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The southern initiative: How indigenous values inspire social innovation and impact

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Abstract

Indigenous values are increasingly recognised in helping organisations contribute to wellbeing within and beyond the workplace. Adopting the theoretical lens of Māori economies of wellbeing, this case study examines how The Southern Initiative (TSI), a unit within Auckland Council, incorporates Māori values to co-create place-based solutions and foster whānau (family) wellbeing. Through kōrero (conversations) with three people, a wānanga (collaborative discussion) with TSI members, and analysis of organisational literature, we identified how TSI's organising approach synthesises social innovation and bureaucracy. We found that indigeneity-embedded intrapreneurship, distributed leadership, and whānau-centred design support TSI's innovations. Mana (prestige) emerged as a primary organising principle, sustaining TSI's approach to achieving systemic change. By bridging Indigenous paradigms and conventional managerial practice, this case study demonstrates how Māori values can transform public sector management, elevate social justice, and encourage community resilience. These findings highlight culturally grounded frameworks for delivering social impact and shaping equitable outcomes.

Keywords: social innovation; intrapreneurship; bureaucracy; indigenous values; economy of mana

Introduction

He aha te mea pai? (What is the most important good?)

Māku e ki atu (And I respond)

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata (Humanity! Humanity! Humanity!)

(Hēnare, 2014, p. 68)

Indigenous values like those in the proverb Hēnare (2014) espouses here are increasingly recognised as being more than informative for management and organisational practice; they are influential in helping small and large organisations aspire to and contribute to wellbeing inside and beyond their workplaces (Haar et al., 2021; Henry, Newth & Spiller, 2017; Mika & O'Sullivan, 2014; Mika, Warren,

Foley & Palmer, 2017; Ruwhiu, Amoamo, Ruckstuhl, Kapa & Eketone, 2021; Spiller, Wolfgramm, Henry & Pouwhare, 2020). The capacity for a large-scale municipality to draw inspiration from Māori values for the way it chooses to organise its operations, respectfully engage with Māori, and support whānau wellbeing through enterprise thoroughly intrigued a team of researchers exploring the practicalities of Māori economies of wellbeing at the scale of the whānau (family) (Rout, Spiller, Reid, Mika & Haar, 2025; Spiller et al., 2025). Yet, this is precisely what we found upon reading about, then meeting with the people behind, The Southern Initiative (TSI), a social innovation unit inside Auckland Council. Located primarily in Manukau, a South Auckland ward of Auckland City, TSI is mandated under the Auckland Plan to improve the wellbeing of South Auckland communities, which the unit strives to do through social innovation and systemic change.

This paper presents a case study of TSI as an example of how Indigenous values can inspire social innovation and impact within mainstream organisations. The research involved kōrero (conversations) with TSI team members, reviewing organisational literature, and discerning how well prevailing organisational theory explains what we found. The paper focuses on TSI and its use of Māori values as an organising ideology for social innovation and impact. Four innovations in managerial and organisational practice are evident at TSI: (1) the functioning co-existence of social innovation and bureaucracy; (2) the efficacy of indigeneity and intrapreneurship; (3) the empowering nature of whānau-led (family-led) design methods; and (4) mana (spiritual power) as an agentive organising principle. These innovations illustrate the interconnections between Indigenous values, social innovation, and intrapreneurialism, highlighting the potential for culturally grounded frameworks to inform and transform public sector management. The case study offers insights into the pragmatism of Indigenous values for social innovation and organisational change, contributing to management theory and practice at the interface of Indigenous knowledge and social justice.

This case study results from Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga funded research under its Pae Ora (Living Well) theme called 'He oranga whānau: mahi ngātahi, whānau livelihoods within the context of work and Māori economies of wellbeing' (Rout, Spiller, Reid, Mika & Haar, 2022). The project set out to identify approaches to work and livelihood that are sustainable, collectively focused, socially just, and adaptive to environmental and social change. Given this purpose, the overall research question was simply, 'How can whānau wellbeing be realised in everyday life?' The theoretical framework adopted for the research is 'Māori economies of wellbeing.' According to Rout et al. (2025), Māori economies of wellbeing can be defined as 'locally embedded and controlled economies that prioritise collective human and nonhuman wellbeing and are built on the economic kaupapa' (p. 2), with 'economic kaupapa' referring to salient characteristics of the Māori economy being 'embedded, collective, empathetic, reciprocal, balanced, and local' (p. 4). The project explored pathways for human flourishing at the scale of the whānau in four pou (pillars) as areas of interest: pou (leadership), pātaka (economy), pakari (resilience), and pakihi (enterprise). Te reo Māori (the Māori language) was central to the research, from which a dictionary of Māori words used in economic and business contexts was produced (Karamaina, 2025); hence the use of reo Māori in this paper. This case study stems from research under one pou of the project called pakihi-ā-whānau (whānau enterprise), which set out to understand how whānau achieve sustainable enterprise (Pihama & Penehira, 2005; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2013) within Māori economies of wellbeing (Hēnare, 2014; Rout et al., 2025).

Methodology

Employing a case study approach, which seeks to uncover the truth from the particularities of a singular entity at the person, organisation, or other appropriate scale (Eisenhardt, 1989; Hephzibah Orhoevwri, 2021; Ragin, 1999), the research examines how TSI supports whānau wellbeing through social innovation. A kaupapa Māori approach underpins this study, which is research 'by Māori, for Māori, about Māori' (Powick, 2003; Smith, 1992). Under kaupapa Māori principles, research is guided by tikanga Māori (Māori culture), te reo Māori (Māori language), and mātauranga Māori (Māori

knowledge), and seeks to be transformative and beneficial for Māori communities (Henry & Pene, 2001; Smith & Smith, 2019). Kaupapa Māori is relevant because of the underlying premise that Māori knowledge, language, and culture are the most appropriate way to understand Māori phenomena, and people who identify as Māori and engage in te ao Māori (Māori society) and its development are apt researchers. Yet, non-Māori are key members of the research as co-investigators, participants, allies, and beneficiaries because of their knowledge, capability, and respect for te ao Māori. This approach aligns with principles for ethical Māori research, which emphasise the importance of whakapapa (relationships), tika (rightness), mana (dignity), and manaakitanga (care) (Hudson, Milne, Reynolds, Russell & Smith, 2010). Approval for ethical conduct in this research was received from Te Raupapa, Waikato Management School.

Two primary methods were used to gather data: first, kōrero (conversation); second, wānanga (collaborative discussion), both of which were held at TSI's offices in Manukau. While kōrero ordinarily means 'talk,' 'speak,' or 'conversation' in English, in connection with research, kōrero is a culturally nuanced form of communication, where meaning and effect are found in narratives that establish identity, connections, and reduce distance (Cribb, Mika, Leberman & Bennett, 2024). Wānanga is similarly glossed as 'discussion,' 'deliberation,' or 'learning,' but the concept and practice of wānanga have no suitable equivalents in English to adequately convey the word's connotation as a way of establishing shared understanding and meaning, that is, a way of 'coming to know' (Cribb et al., 2024). Yet, the research employed both of these Indigenous methodologies (Smith, 2021) in the spirit of Cribb et al. (2024), who encourage non-Indigenous organisations to do so with the support of cultural knowledge-holders and with a receptivity towards Indigenous world views.

Three kōrero were conducted with the managers and directors from TSI groups and initiatives. Each kōrero lasted approximately 60 minutes, covering participants' perspectives on wellbeing, culture, and enterprise in their work. Throughout the kōrero, tikanga rangahau (ethical research) practices were applied, including karakia (prayer), mihimihi (introductions), whanaungatanga (relationships), aronga (world view), kaupapa (philosophy), kai (sharing food), and kōrero whakamutunga (concluding remarks) (Cribb et al., 2024). A culturally safe environment that encourages participants to share insights on matters of Indigenous enterprise is attributed to these practices (Mika & Dana, 2021).

A wānanga was held with TSI intrapreneurs as well as associated organisations like Amotai and Uptempo representatives. The wānanga lasted approximately 2.5 hours. The wānanga included whakawhanaungatanga (sharing origin stories and establishing relationships), kohinga kōrero (sharing ideas and experiences), whakawhiti whakaaro (meaning-making through discussion), whakakapinga (reflective and future-focused kōrero), and kai. Kai is not just food for the body (Moeke-Pickering, Heitia, Heitia, Karapu & Cote-Meek, 2015); it symbolises the transition from a state of tapu (sacredness and caution) to a state of noa (profane and free) in te ao Māori (Mead, 2016), especially on marae (meeting grounds) (Karetu, 1992). The overall effect of these protocols was to foster an open, respectful atmosphere, reciprocal relationships, and empower participants to share their experiences within the context of their cultural values and practices.

All kōrero and wānanga sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for accuracy. A thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo. Following the approach outlined by Clarke and Braun (2017), transcripts were inductively coded, allowing themes to emerge from participants' narratives. Additionally, the coding process followed Henry, Mika and Wolfgramm (2020) and their practice of mahi ngātahi (collaborative thematic analysis). Mahi ngātahi involves the team iteratively reviewing and discussing transcripts together, allowing for consensus on key insights.

The case study was shared with TSI for feedback and later presented at the 37th annual conference of the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management (ANZAM) held in Wollongong, Australia, where the paper won the ANZAM case study award (Niu et al., 2024). Feedback has strengthened the case study and inspired a continuation of the research into whānau wellbeing through enterprise, particularly with the TSI-affiliated entity Amotai. Amotai is a supplier diversity

and social procurement initiative working primarily with Māori and Pacific-owned enterprises and government and corporate buyers (Malcolm, Cairns & Pouwhare, 2023).

The southern initiative case study

Formation

In 2012, seven local and regional councils were amalgamated to establish Auckland Council ('the council') as a unified local government entity for Auckland City. The council's first mayor, Len Brown, and his fellow councillors set an ambitious goal of making Auckland the world's most liveable city (Auckland Burkett & Boorman, 2021; Council, 2012a). Despite such bold ambition, parts of the city registered some of the highest inequality metrics in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through the advocacy of community boards in Māngere-Ōtāhuhu, Ōtara-Papatoetoe, Manurewa, and Papakura, South Auckland became a site for targeted intervention by the council. The Southern Initiative (TSI) was the name given to this intervention, which was specifically noted and, therefore, mandated in the council's first Auckland Plan. Soon, TSI had set an ambitious goal of its own: to enable system-level change for the wellbeing of South Auckland's people (Burkett & Boorman, 2021). The council and various stakeholders developed a multi-sector plan for TSI, with initial priorities centred on early childhood education; family education; training and employment for school leavers; economic development; public transport; and housing (Burkett & Boorman, 2021). In 2024, TSI's scope expanded to include West Auckland. Today, TSI employs more than 60 staff whose initiatives include the Auckland Co-Design Lab, Uptempo, and Healthy Families, all intended to enhance Māori and Pacific wellbeing (Burkett & Boorman, 2021).

Systems-level change

TSI's capacity as a change-maker is attributed to its leaders, including John McEnteer, Gael Surgenor, and Tania Pouwhare, who fostered a culture of social innovation within the council (Auckland Council, 2012b; The Southern Initiative, 2021a). In 2015, TSI was reorganised as a team of intrapreneurs tasked with social and economic improvement in South Auckland through systemic change (The Southern Initiative, 2021a). Auckland Council serves as an anchor institution, supporting TSI with resources and capabilities, but the group operates as a business unit of its own (Burkett & Boorman, 2021).

Social procurement is a notable TSI innovation, which utilises the council's purchasing power to promote supplier diversity (Malcolm et al., 2023). For example, in 2019, the council agreed to a social procurement target of 5% in direct spending and 15% on indirect expenditure for Māori- and Pacific-owned enterprises. For procurement purposes, Māori and Pacific-owned enterprises are defined as enterprises that are at least 50% owned by Māori or Pacific peoples in the case of partnerships, companies, and other entities with dispersed ownership structures and 100% in the case of sole traders (Amotai, 2025). This definition differs from the statistical definition of Māori business, which omits reference to an ownership threshold (Mika, Hudson & Kusabs, 2023). This policy led to $4 million in new contracts and tenders worth $120 million to these firms (The Southern Initiative, 2020). This early success enabled TSI to secure $1.87 million in funding to scale up its procurement activity under an initiative called He Waka Eke Noa (The Southern Initiative, 2020). By 2023, TSI had facilitated over 150 procurements worth $308.8 million (see Table 1 for a list of other key outcomes), connecting 480 Māori and Pacific businesses through a rebranded procurement initiative called Amotai (TSI, n.d.).

Bureaucratic social innovation

Bureaucracy is traditionally presented in management theory as the ideal organisational form because of its ability to balance efficiency and effectiveness through application hierarchy and rules, particularly in stable business environments (Schermerhorn et al., 2017; Weber, 1947). In theory,

bureaucracy and innovation ought to be incompatible organisational constituents. This contradiction arises because the flexibility, creativity, and risk accompanying innovation (Mulgan, Tucker, Ali & Sanders, 2007) intuitively repel rules-based order and hierarchy (Klein & Sorra, 1996). Yet, the people of TSI know that innovation – especially social innovation – is essential to disrupting the power dynamics that underlie persistent societal inequity, structural disadvantage, and the uneven distribution of the consequences of market failure (Henry et al., 2017; Wiremu, Mika, Gillies, Smith & Ngawati, 2021). TSI's ability to conduct social innovation activities within a bureaucratic structure

Table 1. Key outcomes of TSI

Year	Focus area	Key outcomes	Detail
2018	Shared prosperity	Focused consolidation of efforts	TSI consolidated efforts into four main areas: shared prosperity, innovation and technology, tamariki (children) wellbeing, and healthy infrastructure. This consolidation aimed at amplifying the impact across 1,000 + whānau and involved collaboration with over 50 local organisations.
	Healthy homes	470 whānau receiving assessments and assistance with home improvements	Approximately 470 whānau received assessments and assistance with home improvements such as draught stopping and window and door frame repairs. More than 200 whānau have received curtains.
	Social innovation framework	Auckland Co-Design Lab	An evaluative framework was developed in collaboration with the Auckland Co-Design Lab, covering 10 + initiatives and focusing on culturally grounded outcomes for over 1,000 whānau. The Lab provided capability building services to 500 + practitioners and public servants through public lectures, seminars, and workshops in New Zealand and internationally. Approximately 27,000 visitors accessed reports and resources.
Year	**Focus area**	**Key outcomes**	**Detail**
2019	Innovation and technology	17 graduates, 10 + jobs created; $1.27 M invested	Seventeen rangatahi (younger generation) graduated from the Mission Ready tech career accelerator, resulting in 10 direct job placements and 3 entrepreneurial ventures. TSI also secured $1.27 M in funding to support innovation pathways for Māori and Pacific rangatahi, expanding opportunities for 200 + youth.
	Shared prosperity	$4 M in new contracts and $1.87 M in funding	Māori- and Pacific-owned businesses secured over $4 M in contracts through TSI's social procurement initiatives, with TSI itself attracting $1.87 M to scale these efforts. This contributed to creating over 50 job opportunities in the local community.
	Tamariki wellbeing	150 whānau benefited; 12 codesign projects; 105 whānau and 20 staff engaged in codesign	Over 150 whānau benefited from the Manurewa Plunket Family Centre Poutokomanawa becoming a tamariki-responsive space each week. Twelve whānau engaged in a co-design approach at Papakura Marae, and 105 whānau and 20 staff co-designed solutions for making public spaces more accessible.
	Social and community innovation	2,000 + youth engaged; 100 + events hosted	Te Haa o Manukau engaged over 2,000 young people in technology and entrepreneurship through over 100 business and entrepreneurship development events. These activities helped incubate 15 + startups, contributing to the local economy and fostering innovation among youth.
	Healthy infrastructure	30,000 healthier meals; over 4 tonnes of produce rescued	The Healthy Environment Approach led to 30,000 healthier meals for youth. Over four tonnes of produce have been rescued from local supermarkets and upcycled into affordable meals and healthy smoothies and juices.

(Continued)

Table 1. (*Continued.*)

Year	Focus area	Key outcomes	Detail
2020	Systems innovation	Introduction of Niho Taniwha framework impacting 5 + major projects	TSI introduced the Niho Taniwha evaluative framework, which influenced at least five major projects, focusing on systemic changes and cultural grounding. This framework is critical in evaluating the broader impact of TSI's initiatives across South Auckland.
	Inclusive growth	$2 M + in international procurement contracts for Māori and Pacific businesses	TSI's work in procurement, particularly through Amotai, helped Māori and Pacific businesses secure over $2 M in international contracts, promoting economic self-sufficiency and growth from within these communities.
	Relational and connected wellbeing	Impacted 1,500 + whānau through culturally grounded wellbeing initiatives	TSI's place-based, relational approaches in whānau and tamariki wellbeing initiatives impacted over 1,500 whānau, integrating social, economic, and cultural aspects of wellbeing and setting a model for future programmes in South Auckland.

Source: Burkett and Boorman (2021); The Southern Initiative (2019, 2020).

shows that innovation and bureaucracy can co-exist, producing what we call bureaucratic social innovation. The co-existence of bureaucracy and social innovation is, however, not without tension. One senior TSI staff mentioned:

> *The first director got really hoha [annoyed] and left because he just couldn't make any progress. There was just no money .. it floundered.* (Participant 1)

The council's hierarchy and size can slow decision-making, with innovation struggling for traction (Hartley, 2005). Despite the challenges, TSI aligned its activity with the council's priorities to achieve continuity and impact. Reflecting on TSI's approach to navigating these challenges, one staff stated:

> *You have to identify what are the things that need to happen within a large organisation, make it a strategic priority, convince with evidence, and then demonstrate it.* (Participant 2)

Small-scale pilots provide evidence that social innovation can deliver real-world benefits even within risk-averse environments. An intrapreneur of TSI explained:

> *[We are] designing programmes to try and facilitate that pathway and looking at trying to get larger funding for their work from doing smaller pilot projects.* (Participant 3)

TSI has developed a dual operating system that is structured and flexible (Robbins, Bergman, Stagg & Coulter, 2009), balancing innovation with predictability. The hierarchy of the dual operating system supports the continuity, efficiency, and effectiveness of TSI's operation, while its relational network provides for the rapid iteration and flexibility that social innovation requires (Burkett & Boorman, 2021). Distributed leadership emphasising coherence over coordination allows small teams to experiment while staying true to TSI's mission. The interaction between these two organisational systems allows TSI to pursue innovative projects while maintaining stability for long-term organisational success (Burkett & Boorman, 2021). This finding aligns with Henry et al. (2017), who argue that Indigenous social innovation is a means to explore and analyse the enduring nature of Indigenous approaches to solving social disparities.

Indigeneity and intrapreneurship

Intrapreneurship is the practice of entrepreneurship within existing organisations to develop new goods, services, processes, and markets (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001; Hernández-Perlines, Ariza-Montes & Blanco-González-Tejero, 2022; Tracey & Stott, 2016). In Indigenous communities,

entrepreneurship is often conducted in a cultural context distinct from mainstream society, affording Indigenous entrepreneurs access to ways of organising rooted in their indigeneity – Indigenous world views, knowledges, identities, values, languages, and institutions – and an adaptive capacity for cross-cultural commerce (Manganda, 2022; Manganda, Jurado, Mika & Palmer, 2023; Mika, Felzensztein, Tretiakov & Macpherson, 2022). TSI has made strategic use of intrapreneurship to enable small teams to innovate (Burkett & Boorman, 2021), but they have done so in a way that integrates elements of indigeneity – specifically, Māori culture and values (Mika, Dell, Newth & Houkamau, 2022).

Māori have some of the oldest social technologies that are still relevant, providing fresh insights into management (Haar et al., 2021). For instance, applying Māori values of manaakitanga (generosity), whanaungatanga (relationships), and tino rangatiratanga (self-determination), which resonate with other ethnic groups (Mika & Niu, 2025), ensures that TSI's innovations are culturally effective and empowering. For TSI, the result is an intrapreneurship that mirrors the cultural milieu of their South Auckland and West Auckland communities, fostering cultural integrity, community-focused proactiveness, networking, and collaboration (Mrabure, Ruwhiu & Gray, 2021). TSI focuses on enhancing collective wellbeing and respect for the environment (Burkett & Boorman, 2021), leading to culturally sustainable innovations that challenge mainstream individualism and profit-driven ideologies (Spiller, Barclay-Kerr & Panoho, 2015). The Southern Initiative is working towards decolonising spaces, practices, methodologies, and structures while indigenising knowledge systems for systemic innovation (Burkett & Boorman, 2021), which is finding credence in mainstream organisations elsewhere (Woods, Dell & Carroll, 2021). A staff member reflected on this transformation, stating that:

> *We've let go of design as a change or an innovation methodology. However, elements of it are useful, and we've returned to Indigenous systems* (Participant 4)

Although intrapreneurs often experience conflict with prevailing values, TSI's leaders have achieved a culture of inclusion. For example, TSI has adopted Niho Taniwha (the teeth of a spiritual guardian) as an evaluation framework based on mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), which allows the organisation to be accountable to whānau and communities (Burkett & Boorman, 2021). One staff member at TSI explained this approach further:

> *We work at [different] levels and looking at … systems, practice, and for the people that we're working with, and going, 'Okay, so what are the outcomes that [sit] between us, the team, and them?' Like the people that we're working with, what outcomes do they see that they want to achieve?* (Participant 2)

Niho Taniwha integrates intrapreneurial and evaluative learning, ensuring that rapid feedback loops inform TSI's activities and contribute to meaningful outcomes (Burkett & Boorman, 2021).

Whānau-centred design

Design thinking, a hallmark of innovation, allows for rapid idea generation, prototyping, testing, and deployment of solutions (Brown, 2008; Kickul & Lyons, 2020). TSI uses design thinking for similar reasons but also modifies its method using kaupapa Māori (Māori philosophy). Māori enterprises are often entwined with family, from directly hiring whānau to family history influencing the entrepreneur (Mika et al., 2022; Mika & Scheyvens, 2023). TSI has thus devised an inclusive approach to design that places whānau at the centre of design thinking (Auckland Co-Design Lab, 2022). Whānau-centred design involves power sharing through recognition of tino rangatiratanga (Āwhina Plunket, 2023). Key principles of whānau-centred design include manaakitanga – nurturing whānau within a process that acknowledges and values them; whanaungatanga – establishing authentic, meaningful relationships in culturally appropriate ways; tino rangatiratanga – whānau having

the autonomy to decide when and how they will participate, as well as decision-making opportunities within the process; mana – recognising whānau are the experts in their own lives and have the ability to innovate for themselves; and ako – enabling a positive, mutually reinforcing learning space (Āwhina Plunket, 2023; Burkett, 2017). Unlike traditional top-down, deficit-based design, where community needs might be an afterthought, this approach shifts to an empowering, strength-based model characterised by collective decision-making and action. According to one participant:

> *Whānau are seen as passive recipients… the government's done stats analysis, problem definition, intervention logic programme, and say all the things that we [government] think, 'This is the problem,' and 'This is what we believe the answer is.' We created spaces where whānau would come together and do their own research, have their own kōrero, create their own insights, create their own prototypes, and then test them with the whānau .. This is really about addressing the power imbalance that happens.* (Participant 4)

Developed in collaboration with Papakura Marae and the South Auckland Social Wellbeing Board, He Whānau Whānui o Papakura (He Whānau) is an example of whānau-centred design (The Southern Initiative, 2021b), which is grounded in te ao Māori (the Māori world view) (Royal, 2003). In support of He Whānau, which seeks to engender flourishing futures for tamariki (children), TSI created culturally safe and welcoming spaces for whānau. TSI outlined expectations for agencies to show humility and respect for whānau. Consequently, whānau set the agenda, facilitated discussion using Māori values, and engaged with whānau to gather information and conduct analysis. The whānau-centred design allowed housing, employment, and healthcare to be holistically considered as interrelated issues, with solutions developed that reflect whānau needs with agency support.

Mana as an organising principle

In te ao Māori, mana has a significant role in regulating social and economic relations, reflected in the notion of an economy of mana (Hēnare, 2014). According to Dell, Staniland and Nicholson (2018), an economy of mana is 'an economic system in which decisions regarding investment, production, consumption and wealth distribution are influenced by the interplay of mana-enhancing interactions between people and the environment' (p. 55). At an organisational level, a Māori approach to management incorporates Māori values, beliefs, and customs, including mana (Mika & O'Sullivan, 2014). In te ao Māori, mana refers to power and authority derived from the gods, ancestors, land, and personal attributes (Mead, 2016), signifying spiritual power and material agency (Spiller, Pio, Erakovic & Henare, 2011). In business management, mana guides people to act in ways that enhance the mana of others, thus elevating their own mana through reciprocal relations, which Mika et al. (2022) described as *manahau*. Mana is related to collective wellbeing, as success is measured by how well organisations enhance the mana of their communities (Spiller et al., 2011). For TSI, the economy of mana is made real because the concept shifts organisational thinking from an economic model centred solely on monetary gain to one that values human dignity, relationships, and the wellbeing of communities (Dell et al., 2018; Hēnare, 2014). Mana can be observed in TSI's vision, objectives, and innovations. As one TSI staff mentioned:

> *Our job is how do we translate an economy of mana to meaningful, tangible actions. This is about abundance. This is about mana and enhancing mana. And that means for your workers as well. There is no mana in the minimum wage, so we don't do minimum wage, it's you start on a living wage, and we want to see our people up within 24 months.* (Participant 1)

For another member of TSI, mana can be seen in whānau-centred design and its possibilities:

> *They've got everything they need to strive for the goals they have set for themselves, that they're connected to their culture, they feel connected to the place that they're in, and they feel a sense of autonomy, respect, and mana from others.* (Participant 4)

Within the council, TSI uses mana as a guiding principle to navigate the bureaucracy. One manager from TSI put it this way:

> *I've got the org[anisation] chart, but who's the power? Where is the mana network here? The people … that you need to know?* (Participant 5)

Social and cultural dynamics are important in leadership, and the logic of te ao Māori provides an appreciation of the complex and pragmatic nature of leadership (Ruwhiu & Cone, 2013). Within TSI, leadership is attributed not just to positional authority but also to one's mana. One participant noted that:

> *We've got other people who are leaders just because they've got direct line managers. [TSI staff member] .. she has mātauranga [knowledge]; that for us makes her a leader, it's her mana that makes her a leader.* (Participant 1)

Mana, rather than titles alone, determines leadership. This is another unique feature in TSI as a social innovation unit infused with indigeneity and a community-minded mission.

Conclusion

TSI was established as a mandated component of Auckland Council's strategic effort to address South Auckland's social and economic disparities. Through a multi-stakeholder collaborative approach, TSI strives for system-level change to improve community wellbeing. This case study explores how TSI, as a social innovation unit, co-exists within a bureaucracy using a dual operating system. A networked organisation, distributed leadership, and indigeneity-infused intrapreneurship support TSI's propensity for place-based social innovation. This is evident in TSI's whānau-centred design. Initiatives like Amotai demonstrate how Indigenous knowledge and values can lead to scalable innovations with social impact.

Discussion questions

Question 1

What are some tensions between bureaucracy and social innovation? How did TSI navigate these tensions, and what are some useful lessons for other organisations?

Major tensions arise from bureaucracy's inherent focus on control, which often slows decision-making processes, stifles creativity, and avoids risk. TSI navigates these tensions by aligning initiatives and projects with Auckland Council's strategic priorities, using evidence-based pilots to demonstrate their merit. Adopting a dual operating system allows TSI to maintain stability (bureaucratic structure) and change (networked structure). Other organisations could recognise the importance of alignment between innovation and organisational goals, using small-scale projects to build support and developing leadership that champions stability and innovation within bureaucracies.

Question 2

How did TSI incorporate Māori values into its practices? What are some of the impacts of such values on its social innovation?

TSI incorporates Māori values like manaakitanga (generosity), whanaungatanga (relationships), and tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) into its operations. These values produce a culturally grounded, whānau- and community-focused approach to social innovation, exemplified in the shift from expert-led design to whānau-led design. Evaluation and learning frameworks like Niho Taniwha keep TSI accountable to whānau, communities, the council, and other stakeholders. Indigenous values lead to culturally relevant and sustainable innovations, empowering Māori and Pacific

communities through recognising their cultural strengths and decolonising expert-led spaces and methodologies.

Question 3

How does TSI's whānau-centred design differ from traditional design?

TSI's whānau-centred design differs from conventional design by centring on whānau as active leaders across the entire design process rather than passive participants in a piecemeal fashion. This design approach prioritises whānau needs over agencies' interests and is deeply rooted in Māori values and principles. Whānau-centred design shifts the policy development process from a top-down, deficit-based model to a place-based, strength-based, and culturally responsive design thinking model. Creating a safe space where whānau can lead discussions, conduct research, and develop solutions, with relevant agencies participating as supporters, is one way of addressing inherent power imbalances. Agencies must respect whānau leadership, adhere to Māori protocols, and value whānau contributions for this approach to work. When they do, design thinking results in strategies that exhibit equitable power sharing, which supports whānau to achieve culturally relevant and appropriate outcomes.

Question 4

What factors would influence TSI's scalability at a national or international level?

Deep integration of Māori values in TSI's approach poses challenges for scaling and replication. Key factors for scalability include cultural adaptability, strong leadership, cultural knowledge, and the ability to maintain the integrity of Indigenous methodologies (e.g., kaupapa Māori). Successful scaling requires significant investment in cultural competence training, establishing genuine and reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities, and developing adaptive frameworks that consistently preserve and apply traditional values with their original meaning. Moreover, strong organisational and community leadership is crucial to balancing innovation and cultural authenticity. When combined with adequate financial and policy support, scaling TSI's approach may be possible.

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