

Searching for Diverse Images of the Organisation

Exploring Indigenous Business

Kiri Dell, Chellie Spiller

The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

k.dell@auckland.ac.nz, c.spiller@auckland.ac.nz

Abstract

This article will examine the use of metaphors by Indigenous people, practitioners and scholars in the conceptualisation of organisations. Indigenous people hold unique knowledge systems, have diverse understandings with regard to economic development (Kuokkanen, 2011) and utilise alternative organizational systems, processes, and structures (Mika & O'Sullivan, 2014). While these differences exist, scholarly literature knows very little about the metaphorical images of Indigenous organising. Our, preliminary work has shown some of these metaphors to include; guardians, navigators, kinship, innovators and weavers of complexity. We propose that organisational metaphors provide key functions to assist with opening up new worlds and conversations.

The way researchers and scholars understand and shape the world of organisation and management is influenced by the metaphorical images conjured about the subject under study. Morgan's seminal book *Images of Organisations* introduced eight metaphors of an organisation; machines, organisms, brains, cultures, political systems, psychic prisons, flux and transformation – and instruments of domination. Images become the foundation upon which organisational paradigms, schema and concepts emerge. Over time they become embedded institutionally via policies and procedures to further influence organisational practices. People's behaviours and practices conform to the dominant metaphors in their cognitive schema, till they become a naturalised and taken for granted way of seeing the world and doing things. However, as pointed out by Morgan (1986), metaphorical images are a way of seeing, but they can also become a way of not seeing. Although powerful in its articulation of construing the roots of modern day organisational theory, the images were derived from Western scholarship and observations. Dominant metaphors of organisations can override other views and conceptualisations of reality.

While the links between metaphorical thinking to organisational theory are now widely accepted, Indigenous images of the organisation have not been explored. Indigenous populations are estimated globally to be 370 million, spread across seventy countries from the Arctic to the South Pacific, making up over 5000 distinct peoples. Complex and diverse, Indigenous peoples practice unique traditions, retaining distinctive cultural, political, spiritual and social characteristics that differentiate them from the dominant populations they reside within. While each Indigenous context has its own unique, distinct characteristics, attributes, and qualities, some similarities exist across most Indigenous worldviews globally. These include their tendency to give centrality to the inter-relatedness and connectedness of all things,

and additionally, an ideological view of the dependence of man, the cosmos and all living things on each other (Cajete, 2016; Chilisa, 2011; Kovach, 2010; Royal, 2003; Wilson, 2008).

The intention of the paper is three fold, firstly to advance thinking and theorising of Indigenous organisations, secondly to elucidate how cultural tensions might be overcome by understanding both the competing and complementary images with current dominant organisational images and thirdly to consider the potential of Indigenous imagery to offer new insights to Western management. Through an extensive literature review of current Indigenous business and management articles, this paper unlocks some of the metaphorical images that currently exist with Indigenous organisations. The aim of this paper is to open up bold possibilities through explicating Indigenous metaphorical representations of organisations. While Indigenous metaphors may have complementary elements with Western management, they are also imbued with qualities and characteristics that may seem inconceivable to many business scholars.

References

- Cajete, G. (2016). *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (2nd edition). Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers.
- Chilisa, B. (2011). *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Sage publications.
- Kovach, M. E. (2010). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.
- Kuokkanen, R. (2011). Indigenous Economies, Theories of Subsistence, and Women: Exploring the Social Economy Model for Indigenous Governance. *The American Indian Quarterly*, 35(2), 215–240.
- Mika, J. P., & O’Sullivan, J. G. (2014). A Māori approach to management: Contrasting traditional and modern Māori management practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 20(05), 648–670.
- Morgan, G. (1986). *Images of Organization*. SAGE Publications.
- Royal, T. A. C. (2003). *The woven universe: Selected writings of rev. Maori Marsden*. Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing.