keeping between Pākehā and Māori. For Pākehā who run on clock time, being somewhere between five and fifteen minutes late is generally acceptable. However, one can also understand that fifteen minutes might be pushing the upper limits of punctuality even in some clock time cultures. Being tardy beyond that 15 minute window usually requires an excuse and apology around some extenuating circumstances that legitimately prevented an individual from arriving at the appointed time. On the other hand, cultures that run on event time have notions of punctuality that allow for much more flexibility. Bearing in mind that for event time cultures, events are often defined by the presence of people, there is a far less rigid notion of what constitutes being punctual. Thus, for individuals accustomed to operating with event time norms, arriving when it is convenient or when they want to for a certain event may be quite acceptable. Differences could mean that Pākehā view Māori as being too easy going or even disrespectful if they fail to meet Pākehā standards of punctuality. Conversely, Māori may view Pākehā as being fastidious and finicky around being ‘right on’ time. Problems could potentially arise when members from each culture come to work in the same context bringing with them their own

norms of clock or event time. The savvy manager would not only be aware of both time orientations, but he/she would also recognize them as a cultural difference and be able to guide and educate workers accordingly.

Simple insights that promote increased awareness for working with Māori may include; acknowledging the need to cultivate long-term relationships without expecting instant closeness while Māori working alongside Pākehā may need to become more conscious of honouring the European perspectives of punctuality and 'good time keeping' While education on intercultural perspectives of time has not been a focus of cross-cultural or bicultural education programmes in New Zealand to date, generally it is assumed that education on Māori and Pākehā differences in perspectives on historical breaches of Treaty rights supports harmonious social relationships in the work place (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2005) and therefore endorse the inclusion of intercultural differences in conception about time, place and culture. Future work on differences in these time orientations could potentially serve to educate members of both ethnic groups and create training modules for smoother workplace interactions.

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