Multiculturalism at work: cultural convergence between Māori and Chinese in New Zealand the relevance of Collectivism, Long Term Orientation and Perceptions of Time

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ABSTRACT *An awareness of cultural values and how these relate to perceptions of time may open the channels for better cross cultural understanding. This paper explores the relevance of time perceptions among 'new' immigrant Chinese for intercultural communication in New Zealand workplaces. Accelerating ethnic diversity is discussed and the implications of cultural similarities between Māori and Chinese in relation to long term orientation and collectivism explored. It is suggested that Māori and Chinese share core cultural values and these may be leveraged to promote positive relationships between the two groups. A key aim of the paper is to encourage dialogue around how New Zealand managers may leverage cultural similarities between Māori and Chinese to enhance cross-cultural relations in New Zealand workplaces.*

Keywords: *diversity management; valuing diversity; biculturalism at work*

Introduction

For the astute manager, an awareness of cultural values and how these influence employees is recognised as a key aspect of cultural competency and germane to effective cross cultural management (Hofstede, 1991, 1998, 2001). Although New Zealand culture may be 'Western' at a national level cross-cultural competency (understanding different cultural similarities and differences and how these can be leveraged to promote work place harmony) will be a vital skill for New Zealand managers in the future as our society continues to diversify socially and culturally.

Houkamau and Lo (2008) recently embarked on research which explores how time is treated by Māori and Pākehā in New Zealand workplaces. Here the focus shifts to an analysis of how Māori and Chinese in New Zealand may share similar cultural values and how these similarities may shape their treatment of time in work place interactions. The paper was partly motivated by the recent assertion from prominent Māori academic Margaret Mutu, who observed that, despite their differences, Māori and Chinese have shared cultural values which could help consolidate a strong political and economic relationship between these two groups (cited in Shepheard, 2007). Indeed, cultural values around collectivism (the extent to which individuals defer to collective over individual

goals), long term time orientations and respect for tradition characterize both Māori and Chinese culture (Hofstede, 1991, 1998, 2001). Given that these abstract cultural values are fundamental to shaping behavior within interpersonal exchanges it may be suggested that Māori and Chinese may find intergroup social interactions to be relatively harmonious – particularly if the two groups share common goals and aspirations.

Rather than discuss cultural similarities in a broad sense this paper examines the two cultural concepts of long term time orientation and collectivism and how these shape Māori and Chinese perspectives of time. Why focus on time? According to Evans-Pritchard (1937), time is seen as the expression of the core values of each society and therefore can provide a window 'into' the basic value systems of that society. Indeed, as Hall (1990) observed "Time is one of the fundamental bases on which all cultures rest and around all activities revolve." (p. 179). Because members of a given society are socialised to accept shared understandings of the ways in which time is conceptualised, time becomes a taken for granted aspect of day to day interactions within that society or, as Hall (1959) puts it time is the 'silent language' that underpins all manner of human activities.

While how we treat time may be unquestioned in daily activities, scholars from throughout the social sciences, particularly anthropology and philosophy have shown that beliefs around time are culturally constructed (Fabian, 1983) and reflect inherent cultural values which differ between cultures. For example, Western (North America, West and Central Europe, Argentina, Australia and New Zealand) time perspectives emerge from cultural values which are significantly different that those of developing, Eastern and less industrialized cultures (see Brislin and Kim, 2003; Hall, 1959; Levine, 1997).

Time is particularly germane to understanding effective diversity management practices because shared views of time determine how tasks and activities are scheduled, divide and allocated (Schriber & Gutek, 1987). Differing views of time can lead to conflict at the interpersonal level of social exchange as different assumptions around time (schedules, punctuality and turn taking and efficiency for example) can vary substantially between cultures and create misunderstandings and frustration between individuals in the work place (Brislin & Kim, 2003).

A discussion of time perspectives between Māori and Chinese in New Zealand is appropriate in the current social climate as New Zealand's ethnic diversity continues to accelerate. To address shared cultural values and time perspectives between these two groups this paper is structured in four parts. It begins with a discussion of cultural diversity in New Zealand and the employment barriers facing new immigrants. The relevance of developing positive relationships with China and leveraging migrant skills for New Zealand businesses will then be outlined and the importance of cultural values explored. Māori and Chinese cultural similarities will be outlined before suggesting implications for New Zealand managers.

Diversity in New Zealand - from Biculturalism to Multiculturalism

Although race relations in New Zealand have been characterised by a discourse of 'bi-culturalism' since the 1980s (Lashley, 1996) 'multi-culturalism is the new reality in New Zealand society (Singham, 2006). The increasing ethnic diversity of the population is illustrated by the 2006 Census data which found that European/Pākehā are currently 67.6 percent of the population and Māori 14.6 percent (Statistics New Zealand, (2007a). Those identifying with the Pacific Island ethnic group totalled 14.7 percent while the other major ethnic group (Asian) had grown markedly between 2001 and 2006 to 9.2 percent of the population – making the Asian ethnic group New Zealand's fourth largest ethnic minority (Statistics New Zealand, 2009).

A significant influx of Asian immigrants into New Zealand over the last five years has noticeably changed the cultural dynamics within New Zealand's main centres of business (Auckland and Wellington) (Statistics New Zealand, 2007, 2007b). Due a need to attract skilled migrants, Asian immigration to New Zealand is projected to remain high for some years, and the Asian population is projected to reach 790,000 by 2026 (Statistics New Zealand, 2009).

These changing demographics underscore the need for New Zealand employers to adapt to the reality of the diverse communities in which they operate. The benefits of diversity have recently been addressed by Singham (2006) who suggests that New Zealand's future success and

competitiveness depends upon its ability to realise the benefits of a diverse society. For some New Zealand employers this means recruiting and effectively managing new immigrant employees so that the full benefits of a diverse work force may be leveraged.

Leveraging diversity in New Zealand work places: Ethnocentrism and the importance of locating shared values

The movement of Chinese into New Zealand is an important phenomenon for New Zealand for many reasons. Socially and culturally this migration adds to the evolution of New Zealand as a multicultural nation. In addition new Chinese immigrants offer important range of skills to New Zealand employers China is not only the fastest growing major economy in the world but it is also New Zealand's fourth largest trading partner. The 2008 New Zealand/China Free Trade Agreement has further opened up opportunities for domestic businesses and New Zealand exporters, manufacturers and services operators stand to gain by forging positive relationships with Chinese firms as a corollary (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004).

Weymes (2007) has observed that new immigrants can help New Zealand businesses as they understand Chinese businesses practices and are well placed to gain access to Chinese and customers-both domestic and international. However, while New Zealand employers can gain from employing Asian immigrants, at the present time Chinese face significant barriers when seeking work in New Zealand.

In testimony to this, the most recent New Zealand Human Rights Commission Race Relations public opinion survey indicates that that nearly half of all respondents (47%) believed that ethnicity was a key source of discrimination in Zealand and Asians were the group most discriminated against (74% of respondents in this research perceived that Asians experience 'a great deal' or 'some' discrimination) (Human Rights Commission, 2008).

Those of Asian descent may experience more discrimination for several reasons. One possible explanation relates to the extent to which they differ in looks and culture from 'New Zealanders'.

While this specific issue has not received research attention, Podsiadlowski (2006; 2007) surveyed 100 members of the Wellington Regional Chamber of Commerce on their attitudes towards cultural diversity in the New Zealand workplace (particularly in relation to employing migrants). Most of the survey participants were directors, owners and top managers of the organizations they described in the survey. While the ethnicity of the respondents was not reported, given that statistics indicate European (Pākehā) males occupy the vast majority of senior management roles in New Zealand businesses (State Services Commission, 2006) it seems fair to suggest the bulk of respondents were likely to be white males.

Podsiadlowski's research also included 18 interviews with employers, human resource managers, service providers and recruitment agencies to determine a diverse range of perceptions held regarding New Zealand management practices in relation to culturally diverse workforce. Overall the research found employers valued immigrant workers who were able to 'fit into the team'. Overall, 85% of the comments made by employers referred to organizational fit as being very important in terms of employee recruitment. Employers suggested that organisational fit meant that employees should ideally be similar to New Zealanders in culture and appearance. To this end, organisational fit was described as subsuming a range of 'soft skills' (sic) including good chemistry and attitude, the ability to make friends with colleagues, networking skills, and the right 'character' to fit in with existing staff. While employers did not refer to shared time perceptions as being important for 'fitting in' given that time perceptions express the core values of each society it seems fair to suggest that shared views of punctuality, organisation and schedule setting would be relevant to consider when evaluating how 'well' people 'fit into' organisational contexts.

Podsialowski (2006, p. 9) also found employers admitted to some discriminative behaviours in terms of selection of applicants. Examples of discriminative behaviours mentioned including placing "a question mark beside Curriculum Vitae with Chinese or Asian names and putting it aside. They find it easier to select those with Caucasian names. Further, they would call these applicants with "foreign" sounding names for interview only when they had run out of other choices." (p.9)

Research such as this serves to raise consciousness of the barriers which migrants face integrating into the New Zealand workplaces and supports previous commentaries, such as that

offered by McIntyre (1998) and Butcher, Spoonley and Trlin (2006) which suggest that immigrants who speak English and physically 'look like' New Zealanders (that is those from Europe, South Africa and North American) typically fare more favourably in terms of finding employment than immigrants who are dissimilar from New Zealanders in looks and culture (that is, those from Asia and the Pacific).

The preference many New Zealand employers may have for people 'like themselves' is not particularly unique. A vast body of social psychological literature and research has repeatedly demonstrated humans are ethnocentric and often apply negative stereotypes to members of other cultural groups and positive ones to members of their own ethnic group. The more different another group is in looks and culture – the more negatively that group is evaluated (Hogg, 1996a, 1996b, 2000, 2001; Tajfel, 1969, 1981, 1982a, 1982b: Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

While humans make 'snap' judgements of others based upon age, gender and ethnicity research indicates that shared values and goals may be the key to building positive interpersonal relationships regardless of category membership (Tajfel, 1970). That is people are more likely to relate to others who are different from the on the 'outside' if they are aware that they share common goals or values.

The understanding that shared values are central to positive intercultural communication has been explored within the management literature. For example, in a multi-method field study of 92 work-groups Jehn, Northcraft and Neale (1999) found that while diversity in relation to gender, age and ethnicity promoted work place productivity when groups had different values this impacted negatively on performance. In later research Phillips, Northcraft and Neale (2006) found that shared values help build team cohesiveness while diversity in values impact negatively on team performance.

These findings are consistent with Hofstede's (1991, 1998, 2001) research on national values and work related culture. While Hofstede's work and his cultural dimensions have been subject to a broad degree of criticism by academic scholars in recent years (McSweeney, 2002) his concepts have become the most often cited framework for understanding the role of cultural values in the work place (Hofstede, 1991, 1998, 2001). For the purposes of this paper therefore, his ideas are used as a vehicle to initiate discussion on the potential similarities between Māori and Chinese cultural values. At the

same time it is recognized that Hofstede's cultural value dichotomies are somewhat simplistic and further exploration of the finer distinctions between Māori and Chinese value systems is required to gain a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between these groups.

While it is not possible to cover the breadth of Hofstede's cultural dimensions here, two in particular are appropriate to utilize as they relate to Māori and Chinese perspectives on time: Individualism vs. Collectivism and Long-Term Orientation (LTO). Collectivism refers to the extent to which individual defer to collective (group rather than individual goals). LTO has roots in Confucian values concerning time, tradition, perseverance, saving for the future, and allowing others to "save face" and prescribes to the values of long-term commitments and respect for tradition (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). The next section explores cultural similarities between Māori and Chinese in New Zealand workplaces in relation to these two factors.

Māori and Chinese Collectivism

A key division can be made between cultures which are individualist and those which are collectivist (Sampson, 1988). Hui and Triandis (1986) define collectivism as related to other orientation, being concerned with the needs of others over one's own personal needs, sharing material benefits, a willingness to accept and accommodate the needs and opinions of others, a concern with other people's perceptions, saving face in social situations, and a desire to contribute to the lives and well being of others.

The collectivist nature of Māori society has already been described in literature. Māori have a cultural preference towards collectivism, tend to define themselves in relation to their social group memberships (Barlow, 1991; Best, 1924; Biggs, 1960) and traditional Māori cultural values and social expectations cohere around collectivist ideals (Burch & Houkamau, 2008).

For Māori these cultural behaviours emanate from pre-colonial Māori society which was communal and tribally based (Walker, 1990). Māori communities comprised three main social groupings: whanau (family units), hapu (sub-tribes), and iwi (tribes). As Walker (1990) explained,

whanau were a vital social unit within Māori society and usually included three generations of family members of common descent who lived together in defined home areas (kainga). Several or more whanau comprised hapu and hapu merged to form iwi. Māori culture was collectivist largely out of necessity. Harsh living conditions meant collective work activities (hunting, gardening, fishing, food preservation and the care of children and the elderly) were essential to ensure a constant food supply (Ramsden, 1994). In addition, as inter-tribal warfare was a frequent feature of pre-colonial Māori communities, strong relationships and loyalty within tribes enhanced family security in times of war (Walker, 1990).

According to Sullivan (1995, 1997) the resilience of Māori cultural values of collectivism and strong group loyalty remains evident despite generations of colonization. This view is supported by studies with Māori participants such as Fitzgerald's (1969) examination of identity among 75 Māori university graduates. His work found that participants commonly reported that being Māori related to communal values and group orientation. Participants also described whanaungatanga (family strength and unity), kinship ties (community spirit and cooperation), group identification, pride in tikanga Māori and Māori arts and crafts as central to being Māori.

In a similar vein, Liu and Tamara (1998) examined economic views among the Tuhoe (a tribe located in the central North Island of New Zealand) by conducting in-depth interviews with 16 participants. The majority of participants reported that their Māori culture related to kinship, collective development and group loyalty. In addition, older participants fondly recalled the communal economic activities that characterised their own childhoods and suggested that being Māori related to communal activity for collective gain, reciprocity, and mutual support.

Much has also been written about the collectivist nature of Chinese society (Liu, 2008; Ng, 1990; Hui & Triandis, 1986). Hofstede's analysis of Chinese culture has found that Chinese rank lower than any other Asian country in the Individualism and highest on Collectivism - attributable in part, to the high level of emphasis on a Collectivist society during the Communist rule (Hofstede, 1991, 1998, 2001). Reflecting their collectivist value system it has been suggested that for Chinese, relationships and correct social etiquette take precedence to clock requirements in social interaction. Moreover, an emphasis on relationships is seen as essential to the development of trust which is

considered as a critical component of networking and appropriate social conduct in Chinese business activities (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987).

Looking at these cultural similarities one may suggest that Chinese views of collectivism and deference to relationships may operate in a similar way to Māori in relation to time perceptions. The value orientations of collectivism relevant in relation to time include a priority given to completion of tasks according to the right processes - rather than adhering to strict time frames (Berwick-Emms, 1995). This may be juxtaposed with a more individualist perspective of time which is focused on individual desires and motivations – competing to speak and vying for the chance to assert ones views. In terms of how this may be relevant in work situations several possibilities arise. For example, in meetings or situations where people are contributing to group discussion both Māori and Chinese may consider it 'bad form' to rush speakers or impose strict time limits on others. Working with these groups may require an approach which is somewhat flexible around time, concerned with sensitivity to social contexts and building relationships while addressing the issues at hand. It is also possible that Māori and Chinese may work well particularly well together within groups – particularly if they are made aware of their shared cultural values and are encouraged to work together to achieve collective outcomes rather than individual agenda.

Long term time orientation

One of the key characteristics of the Chinese value system, according to Hofestede, is the Long-term Orientation (Hofstede, 1991, 1998, 2001). Long term time orientation refers to a preference for considering events in context of the past, present and future. This perspective of time is also evident among Māori who traditionally show a strong preference for taking into account contextual factors and seeing people and situations as comprehensible only in relation to the events and relationships that precede them (Williams, 1971). For Māori then, in order to understand the present one must automatically see it in the context of the past and future. Such a perspective is

diametrically opposed to the Anglo-American perspective that tends to live in the present and prefer a future orientation (McKay & Walmsley, 2003).

Liu (2008) observes that long term time orientation among Chinese derives from their cultural preference for following traditional Chinese practices. He observes that the Chinese culture places heavy emphasis on past experiences and lessons from the past – as these are seen as an important reference point for progress in the future. Reflecting this the Chinese are very respectful of their elders, honour their ancestors in ritual and art, frequently make sense of their current experiences in reference to historical figures and legends and are also more likely to conform to traditional rules and practices.

The cultural similarities to Māori in this regard are explicit. As Barlow (1991) has observed, Māori traditionally show much deference and respect for elders, are concerned with preserving history traditional and culture and also are focussed on understanding the present only in relation to the past (Pake, Maloney & Cleave, 1993). 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." In practice, this refers to the attendance of the past before the present as it is assumed that in order to comprehend the present it cannot be divorced from the past (Barlow, 1991).

These values are important to consider when understanding how Māori and Chinese may view events, and priorities in the work place. Liu (2008) traditionally, Chinese do not adhere to time in a strict, linear fashion, rather, there is a sense of continuity between the past, present and future. According to the Chinese world view, suggests Liu the time allocated for different tasks can overlap as long as all the tasks get completed. Berwick-Emms (1995) has observed that Māori managers may also treat the time allocated to various tasks in a flexible fashion. This flexibility in relation to time has implications for managerial practice among Māori managers who may tend to see employees holistically – taking into account their history and family context when allocating work tasks.

In summary, because of a cultural norm to contextualize through history and past events, Chinese and Māori may demonstrate similar preferences in relation to time orientation. In terms of how Māori and Chinese alternative perspectives of time may influence work situations several issues are relevant to consider. Given the value placed upon long term relationships, simple insights that

promote increased awareness to event time preferences and long term orientation for Chinese (perhaps lead by Māori) may include things like: work on cultivating long-term relationships, understanding the need to acknowledge collective goals and aspirations when negotiating time frames.

Conclusion

Given the projected growth of both the Māori and Chinese population and the need for New Zealand businesses to leverage the skills and capabilities of a diverse work force it is timely for managers to search for new and innovative ways to understand Chinese business practices and culture.

This paper was written with the main objective of promoting dialogue around the cultural similarities between Māori and Chinese with the aim of locating opportunities to develop productive business practices between these groups. Disparate areas of research and literature were drawn together to highlight issues relevant to New Zealand managers including the transition from biculturalism to multiculturalism in New Zealand society, the relevance of identifying shared values between groups for diversity management, Māori and Chinese cultures (collectivism and long term orientation) and the implication of these issues for conceptualizing how time is treated within the work place.

It was suggested that while Chinese and other Asian immigrants may find it difficult to gain acceptance by some New Zealand employers, Māori may find shared cultural similarities with Chinese relatively attractive and this may promote work and business relations between the two groups. Similarities in long term orientation and collectivism were offered as a platform from which to begin engaging identifying similarities in relation to time perceptions. In summary, because of a cultural norm to contextualize through history and past events, and Chinese Māori may demonstrate similar preferences in relation to time orientation.

Further exploration in this area could explore the following issues: How can cultural values between Māori and Chinese be identified – and how do these cultural values manifest in work place behaviour and perceptions in relation to time? How can cultural values between the two groups be leveraged to promote work place harmony? Which organisations exemplify best practices in this

regard? Research and further inquiry in these areas could shed light, not only on current conditions in New Zealand workplaces, but on how New Zealand society is constantly evolving.

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