Leadership in New Zealand: the impact of gum boots, the haka, buzzy bees and number 8 wire.

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ABSTRACT
This is an exploratory study of leadership behaviours within New Zealand. This paper discusses the environmental factors which impact on the approach and style adopted by leaders in New Zealand. It suggests that approaches to leadership are closely linked to the society in which they operate. A review of the literature compares research undertaken by those living within Australasia and that undertaken on a global basis. The review finds that research undertaken globally clusters New Zealand with countries which share its’ Anglo-Saxon heritage the local research distinguishes differences between Australian and New Zealand leadership styles. This paper discusses environmental factors which impact on the approach and style adopted by leaders in New Zealand. It suggests that approaches to leadership are closely linked to the society in which they operate. It argues that leadership in New Zealand is influenced by; the nature and size of its organisations, bi-culturalism; woman role models and isolation, these are represented by the Kiwi icons: gumboots, the Haka, buzzy bees and number 8 fencing wire.

Key Words: Leadership, Culture, Values, Environment

INTRODUCTION
Effective leadership is seen as a means of meeting the many challenges facing Governments and business organisations today. When things go wrong the leader is the one who is most often given the blame. A new leader is appointed in the hope that changing the leader will bring about more positive
results. The rise and fall of organisations is regularly attributed to leaders. Yet the concept of leadership seems as elusive today as it was 46 years ago when Bennis observed ‘Always the concept of leadership eludes us or turns up in another form to taunt us again with its slipperiness and complexity. So we have invented an endless proliferation of terms to deal with it…. And still the concept is not well defined’ (Bennis, 1959: 259).

New Zealand is a small country in the South Pacific that has learned to manage its isolation from other developed nations. It has a recognised bi-cultural approach to government activities, a strong proportion of women in key leadership roles and many small organisations. It is suggested, in this paper that these unique aspects of New Zealand’s environment have contributed to the development of a characteristic leadership style.

This paper looks at the environmental factors, which have influenced leadership development within New Zealand. It will first review the literature from the perspective of New Zealand and Australian researchers. These researchers have a perspective on their own culture, which may be different from those from outside looking in. The research on a global scale that compares and contrasts New Zealand leadership approaches with others is then reviewed. This paper covers the following issues: (1) culture and values: global studies; (2) culture and values Australasian research; (3) Gumboots: The nature and size of New Zealand organisations (4) The Haka: bi-culturalism; (5) Buzzy bees: woman role models; (6) Number 8 fencing wire: isolation and (7) conclusion.

**CULTURE AND VALUES: GLOBAL STUDIES**

New Zealand was part of an early international study into Global culture undertaken by Hofstede, (1980). From his research Hofstede was able to cluster countries with similar values along four dimensions: individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity versus femininity. New Zealand was clustered into a group with Australia, Canada, United States of America and Britain. This cluster group was found to be strong on ‘individualism’, which means that
this group values individual success over collective success, prefer individual rewards over group
rewards and are less likely to value or pay attention to group norms or feel responsible for the group or
team.

The cluster group, which included New Zealand, scored low on power distance. A low power distance
score indicates this group values sharing power and working with a democratic or participatory
leadership style. This can be contrasted with a high power distance score found in countries like Japan,
which have major distinctions of power and favour an autocratic leadership style.

A low uncertainty avoidance score implies that people in the New Zealand cluster group are able to
tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty and do not require strict guidelines and controls. New Zealanders
according to Hofstede’s scale are neither weak nor strong on masculinity. The dimension of
masculinity versus femininity refers to emphasis on the masculine values of assertive, success and
materialism compared to the more feminine values of social relationships and life balance.

Although Hofstede’s research has been influential in the development of inter-cultural management,
problems have been highlighted in his methods of sampling and methods of measurement and the now
outdated nature of his data (Gooderham, & Nordhaug, 2001; Tromppenarars, Hampden & Turner
1997; Mead, 1994). The research by Hofstead has been likened to a form of ‘sophisticated
stereotyping’ and therefore can in itself change our perceptions of other cultures. Osland, Bind,
Delano & Jacob. (2000)

The more recent GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness) study
(House, 2004) reviews culture in 62 societies and relates this to societal, organisational and leadership
effectiveness. The ten-year multiphase study identifies ten regional clusters. New Zealand is included
as part of the Anglo cluster along with Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, South Africa (white
sample) and the United States of America. The study finds that some behaviours are regarded as
highly effective in all cultures but others are more culture specific. They note ‘in all cultures leader
team orientation and the communication of vision, values, and confidence in followers are reported to be highly effective leader behaviours’ (House et al, 2004: 7). Aspects of leadership, which differ across cultures, include the value placed on participative leadership compared to an expectation that leaders make decisions about their employees work.

The GLOBE research on the Anglo cluster group was reviewed by Ashkanasy, Trevor-Roberts, & Earnshaw, (2002) The Anglo Cluster Group is characterised by an individualistic performance orientation. Charismatic, team orientated and participative leadership styles are perceived to be the most effective in this group. Charismatic leaders according to the GLOBE study are visionary and inspirational and appeal to the underlying values of followers. Team–orientated leadership behaviours involve undertaking ‘a collaborative approach’ to work, utilising a ‘shared vision’ and ‘developing a team structure’. A participative leadership style means involving others in the decision making process. ‘As countries in this cluster are relatively individualistic in cultural orientation and all are democracies, people place great emphasis on their freedom and being able to have their say.’ (Ashkanasy et al, 2002: 37).

CULTURE AND VALUES: AUSTRALASIAN RESEARCH.

Early research on leadership undertaken by Australasian writers had a general focus and did not identify cultural differences in approach and style (see for example Lewis, 1996; Aviolio & Bass, 1995; Singer, 1996). Parry’s (1998) Synthesis of Leadership research in Australia and New Zealand illustrates this general trend. Of the twenty-two researchers examined only four considered cultural differences when analysing the outcomes of their research.

The unique behaviours of Australian and New Zealand leaders began to emerge as a focus for investigation around the turn of this century. A study of 1,300 middle managers to identify New Zealand’s best leaders’ traits, approaches and styles was conducted by Proctor – Thompson and Parry (2001). They suggested that becoming a successful leader is ‘a matter of what not to do, as much as
what to do more of.’ (Proctor-Thompson & Parry, 2001: 185) Behaviours which Proctor-Thompson
and Parry’ said should be avoided were those that were transactional in nature rather than
transformational. Transactional approaches which should be avoided include: an ‘emphasis on
bargaining as a standard form of communication, adherence to precedent, strict implementation of
rules, contractual mindsets, silence, competition for resources, fear of failure and many levels of
authorisation.’ They also suggested that leaders should avoid ‘abdication of the leadership role’ when
there is ‘a need for it.’ They should not ‘excessively emphasise the monitoring of exceptional reports
aimed at correcting errors’; nor ‘excessively emphasise contractual systems of rewarding people in
return for specific performance objectives.’ (Proctor-Thompson & Parry, 2001: 185)

Behaviours, which an average leader should demonstrate in order to become an exceptional leader,
included: emphasise and reward organisational citizenship, the search for new ways of doing things,
learning, lateral thinking, saying what one thinks, and taking responsibility for one’s actions;
understand the different needs of people, act as a role model, articulate future scenarios and what can
be achieved together over time, and identify and develop future leaders. (Proctor-Thompson & Parry,
2001: 185)

A profile of the ideal ‘Antipodean leader of the 21st century’ was developed by Parry (2001). His
profile is of a leader who ‘is tuned into culture, is culturally adaptable, is participative and supportive
of followers and generates a climate that is supportive of new ideas,’ the leader ‘will display
transformational leadership to improve morale’ and develop a ‘climate for innovation, will value
quality first, not financial reward’, will see leadership as a ‘shared activity’, will manage change using
‘transformational and contingent reward leadership,’ and ‘will manage performance effectively.’ He
suggested the leader of the 21st century ‘is just as likely to be a man as a woman’ and ‘will come from
transformational cultures more so than from transactional cultures.’ (Parry 2001: 226 – 239) The
profile reflected not only the Australasian research but also the international research being conducted
in this decade.
Effective leadership in Australia was compared to New Zealand (Ashkanasy et al, 2002). They suggest that New Zealanders are more outcome orientated in their approach to leadership compared with the Australian social or affiliative approach. ‘In New Zealand a low score on Family Collectivism means a leader using a team orientated style must be task focussed and ensure the job gets done.’ (Ashkanasy et al, 2002: 37). Both Australians and New Zealanders identified individualism as contributing to a leader’s effectiveness but only the Australians felt that charisma was important. New Zealanders did not believe that charisma contributes to leadership effectiveness. This may account for the poor coverage the media gave Christine Rankin the Chief Executive Officer of Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) in 1999. Rankin’s mini skirts, large earrings and her less than traditional approach to leadership were regarded as charismatic (Elkin, Jackson, & Inkson, 2004). Her leadership style led to controversy and the eventual loss of the position.

Leadership integrity has been identified as an important aspect of leadership in New Zealand. Credibility and consistency in putting values into action is regarded as more important than charisma in Australasia. (Kouzes & Posner, 1993) This has been reinforced by the research of Parry (2001) ‘To be thought of as having integrity a leader must demonstrate honesty, credibility and consistency in putting values into action.’ (Parry, 2001: 240). A number of authors suggest that charismatic leadership depends on the followers’ reaction to their leaders (Deveraux, 1955; Marcus 1961). These theorists concur that; charisma should only be attributed to those leaders who can develop very strong emotional attachments with their followers. If New Zealand followers do not believe that charisma contributes to leadership effectiveness then they may not develop a strong emotional attachment to their leaders and thus they unwittingly inhibit the development of charisma. Parry explained New Zealanders ambivalence to Charismatic leaders by the feelings that Charisma is simply “American style hype.” (Parry, 2001:240)

**GUM-BOOTS: THE SIZE AND SHAPE OF NEW ZEALAND ORGANISATIONS**
As New Zealand has strong rural industries and lifestyles, it has many male dominated working environments and male dominated leadership patterns. The icon of the gumboot is a symbol of New Zealand’s rural heritage. The pressure on women to adopt masculine styles of leadership in such male dominated workplaces was discussed by Gardiner, (2002) She suggests the ‘pressure to change leadership style and the associated stress may be a sufficient deterrent to woman entering or continuing on to senior management positions.’ (Gardiner 2002: 36)

The economic reforms of the 1980’s influenced the development of New Zealand’s leadership styles. New Zealand business owners had to change their values as a result of the economic reforms. ‘The changes that occurred touched almost every aspect of the lives of all New Zealanders, who had to adjust to an economic environment that focussed on the values of ‘enterprise’, ‘self reliance’ and being ‘business like’. For a country that was used to governments which were involved in almost all aspects of an individual’s existence, the new environment was light years away from the days of price freezes and restricted banking hours.’ (Cameron and Massey, 1999: 1)

Changes in management practice following deregulation did not occur immediately. Early studies by Campbell-Hunt & Harper (1993) did not detect any changes in management style as a result of deregulation. However a study by Campbell-Hunt and Corbett three years later showed that changes in approach were beginning to occur and attributed this to the deregulated environment. Organisations were becoming more self-reliant and developing entrepreneurial skills.

New Zealand organisations have unique features that influence the behaviour of the business leaders within them. New Zealand organisations are small. Smaller enterprise size and increased competition has meant that New Zealand businesses tend to be flatter with few management levels. This means that individuals are often multi-skilled and participate within a number of different roles within an organisation. A ‘can do’ attitude accompanies this multi-skilled leadership force. Statistics New Zealand reported that in 2004 ninety-six percent of businesses employed fewer than 20 employees. Less than one percent of enterprises in New Zealand had 100 or more employees. These businesses
accounted for 47% of the total number of employees in New Zealand. Auckland is the most popular business location with 35% of all businesses located there. (Statistics New Zealand, 2004)

The 2005 edition of SME’s in New Zealand: Structure and Dynamics, the annual statistics review of SME’s produced by the Ministry of Economic Development shows that the small and medium sized enterprises sector of the economy continues to grow. It reports that the number of small and medium sized enterprises increased 10.2% in the year to 2004, more than double the increases in the year 2003. In New Zealand 96.3% of enterprises employ 19 or fewer people while 86.8% of enterprises employ five or fewer people (Ministry of Economic Development, 2005).

The reasons why the total number of small and medium sized enterprises began there growth surge in the 1990’s was investigated by Cameron and Massey (1999) their findings showed ‘large corporations had downsized their labour forces to maintain profitability in the face of global competition. New Zealand governments at the time were encouraging the population to become more self-reliant and entrepreneurial. New Zealanders were being forced to think of ways of providing for their retirement as the prospect of a comfortable government funded pension diminished. Fewer jobs were for life with redundancy and forced career change was becoming more common.’ They found that women were bypassing the corporate glass ceiling and that ethnic minorities and immigrants were overcoming negative attitudes in the labour market by developing their own businesses. They also reported that small business ownership was becoming a lifestyle choice particularly for those in mid-career. Home working in particular was becoming attractive because it provided a more flexible way of life at minimal cost.

THE HAKA: BI-CULTURALISM

New Zealand was founded on the basis of the Treaty of Waitangi, an agreement between two peoples, Maori and Pakeha. The Treaty forms the basis of an on-going partnership. New Zealand is officially a bi-cultural society. The Treaty is regarded as a founding document of New Zealand and Treaty
principles are emphasized throughout the government’s services. Maori has the status of an official language.

The Haka is performed at the beginning of rugby matches played by the New Zealand All Blacks. Before the Haka is performed by the team, the Haka leader, normally an All Black of Maori descent, will instigate the Haka and spur on those who are to perform the Haka. The Haka is chosen as a symbol of New Zealand’s biculturalism because of its ability to draw all New Zealanders together in a feeling of national pride.

The twentieth century was a century of Maori renaissance in New Zealand. Bi-culturalism principles were enacted into all Government Departments and reflected in new and revised legislation. This was formalised under the Law Commission Act 1985, section 5 (2 a) which requires the commission when making recommendations for the reform and development of laws in New Zealand to ‘take into account Te Ao Maori (The Maori Dimension). (Law Commission 2001: vii). This has lead to an increase in awareness amongst New Zealand leaders of their responsibilities under the Treaty.

The traditional Maori approach to leadership was based on seniority and hereditary. Group involvement and consensus decision-making played an important role in the day-to-day running of the Marae. Tremaine (1990), contrasted Marae management and Pakeha management in terms of leadership responsibility, decisions, time management, prized attributes management style and mission. Her research showed that Maori leaders are responsible to the group they lead while traditional Pakeha leaders are responsible to themselves and upper management. Decisions on the Marae ‘are made by consensuses whereas traditionally decisions in the western world ‘are made by management or by the majority’. On the Marae ‘group processes are able to take the time they require’, whereas in Pakeha business operations ‘time is tightly structured.’ Attributes, which are prized on the Marae, include ‘humility’ and ‘commitment to serve others’ whereas the traditional Pakeha valued attributes include ‘personal ambition and confidence’. Traditional Maori leaders tended ‘to lead from behind, encouraging and supporting others but remaining in the background.’ There is an
expectation that Pakeha managers need to be ‘highly visible.’ Finally Tremaine found that on the Marae the kaupapa or mission ‘is discussed by all and the strategy for reaching the objectives is understood and is the responsibility for each group member.’ In the Pakeha business ‘the mission is often decided by top management and communicated downwards to other members of the organisation.’ (Tremaine, 1990: 53). The traditional Maori values identified by Tremaine reflect modern leadership thinking regarding the value of servant leadership.

Maori leadership was also compared and contrasted with Pakeha approaches by Elkin, Jackson and Inkson (2004). They concluded that the idea of authority is strong in Maori cultures as well as motivation and incentives. They equated the Maori word ‘mana’ with that of ‘charisma’ in English. However, Elkin et al also found some leadership approaches used on the Marae which are ‘less familiar’ in the western world of business, these included ‘the hereditary transfer of leadership, the use of magic, and the allocation of different leadership roles to different leaders in the same setting’. (Elkin et al, 2004: 199)

In New Zealand’s first MMP election in 1996, New Zealand First, a party lead by Maori leader Winston Peters allowed Maori for the first time in the country’s history to hold the balance of power in politics. With New Zealand First’s Maori members winning all five Maori seats and enough list seats to allow negotiation with the major parties. New Zealand First eventually formed a coalition with National to lead the country. In 2004 The Maori party was formed. This new party had the following value statement: ‘On behalf of the Māori partner to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Māori Party will prescribe for Aotearoa an avenue to the expression of Māori values for the benefit of all who reside in this Nation. The Māori Party will speak with a strong, independent and united voice on all aspects of the social cultural, economic and political life of Aotearoa to move our Nation forward. Our model is drawn from te ao Māori, the Māori world, and offers values that will ensure that we create our tomorrow in the best interests of Aotearoa.’ (Maori Party, 2005). The winning of four parliamentary seats demonstrates the strong influence of Maori in New Zealand Politics.
The settlement of many Treaty of Waitangi claims, have allowed some Maori to develop considerable economic strength. This has allowed the development of business ventures on the part of Maori and new leaders to emerge. This new era has meant changes to traditional Maori leadership patterns. ‘As life grows more complicated, no one person is likely to have the gifts, or the backing to cover all the bases. This suggests that the old marae-based model – where whakapapa – is no longer up to the task.’ (Diamond, 2003: 6). Diamond also observes that a ‘move away from marae was opening up opportunities for more Maori women to take leadership roles. A-team based approach, where younger, university-educated leaders worked with leaders versed in matauranga Maori; Maori knowledge was also becoming evident in some areas.’ (Diamond, 2003: 6-7).

With the Maori renaissance, which has occurred within New Zealand since the end of last century and the reemphasis on the bicultural responsibilities of all New Zealanders it is increasingly important for New Zealand leaders to understand traditional Maori custom. As Pinner et al, observed ‘Many important meetings in New Zealand are conducted according to traditional Maori practise (Pinner and Pinner 1998, p238) Failure to understand the protocol in such a meeting can lead to offence and embarrassment.

As industries in New Zealand developed so too did the role of women. By 2002 women in New Zealand occupied the top jobs in politics, law and business. Women held the positions of Prime Minister (Helen Clark), Attorney General (Margaret Wilson), Chief Justice (Sian Elias), and Governor-General (Dame Sylvia Cartwright) as well as Chief Executive Officer of one of New Zealand’s largest companies Telecom (Theresa Gattung). This gender shift had earlier been detected at lower levels of leadership in New Zealand both in the number of woman in leadership roles and in the percentage of women in the management structure. (Parry, 2000).

A buzzy bee is an iconic New Zealand children’s toy. It also symbolises the extra pressures New Zealand women have in combining families with work life. The demographics of leaders in 27 industrialised countries including Australia and New Zealand were investigated by Neale, (2001)
Comparing the non-work life of business leaders in each cultural settings, Neale found that ‘in all cultures there was a significant difference between male and female leaders but this difference was most ‘marked for those living in Australia and New Zealand.’ (Neale, 2001: 157). She found that Australasian women leaders in particular had to combine work activities with running a family and those Australasian women were less likely to obtain help for these tasks either from extended family or paid help.

Women are often associated with being warmer and more concerned about people’s feelings than men. Men on the other hand are stereotyped as being independent and achievement orientated. Although there may be differences between the natural leadership styles of men and women (Payne, Fugua, & Canegami, 1998) argues that this can be countered by training. Parry researched the leadership capabilities of junior managers in New Zealand. He found that female leaders were rated as generating ‘greater levels of work effort and better perceptions of effectiveness from their followers than male leaders do.’ He also reported that ‘in line with previous research in other countries, it was found that levels of transformational and transactional leadership were moderated by gender. In general, women were rated higher than men on the most effective leadership qualities and on contingent reward, and lower than men on some of the transactional qualities of leadership.’ (Parry, 2000: 24).

As the numbers of women leader’s increase it might be expected that levels of transformational leadership approaches will increase. The number of woman leaders in New Zealand has also been blamed for the shortage of charismatic leaders. Bob Harvey, Waitakere major is quoted in the Sunday Star Times as saying ‘Charisma in its purest form is a male quality’ (Corbett, 2005).

**NUMBER 8 WIRE: THE ISOLATION OF NEW ZEALAND ORGANISATIONS**

New Zealanders have often been credited with the ability to improvise and be innovative. Early New Zealand pioneers found themselves in situations where they did not always have the resources they needed. They developed ways to make do and adapt to the situation they found themselves in. This is
referred to as the No. 8 wire mentality, the ability to do anything with very little. The adoption of
metric measurements in New Zealand during the 1970’s means No. 8 fencing wire is no longer
available however, the icon lives on.

New Zealanders pioneering heritage and ‘can do attitude’ is born out in the way leadership has
developed in this country. New Zealanders lack of emotion and reliance on common sense is identified
by Inkson, Henshaw, Marsh ,W. & Ellis, G (1986) who suggest that “New Zealand managers accept or
reject new ideas largely on pragmatic grounds rather than emotional; New Zealanders trust
undemonstrative common sense above excessive enthusiasm, emotion and hype.” (Inkson and Kolb,
1986, pix) The innovative aspect of New Zealand culture is seen within its leaders. Specialist labour
was difficult to find in early New Zealand, creating a need for individuals to develop a wide range of
skills. The small size of New Zealand business’s today continues the need for an all-roundedness
approach.

To survive businesses must adopt a ‘can do’ attitude. This approach is described as ‘the attitude of
inventing, reworking and adapting technologies to get the job done.’ (Campbell-Hunt et al, 2001: 137).
They believe this attitude is a product of New Zealand’s isolation. Campbell-Hunt et al (2001) also
identified a number of key business leaders whom they believed to be particularly innovative these
included Angus Tait, Bill Gallagher, Paul Tidmarsh and John Williams. Inkson et al (1986) included
in their list of innovative leaders; Richard Izard, Craig Barnes, Alan Hawkins and Doug Myers.
Innovative leaders today might include Dick Hubbard and Steven Tindall.

New Zealand has very unique features, which have impacted on the preferred leadership approach and
style. This paper has explored the importance of New Zealand’s environment including its isolation,
its bicultural heritage, the nature and size of its organisations, the economic reforms of the 1980’s and
the recognition of its women leaders. The icons included in the title of this paper ‘gum boots, the haka,
buzzy bees and number 8 wire’ are representative of the environment which has influenced the
development of New Zealand’s leadership style. Gum boots refer to New Zealand’s rural beginnings.
Buzzy bees represent the combining of family life with a leadership role something especially true to New Zealand women leaders, and increasingly becoming important to our male leaders. The Haka is a symbol of New Zealand’s pride in its bi-cultural heritage. The number 8 fencing wire represents an innovative approach to leadership challenges.

This paper has found that some aspects of excellent leadership are universal including the need for leaders to create a vision and to show confidence in their followers. Other aspects change depending on the culture in which the leadership behaviour occurs. Aspects of leadership which are important in a new Zealand culture includes having an innovative can do attitude, being outcome orientated and ensuring the job gets done, being consistent and putting values into action, giving workers freedom to make decisions and giving them mechanisms which allow them to have their say and be involved in decision making.

While there is a danger in making stereotypical generalisations when it comes to discussing cultural differences, it also provides clarity and understanding for those who wish to be the leader who New Zealanders wish to follow.

REFERENCES


