

Wise Up: Creating Organizational Wisdom Through an Ethic of *Kaitiakitanga*

Chellie Spiller · Edwina Pio · Lijjana Erakovic ·
Manuka Henare

Received: 8 April 2011 / Accepted: 13 May 2011 / Published online: 28 May 2011
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Abstract Organizations are searching for innovative business approaches that deliver profits and create shared value for all stakeholders. We show what can be learned from the relational wisdom approach of Indigenous Māori and reframe the prevailing economic argument that has seen companies profit and prosper at the expense of communities and ecologies. We develop an ethic of *kaitiakitanga* model premised on Māori values which holds the potential to enrich and further humanize our understanding of business. The Māori economy is a globally connected, prosperous, and profitable sector of the New Zealand economy. By drawing on Māori values, we present a wisdom position through an ethic of *kaitiakitanga* or stewardship to emphasize and illustrate the interconnectedness of life in a woven universe. Through practicing *kaitiakitanga*, organizations can build businesses where wisdom is consciously created through reciprocal relationships. In this worldview of business, humans are stewards endowed with a mandate to use the agency of their *mana* (spiritual power, authority, and sovereignty) to create *mauri ora* (conscious well-being)

for humans and ecosystems—and this commitment extends to organizations.

Keywords Ethics · Indigenous · Maori · Stewardship · Values · Well-being · Wisdom

The Māori economy is a globally connected, prosperous, and profitable sector of the New Zealand economy. By drawing on Māori values, we present a wisdom position through the ethic of *kaitiakitanga* or stewardship to emphasize and illustrate the interconnectedness of life in a “woven universe” (Marsden 2003). Through practicing *kaitiakitanga*, organizations can build businesses where wisdom is consciously created through reciprocal relationships. In this worldview of business, humans are stewards endowed with a mandate to use the agency of their *mana* (spiritual power, authority, and sovereignty) to create *mauri ora* (conscious well-being) for humans and ecosystems—and this commitment extends to organizations. In a Māori worldview, explains Porter (2009), humans are born as *kaitiaki* (stewards) imbued with manifold *mana* (spiritual power, authority, and sovereignty). Therefore, they are stewards, endowed from birth with obligations, and empowered at the same time to care, respect, conserve, and create *mauri ora* (conscious well-being).

In contrast, much Western philosophy is a response to Descartes’ famous proposition “I think therefore I am.” While his insight has been valuable, it has precipitated a philosophy that asserts primacy of the individual. In business, the solely self-interested individual approach is blamed for much of the unsustainable muddle that business finds itself in (Folger and Salvador 2008). An individualized, self-interested view often involves dissociation whereby conducting business can become a morality-free

C. Spiller (✉) · L. Erakovic · M. Henare
Management and International Business, University of Auckland
Business School, Owen G Glenn Building, 12 Grafton Road,
Auckland, New Zealand
e-mail: c.spiller@auckland.ac.nz

L. Erakovic
e-mail: l.erakovic@auckland.ac.nz

M. Henare
e-mail: m.henare@auckland.ac.nz

E. Pio
School of Business & Law, AUT University, 42 Wakefield
Street, Level 8, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142,
New Zealand
e-mail: edwina.pio@aut.ac.nz

exercise. Examples of this dissociation have been noted by numerous scholars who point to the crisis of sustainability which faces the global community, and ethical and social responsibility crises in business. Examples are the Global Financial Crisis, oil spills, insider trading, dishonest accounting practices, undue executive compensation, environmental degradation, poor employment relations, imbalance in the quality of life between nations and within nations, the increasingly atomized existence of workers in developed societies, and the continuing intense poverty in many parts of the globe (Jones 2005; Laplume et al. 2008; Rowley and Gibbs 2008; Rynes et al. 2010; UNSD 2010).

The limited literature on wisdom theory has burgeoned, as organizational theorists from multiple disciplines respond to the challenges faced by modern organizations (Case and Gosling 2007; Jones 2005; Hays 2008; Küpers 2007). In addition to ethical crises, wisdom theorists seek to assist organizations to address increasing complexity, fragmentation, and uncertainty, which are accompanied by the call for more sustainable, equitable, and values-oriented organizations (Küpers 2007; Rooney and McKenna 2007; Rowley and Gibbs 2008). Furthermore, some theorists argue the business case for wisdom as a competitive advantage (Bierly et al. 2000; Mangaliso 2001; Spiller et al. 2010).

Friedman (1970) is often interpreted as advocating that the purpose of business is to produce only material wealth. This undermines the complexity and more nuanced view of values implicit in his study where profit-maximization would be constrained by considerations such as important rights and freedoms. Advocating profit-maximization as the sole purpose of business could result in forgetting that humans exist in a web of reciprocal relationships with many stakeholders apart from shareholders. The relational aspects of wisdom in organizations have been especially emphasized by Küpers (2007) who argues for a relational wisdom paradigm using an integral model to explain that wisdom is constituted not only from what people in organizations think, but also from how they relate and respond in practice. In the Māori view discussed and analyzed in this article, the human is born into a relational world as a *kaitiaki*, empowered to be a steward and endowed with obligations.

Such ideas challenge current thinking that wisdom is synonymous with “*rational* knowledge, learning and utilitarian judgement” (Case and Gosling 2007) and reclaim a holistic philosophy that can assist all organizations to be relevant, responsive, and relational (Ashkanasy et al. 2002). Thus, a wisdom worldview in organizations is the one, we suggest, that seeks to close gaps of separation when “I think therefore I am” leads to dissociation.

A sense of belonging is central to a Māori relational view of the world, which holds that all people are called

into being through relationships, such as stewardship. In serving others, one is serving one’s extended self, and self-actualization occurs in and through relationships (Spiller et al. 2010; Spiller 2010). A relational, belonging worldview with the purpose of serving as a steward of resources is at the heart of Māori culture. While kinship is an abiding feature of a Māori approach, kinships needs to be understood as an expansive term that encompasses a wide variety of relationships. Māori organizations have many forms, ranging from small family-run enterprises, to large entities that have ownership of significant assets in industries, such as agriculture, aquaculture, farming, forestry, geothermal energy, horticulture, mining, seafood, and tourism. There are also numerous service providers in health and tertiary education, and joint ventures in science and technology. Features that make the Māori economy especially distinctive, and give it its competitive “edge” are its relational approach to business, which has been shown to work especially well with forging long-term supplier arrangements and joint venture partnerships with other global firms (NZIER 2003; Spiller et al. 2010).

This article develops an understanding of how organizations can learn from the relational wisdom approach of Indigenous Māori values. Our usage of the term Indigenous refers specifically to the Māori people of Aotearoa New Zealand who have an historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies, which developed on their territories (SPFII 2004) in contrast to usage that emphasizes Indigenous as referring to a country or context (Tsui et al. 2007). We provide a platform for scholars and organizational practitioners to reflect on the “why and how rationale” for adopting the ethic of *kaitiakitanga*, stewardship, approach. This article is also unique in its foregrounding of Māori culture, which, as a prosperous and profitable economy, has the potential to provide insights for those organizations searching for innovative business approaches that deliver profits and create shared value for all stakeholders. We argue that a relational wisdom position can offer benefits in consequentialist ways because of its intrinsic rightness and goodness. This article shows what can be learned from the relational wisdom approach of Māori, and in doing so reframes the prevailing economic argument that has seen companies profit and prosper at the expense of communities and ecologies.

We revitalize and enhance theorizing and practice on wisdom in organizations to advance a position that coheres around a core of stewardship in which the purpose of business is to create relational well-being and wealth. Our view of wisdom in organizations draws primarily on Indigenous Māori wisdom. According to the United Nations (2006), there are 370 million indigenous people in the world who account for 5% of the world’s population: Indigenous perspectives stress kinship with all of creation (Cajete 2000;

Marsden 2003; Royal 2002). A relational view recognizes the ontological and epistemological unification with the natural world is what truly unites Indigenous peoples (Royal 2002, p. 29). Ultimately, this is a “spiritual exchange,” a deep belief in what Cajete (as cited in Royal 2002) calls “co-evolution”: that humans did not evolve only in relationship to each other, but that all entities co-evolved together in spiritual exchange (p. 64). Cajete’s view aligns with a multi-dimensional “woven universe” as described by Marsden (2003), in contrast to an enmeshed world, where individuals are deeply embedded in rationalistic, materialistic economic logic.

Māori are the *tangata whenua*, the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand,¹ who have retained strong and thriving tribal wisdom traditions despite the enormous impacts of colonization from the 1800s. Traditionally, Māori had an existing economic framework with stable, well-established protocols for the conduct of trade to meet the needs of the individual and the collective. Their distribution systems were far reaching, and trading relationships were secured and strengthened through an “economy of affection” (Henare 2003). In the early colonial period, Māori economic involvement was influential, recognized, and organized. An 1840 foundational covenant, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*, between the British Crown and Māori *rangatira* (chiefs) reflected for the signatories an intention to establish relationships of reciprocal respect and understanding between equal parties. Yet, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* was persistently violated by the British Crown.

As the number of settlers swelled, combined with the debilitating effects of land confiscations, disease, and political disenfranchisement, Māori modes of production and economic engagement were devastated. At the time of colonization; the Māori population numbered about 100,000–110,000. At the signing of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*, the Māori population had dropped to around 70,000, and the settler community stood at around 2,000 people. By 1881, the Māori population had been decimated through wars, disease, and epidemics to just 46,000; in the same year, the settler population had grown to over 470,000. In 1896, Māori numbered only 42,113 people—and many believed they were headed for “extinction.” A doctor at the time spoke of the need to “smooth the pillow of a dying race” (King 2003, p. 223).

In 2011, Māori, a growing population with around 650,000 people, represented over 15% of the total Aotearoa New Zealand population. The full potential of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* as a foundational covenant that promotes and

upholds relationships of respect and understanding between peoples is slowly being rectified through legal, political, educational, and social processes. Substantial resources are being returned to Māori. Increasing numbers of Māori entrepreneurial firms, tertiary institutions, and health and service providers also make significant economic contributions. While Māori organizations are often depicted as sharing the same goals and objectives as any conventional business—to create profitable and economically sustainable enterprises—they differ from the general business norm by viewing profit and economic well-being as a means to serve broader social, cultural, environmental, and spiritual well-being goals (Durie 2001, 2003; NZIER 2003; Spiller 2010). Māori traditions evoke a worldview of relatedness and insights which can help organizations move away from the atomized, self-interested, disassociated, individualized practices inherent in many Western organizations (see Folger and Salvador 2008).

This article proceeds in four parts. In the first, we define key terms which are anchored in a Māori worldview to reflect a spirit of stewardship. Second, we present what organizations can do to create wisdom for wealth and well-being. Next, we cast into sharp relief the unwise behavior evident in many organizations. Finally, we discuss the intermingling of theory and analysis for stewardship, and present ideas for future research.

Terms of Endearment: Defining the Undefinable

Drawing on a Māori wisdom tradition offers insights into a worldview of stewardship, a world bound by life energies such as *mauri* which is a life-force. *Mauri* gives “uniqueness and being to each individual object” and is a binding force, an energy that draws species together and “is immanent in all things, knitting and bonding them together,” thus bringing unity in diversity (Marsden 2003, pp. 47, 60) and ascribing intrinsic worth to all (Morgan 2008). Being bound through *mauri* unifies all aspects of creation, and is not unity without differentiation, but unity appreciative of the intrinsic spiritual worth, and difference, in all of creation.

Mauri ora, meaning well-being, is, from a Māori perspective, to consciously realize and manifest the full potential in relationships. *Ora* denotes “well” and “in health” (Williams 2004). When *mauri* and *ora* come together, the word can mean “conscious” (Māori Language Commission 1995), and in this article is used to mean “conscious well-being” (see also Spiller et al. 2010). While *Mauri* as a life-force is oriented toward healing and sustaining life (Marsden 2003; Tipu Ake ki te Ora 2011), we contend that organizations must act consciously to create well-being.

¹ Aotearoa, meaning Land of the Long White Cloud, is the ancient Māori name of this country. New Zealand is a relatively recent name given by settler society.

Thus, in a Māori worldview, wisdom is linked to consciously created well-being. Such creation involves stewardship whereupon care and conservation are at the heart of the Māori values system, which call upon humans to be *kaitiaki*, stewards of the *mauri*, the life force, in each other and in nature. This echoes the original meaning of the old English “welth,” meaning “to be well” (Zohar and Marshall 2004, p. 2). Well-being, then, is the goal of wisdom, not wisdom for wisdom’s sake—but how wisdom serves others.

According to the Māori view, a child arrives with *mana*, and agency to create *mauri ora*, or conscious well-being which is the wellspring sustainability. *Mana* as a concept denotes agency (Henare 2003) for realizing potential (Porter 2009). *Mana* means spiritual power, authority, and sovereignty, drawn from various sources. Being a steward endowed with *mana* requires that a child lives, and grows into an adult, in respectful recognition of their own *mana* and the *mana* in the world around them. In this view, empathetic relationships are not limited to a parental figure alone but include spiritual, ancestral, environmental, as well as human emotional attachments. These reciprocal relationships of respect appreciate that personal well-being is intimately linked to the well-being of others and the environment.

According to a Māori perspective, well-being embraces a wide variety of relationships as the business organization seeks to uplift and empower the *mana* of others—it is an ethic of power and the common good which is “threaded into a fabric of existence” (Henare 1988, p. 18). *Mana* has little application outside the collective context—as a group-enhanced quality, it belongs to the group. Individuals in Māori society are “agents of their people; their value being measured by the way in which their efforts promote the *mana* of their people” (Henare 1988, p. 20). Thus, wise organizations, according to a Māori worldview, construct community with their customers, employees, and local people (communities), and, in doing so, deepen the connection with each other and with the place. They achieve this through the “process of sharing common ground upon which an affinity and respect can grow” (Sharples 2008), affirming the importance of relationships.

Care and compassion for others are at the heart of the Māori values system, which calls for humans to be *kaitiaki*, stewards of the *mauri*, the life-force, in each other and in nature. These values include *manaaki*, to show respect or kindness; *aroha*, to show care, empathy, and charity; *hau* to respect, promote, and maintain vitality; *kaitiakitanga*, which includes guardianship, preservation, conservation, fostering, protecting, and wise use of resources; and *hāpai* meaning to uplift others. Stewardship practice creates value for stakeholders, and builds relational well-being and wealth.

Māori words for wisdom/wise include *hīnātore* (twinkle phosphorescent, luminescent, enlightened), *mātauranga* (knowledge, understanding, skill), *mōhio* (realize, recognize), and *tawhito* (expert, authority). People are encouraged to acquire breadth and depth of knowledge. Hirini Mead (1997, p. 51) uses the expression “*te hōhonutanga o te mātauranga*” to convey the depth of knowledge, wherein the learner dives into explore the areas of darkness, the unknown parts of the ocean and, by exploring, comes to understand. He writes that, “*Te whanuitanga o te māramatanga*,” refers to the horizons of knowledge, signifying that the ocean’s horizons must be explored as well as its depths. *Mātauranga*, he advises, is about developing the creative powers of the mind, and of expanding horizons, and reaching beyond the limitations of circumstance and adversity. Our definition of wisdom involves the enlightened weaving of knowledge, expertise, and authority to nurture and unfold the life-force to achieve well-being. We posit that acquiring wisdom is an unfolding nonlinear journey. Organizations can engage with and embody wisdom through practicing key values (see Table 1) within the ethos of stewardship. Wisdom in organizations, then, resides in the practice of stewardship values.

Arguably one of the most developed and empirically supported recent frameworks of wisdom is Sternberg’s (2001, p. 231) Balance Theory of Wisdom. According to him wisdom “is the application of tacit knowledge as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good through a balance among (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, and (c) extrapersonal interests to achieve a balance among (a) adaptation to existing environments, (b) shaping of existing environments, and (c) selection of new environments.” Our definition calibrates in significant

Table 1 Wisdom values through an ethic of *kaitiakitanga* (stewardship)

| Māori | English translation |
|-----------------------|---|
| <i>aroha</i> | Love, care, compassion |
| <i>hau</i> | Promote, and maintain vitality |
| <i>hāpai</i> | Uplift others |
| <i>kotahitanga</i> | Create alliance; unity, connectedness |
| <i>manaaki</i> | Respect, kindness |
| <i>mātauranga</i> | Knowledge, understanding, skill |
| <i>mōhio</i> | Realize, recognize |
| <i>pono</i> | Honesty, truthfulness |
| <i>tawhito</i> | Expert, authority |
| <i>tika</i> | Just, right, correct, appropriate behavior |
| <i>whakapapa</i> | Genealogy, honoring of ancestors, recognition of the human connectedness to all of creation |
| <i>whanaungatanga</i> | Relationships |

ways with Sternberg; however, our emphasis is on humans as stewards endowed with a mandate to use the agency of their *mana* (spiritual power, authority, and sovereignty) to create *mauri ora* (conscious well-being).

Valuing Wisdom

Wisdom emerges when stewards practice values with the purpose of consciously creating well-being. Māori scholarship highlights the role of values to guide Māori businesses (Durie 2001, 2003; NZIER 2003), and to develop models of organization that integrate economic goals with the creation of well-being in other areas. Henare outlines a traditional spiral of ethics, which he says, “simultaneously presents a Māori worldview and acts as a check on that worldview” (2001, p. 213). Henare’s view accords with that of other commentators who have highlighted the role of values as instruments to make sense of the world (Marsden 2003; Shirres 1997) and to guide Māori organizations (for example see Durie 2001, 2003; NZIER 2003; Reihana et al. 2007). More generally, a large body of organizational literature stresses the importance of values to guide business action and decision-making (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005; Kotter and Heskett 1992; Senge et al. 2004; Spiller 2000).

Table 1 illustrates some key Māori values pertaining to the ethic of *kaitiakitanga*, meaning stewardship that aspiring wise organizations can incorporate to managing organizational life. The values have been drawn from a field study in Aotearoa New Zealand on Māori organizations that are in the process of creating well-being (Spiller 2010). While the list of values is not meant to be exhaustive, we believe that they are key values which help stewards create well-being. From a Māori perspective, values exist in dynamic relationship with each other, as interlocking parts of a whole system of knowledge and are inseparable from the ongoing context of life itself (Durie 1998, 2003; Henare 2001) and reflect an ability to engage with “what is.” Applying values consciously in context is essential, and is a central dynamic of a Māori paradigm (Henare 1994) that strives to create reciprocal relationships of respect between humans and ecosystems. The interwoven nature of values reflects the “woven universe” (Marsden 2003), which in the context of this article, augments a wisdom position.

Many businesses, notably Western ones, believe that the sole purpose of business is to produce a profit, but from the woven universe wisdom perspective advocated here, the purpose of business is to create well-being. And to create well-being is to consciously realize and manifest the full potential in connected relationships. For many Indigenous

peoples, such interweaving or connectedness is linked to a culture of relationships and at the center of all relationships, binding them together, is a deep belief in a spiritual life force.

An interconnected worldview is not “new” as suggested by Senge et al. (2004), and their observations reflect the reawakening of wisdom latent in Western cultures. Like many Indigenous peoples, Māori prefer “process,” contrasting the modern Western predilection for “progress” which refers to inexorable, incremental improvements over the past, and is generally materialistic. The progress paradigm “perpetuates a distorted vision of what is, in fact, a multi-dimensional relational process” (Cajete 2000, p. 266). Suzuki et al. capture this ethos well, and observe that traditional cultures live in an animated world where humans “instead of being separated from the world because of their unique consciousness, they belong to a conscious world in which everything interacts with everything else in a process of continual creation” (1997/2007, p. 271). Indigenous communities embrace the idea of the coalescence of connectedness for all of creation (see also Cajete 2000), and that connectedness is needed to achieve wellness of earth and human spirit. This article shows how a stewardship ethic fosters, reinforces, and establishes the connections that are part of an Indigenous worldview, for the purpose of encouraging wise behavior in all organizations.

As *kaitiaki*, Māori are stewards and guardians who are expected to respectfully care for the ecosystems, land, habitats, and dwelling places of nature—and this commitment extends to organizations. As Marsden explains, humans are the “conscious mind of Mother Earth and our contribution is to enhance and maintain her life support systems” (2003, p. 46). In caring for the well-being of nature, Māori organizations demonstrate how they ensure that the environment itself is a stakeholder with a voice, and listen directly to nature, rather than the voices of intermediaries such as institutions. Kao, Kao, and Kao have noted how many businesses tend to treat nature as a “silent” stakeholder:

Throughout human history, we have been continuously taking from nature, and asking nature “Give me that which I want.” The silent nature remains (as always) silent, and we take it as “silent consent.” We have rarely asked nature: what can we give you which you want? (2002, p. 130).

In *Who speaks for the trees? Invoking an ethic of care to give voice to the silent stakeholder*, Sama, Welcomer, and Gerdel write that “the natural environment must also be treated with respect, which assumes a positive valuation of the environment’s contribution to organizational life and a certain deference to ecological claims” (2004, p. 141).

They note that interdependence between ecological and human systems is the core idea of sustainable development.

Wise organizations are encouraged to have a direct, participatory relationship with the environment which emerges out of “a life-centered, lived experience of the natural world” (Cajete 2000, p. 5). This outlook accords non-human entities the right to an “uninterrupted freedom of existence and the same rights as humans” (Holden 2003). Nature is not a silent stakeholder, but an extension of the human person, just as the human person is an extension of nature: It is a kin relationship.

When materialistic values become the overriding concern, *mauri ora*, conscious well-being, cannot flourish. Kasser’s extensive research revealed that the pursuit of wealth and possessions might be undermining well-being. Materialism, according to Kasser, burdens the human soul and uses up energy that could be enjoyed for “living, loving, and learning” (2002, p. xi), and he argues that the more individuals locate materialistic values at the center of their lives, the more their quality of life diminishes.

Csikszentmihalyi insists that “business that does not contribute to human growth and well-being is not worth doing, no matter how much profit it generates in the short run” (2003, p. 35). Similarly, Sen (2009) argues that the market maxims of Adam Smith, upon which modern-day capitalism is supposedly but not actually largely built, called for a much wider conceptualization of business beyond short-term profit maximization and supposed self-interest as it is often practiced today. According to the argument of Wicks et al. (1994), which aligns with Leana and Rousseau’s (2000) concept of “relational wealth,” value is generated through effective, stable, and trusting relationships. The relational approach shows how wise organizations can engage in the global economy, using new modes of exchange, such as the associative, communal, and moral forms theorized by Biggart and Delbridge (2004), to counter the dominant price-and-product form.

Contrasting and Comparing Organizational Weaves

Māori organizations following a stewardship approach would culturally and inherently integrate corporate social responsibility not as an add-on, as happens in many Western organizations, but as an integral part of being in the world. The central difference between the more individualistic ideologies of many Western enterprises contrasts starkly with the Māori approach. This would be a clear contrast, even for those Western organizations that have added-in corporate socially responsible practices, fashioning to a growing trend over the past years of dozen or so.

Various international surveys, such as the SAM index, EIRIS, Fortune 500, the Dow Jones Sustainability Index, and the FTSE4Good, appraise and report on criteria, such as environmental sustainability, social issues and stakeholder relations, corporate governance, equal opportunities, and human rights. Some of the “wise” companies are Walt Disney, Herman Miller, Google, and United Parcel Services. Some of the “unwise” companies are Sears Holdings, Delphi, and WellCare Health Plans. In contrasting and comparing organizational weaves, our selection of companies is based on criterion sampling, identifying companies who reflect wisdom values as set out in Table 1. Our selection, shown in Table 2, portrays four unwise organizations.

Table 3 portrays four wise organizations, two of which are Western and two of which are Māori organizations. These form a snap-shot of companies, who in our view, engage with and embody wisdom, or disengage, from practicing key values within the ethos of stewardship.

Collins and Porras (1994) in their study of long-lasting companies showed that durability depends on a system of guiding principles and tenets, to shape an organization’s core purpose. Durability in the context of this discussion incorporates a concern for sustainable and ethical behavior, which serves not only the organization, but also broader well-being goals. Rooney and McKenna argue that organizations need to be wiser, for their role as a “positive ethical force in constructing the future” (2007, p. 126), and Hays calls this “*the greater good*” where the wise organization is cognizant of the “big picture” and is willing to trade short-term profit with long-term viability. The notion of the self-interested organization is transcended as the organization continuously seeks to “do the right thing” (2008, p. 2). Rowley and Gibbs argue that an organization becomes wise through care and attention to the needs of others, both inside and outside the organization (2008, p. 364).

Table 4 pulls together the threads from the wisdom position and the traditional Western mode, to display the characteristics of wise organizations from a traditional Western model and an ethic of *kaitiakitanga* model.

In authoring this article, we realize that identifying both “unwise” and “wise” organizations in Tables 2 and 3, and casting a sharp contrast between the characteristics of an ethic *kaitiakitanga* model and a traditional Western model in Table 4, we may be charged with inducing a dichotomy, which is antithetical to the wisdom approach that rests on the ethos of caring and compassion for all, arguably the “unwise” as well. While the ethical failures of Exxon Valdez, Ford, Union Carbide, and TEPCO along with others, such as Worldcom, Enron, Parmalat, and others form a portfolio of the “unwise” we recognize that many organizations are not operating at such extremes. The

Table 2 Organizational weaves: unwise organizations

| Case | Description | <i>Kaitiakitanga</i> values not followed | Comments: why the organization is unwise |
|---|---|--|--|
| <p><i>Case 1:</i> Exxon Valdez (USA)</p> <p>Unwise behavior: Poor crisis management and ineffectual scenario planning</p> | <p>In 1989, the Exxon Valdez oil spill of more than 11 million gallons of crude oil, with enormous consequences for the marine habitat in Alaska, with mass mortality of seabird deaths estimated at 250,000; 1,000–1,800 otters and over 300 harbor seals. The organization failed to show that it had effective systems in place to deal with the crisis. In 2010, the BP Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico demonstrates unwise behavior, not the least of which that the organization had not learned from the Exxon Valdez crisis</p> | <p><i>Tika</i> (just and appropriate behavior), <i>pono</i> (honesty, truthfulness), and <i>whakapapa</i> (recognition of the human connectedness to all of creation) not followed</p> | <p>Even though one may argue that the organization had to some extent expertise and knowledge in their field of activity, the organization clearly was unable to implement stewardship</p> |
| <p><i>Case 2:</i> Ford Pinto Case—Ford Motor Company (USA)</p> <p>Unwise behaviour: Putting utilitarian values ahead of humanistic values</p> | <p>In 1978, three young women were burned to death when the Pinto they were driving was struck from the rear and the fuel tank exploded. Ford had known that the organization was vulnerable to rear-end collisions and in their cost–benefit analysis decided that it would be less costly for the organization to pay for deaths and injuries rather than making the Pinto fuel tank safer—this would have cost \$11 per car. The 2010 recall of Toyota’s flagship green car, the Prius, due to faulty brake performance, demonstrates wise action. However, the 2011 recall of the same model due to faulty water pumps suggests unwise hastiness to release new models for profit-maximization at the cost of consumer safety</p> | <p><i>Tika</i> (just and appropriate behavior) and <i>manaaki</i> (respect) not followed</p> | <p>While the organization had certain expertise to guide decision-making and recognition, of the problem, they did not use their understanding in an honest, truthful and appropriate way for the good of producers and users</p> |
| <p><i>Case 3:</i> Union Carbide (India)</p> <p>Unwise behavior: Risk assessment failure of population density and potentially hazardous emissions</p> | <p>Pesticide plant which released 40 tonnes of methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas in 1984, immediately killing nearly 3,000 people and ultimately causing the deaths of at least 20,000, with at least 120,000 continuing to suffer from its after-effects. Frequently this has been cited as one of the world’s worst industrial disasters. The cause for this disaster includes the location of the plant in a densely populated area and a series of cost-cutting measures affecting the workers and their conditions</p> | <p><i>Hau</i> (promoting and maintaining vitality), <i>aroha</i> (love, care, compassion), and <i>whanaungatanga</i> (relationships) not followed</p> | <p>The organization knew what they were doing in that they were cost-cutting, and hence they looked after their own interests. Their self-interested, profit-oriented approach disregarded connectedness to the environment and relationships with the community</p> |

Table 2 continued

| Case | Description | <i>Kaitiakitanga</i> values not followed | Comments: why the organization is unwise |
|---|--|---|---|
| Case 4: Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) Fukushima nuclear plant (Japan) Unwise behavior: Failure in transparency regarding safety standards in the interests of public health | The 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan damaged plant equipment and emergency generators, leading to a failure of pumping cooling water to the core resulting in toxic radioactive leaks. While earthquake and tsunami planning had taken place, with some safety precautions being implemented, these proved manifestly insufficient as evidenced by errors of safety standards and falsified information in the public domain. The Fukushima incident is reminiscent of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Plant, owned by the same organization, TEPCO, which was impacted in 2007 by a 6.9 earthquake | <i>Tika</i> (just and appropriate behavior), <i>pono</i> (honesty, truthfulness), and <i>mōhio</i> (recognition) of the problem | The organization failed to address safety issues, and made available falsified information for public scrutiny. The organization failed to learn from its own 2007 disaster, as well as 3-Mile Island, USA in 1979 and Chernobyl, Ukraine in 1986 |

For information on Exxon Valdez, Ford Motor Company, and Union Carbide, see Spiller (2007), and for information on the Fukushima Nuclear Plant, see www.guardian.co.uk and Pinto (2007)

wisdom position we present in this article is not just one, linear, narrow pathway—rather—there are many paths that connect, engage, and interweave with each other. These are pathways of unfoldment and transformation, of learning through the practice of key wisdom values, as set out in Table 1. Thus, we do not argue the case for a continuum, a spectrum, or a check-list—rather—we set out the “how and why of wise practice” in business for the benefit of all organizations who wish to become stewards toward a better, more sustainable world.

Analysis and Implications for Future Research

Unlike a classic Triple Bottom Line approach that tends to report on social, environmental, and economic dimensions as separate categories, we highlight the inter-relationships between values in a position on wisdom through an ethic of *kaitiakitanga* or stewardship.

Business can do well (make money) by doing good (make a difference). Demonstrating the benefit of stewardship is often regarded as a prerequisite for convincing business to pursue strategies that may appear to be more explicitly aimed at increasing other well-beings. For example, proving the economic imperatives of corporate social responsibility is often a core modern management strategy (Carroll and Buchholtz 2008; Clarkson 1995; Freeman 1984). Thus an organization can have profit AND principle, make money AND make a difference, with no need for a trade-off between doing well and doing good.

An analysis of 127 published studies by Margolis and Walsh (2003) indicated that a positive association existed between corporate social responsibility and corporate financial performance, and that little evidence of a negative association existed. A more recent meta-analysis of 167 studies concluded that, despite a very slight positive association, the relationship between corporate social responsibility and corporate financial performance is essentially neutral (see Margolis and Elfenbein 2008). However, there is a literature emerging on managing for stakeholders, which suggests a positive relationship (Sisodia et al. 2007). DePaul University found a “statistically significant linkage,” that showed a positive relationship between a company’s commitment to ethical and socially responsible behavior and its corporate financial performance (as cited in Post et al. 2002, pp. 104–105). Similarly, a stakeholder view of business guided by ethics has been shown to create “win-win” outcomes that lead to enhanced organizational performance across multiple bottom lines (Carroll and Buchholtz 2008; Frank 2004; Jones et al. 2007; Post et al. 2002; Spiller 2000; Tencati and Zsolnai 2009; Wicks et al. 1994).

The economic bottom line is highlighted by the meta-analysis of Orlitzky et al. (2003) of 52 studies (involving 33,000 observations) of the relationship between corporate environmental and social performance and corporate financial performance. They concluded that a positive association between the two had been proven which, in general, demonstrates that pursuing other well-beings does in fact usually make money and make a difference. In

Table 3 Organizational weaves: wise organizations

| Case | Description | <i>Kaitiakitanga</i> values followed | Comments: why the organization is wise |
|---|--|---|---|
| <p><i>Case 1: Patagonia (USA)</i> Wise behavior: Social innovation and enterprise that creates shared value across stakeholder groups</p> | <p>Patagonia produces and sells clothing and gear for “silent sports” such as climbing, skiing, snowboarding, surfing, fly fishing, paddling, and trail running. They use “business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.” Patagonia have been listed as one of eight revolutionary socially responsible companies. Each year, they donate either 1% of their total sales or 10% of their total profits, whichever is more, to environmental causes</p> | <p><i>Aroha</i> (love, care, compassion); <i>hau</i> (promote and maintain vitality); and <i>mōhio</i> (realize, recognize) were followed</p> | <p>Patagonia believes in promoting and maintaining the vitality of the environment, done with a spirit of love and compassion for the world, and a sustainable future, exemplifying the values of stewardship</p> |
| <p><i>Case 2: Da Vita (USA)</i> Wise behavior: Caring for all stakeholders and putting humanistic values to the fore</p> | <p>Da Vita, translated from Italian meaning “he or she gives life,” is the largest independent provider of dialysis services in the USA. It is recognized among the Fortune World’s Most Admired Companies for the last 5 years (2006–2010). They adopt a “Trilogy of Care: caring for our patients, caring for our teammates and caring for our world.” They have a growing catalog of goodwill initiatives, pioneered at all levels of the organization</p> | <p><i>Aroha</i> (love, care, compassion), <i>hāpai</i> (uplift others), and <i>kotahitanga</i> (creating alliances and unity) were followed</p> | <p>Da Vita is an energetic organization dedicated to making work enjoyable and uplifting for all “teammates” (employees) and the communities they serve</p> |
| <p><i>Case 3: Whale Watch Kaikoura (Aotearoa New Zealand)</i> Wise behavior: Creating shared value for communities and ecologies, as well as protecting cultural and spiritual values</p> | <p>Whale Watch is a marine-based whale-watching organization offering visitors—a year-round up—close encounter with the Giant Sperm Whale. In 2010, they won the Tourism for Tomorrow—Community Benefit Award for making a positive contribution to cultural heritage, local community input and empowerment, and training and educational opportunities. Community programs have included creating youth skills and therefore, a future by taking care of their welfare, and contributing to an alcohol and drug rehabilitation program</p> | <p><i>Hāpai</i> (uplift others), <i>mōhio</i> (realize, recognize), and <i>whakapapa</i> (connectedness to all of creation) followed</p> | <p>Whale Watch took a risk and invested in their community and the environment at a time when resources were limited and spirits low. Their respect, love, and appropriate tourism policies protect marine life, and their social program uplift stakeholders, especially the environment, community, and customers</p> |
| <p><i>Case 4: Wakatu Inc (Aotearoa New Zealand)</i> Wise behavior: Taking a long-term view that builds value in the present for the future generation</p> | <p>Wakatu Inc. are “a business of the land & sea... for profit, social and cultural growth through professionalism, honesty, diligence and embracing our tikanga [cultural protocols].” Their interests include horticulture, viticulture, seafoods, investment and development of property and land. Their mission includes empowering youth through education and personal growth opportunities to ensure the future prosperity of the organization, communities, and families</p> | <p><i>Mōhio</i> (realize, recognize), <i>tika</i> (just, appropriate behavior), <i>whakapapa</i> (genealogy) followed</p> | <p>Wakatu Inc. recognize that business can be a vehicle for transforming the well-being of communities, both now and in the future. For them responsible behavior that contributes to the greater good and stewardship is “not about commercialising our culture, it’s about culturalising our commerce”</p> |

For information on Patagonia, see www.patagonia.com, Da Vita see www.davita.com. For information on Whale Watch Kaikoura, see Lake and Erakovic (2005) and www.whalewatch.co.nz. For information on Wakatu Inc. see (“Māori tourism not just hangi and haka”, 2007) and www.wakatu.org. Websites accessed January 6, 2011

Table 4 Comparing the *Kaitiakitanga* wisdom model with the traditional Western model

| Characteristics | <i>Kaitiakitanga</i> model | Traditional Western model |
|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Ecological voice | Internal, embedded | Silent, external |
| Mode of communication | Dialogic, respectful, compassionate | Bargaining, power |
| Premised on | Wisdom, well-being, process, co-existence | Profit, progress, managing |
| Social issues | Center | Periphery |
| Stakeholder dominance | Community connections, protection of resources, wisdom model | Fiscal returns, economic model |
| Structural form | Woven, reciprocal connections | Hierarchical |

short, a positive correlation cannot always be demonstrated between social and financial performance but, as Post, Preston et al., argue, “there is very little evidence of a *negative* association” (2002, p. 28). Thus, businesses can be seen to be doing well and doing good even if they have not conclusively been shown to be doing well by doing good.

Kotter and Heskett (1992) demonstrated through a large study of the US companies that those with a strong corporate culture, based on a foundation of shared values, significantly outperformed those with no such basis. The importance of values is supported also by Collins and Porras (1994), who showed how values and a purpose beyond just making money build a strong corporate culture, and how those firms with such values and purposes achieve long-term success. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2007) promotes the integral role that local entrepreneurs, microenterprises, and small and medium enterprises have in community well-being. Smaller businesses, they say, typically have a greater vested interest in community development and draw upon the community for their workforce. Furthermore, smaller businesses understand the communities within which they operate and are a good source of employment for women, young people, or low-skilled workers.

There are tangible economic benefits for environmentally responsible business. Senge et al. describe the benefits of a business case through saving money from reduced waste and energy use, improving brand differentiation, attracting and retaining employees, and offering an expanded suite of services that include sustainability options (2008, p. 111). This echoes arguments from many directions notably the Stern Review that “recasts environmentalism as economics” (Stern 2007).

Stewardship involves the collaborative nature of wise organizations, which enables businesses to accomplish changes that would be otherwise difficult to achieve. Miles et al. (2005, p. 40) argue that “in collaborative relationships each party is as committed to the other’s interests as it is to its own, and this commitment reduces the need for the continual assessment of trust and its implications for how rewards will be divided.” A collaborative business model, they maintain, can yield efficiencies, foster innovations in product development, processes and distribution systems, and increase knowledge capability. Collaborations can match larger competitors by linking talents, skills, and resources (Hawkins 2006, p. 230). Wise organizations bring a collaborative aptitude which they use to form relationships across the spiritual, cultural, social, environmental, and economic dimensions (see also, Karakas 2010; Ngunjiri 2010; Vieten et al. 2006) of well-being.

A study of Māori organizations (Spiller 2010) revealed that a Māori values-based approach creates well-being

across five dimensions: spiritual, cultural, social, environmental, and economic. Following on from Spiller’s study creating spiritual well-being calls for wise organizations to respond to the spiritual needs of individuals, who can make a difference in their communities, and deepen ecological connections and awareness. Cultural well-being calls upon custom, to guide behavior in modern workplaces, which entails evaluating situations in a critical and a caring manner, to ensure that decisions are relevant culturally. Social well-being embraces a wide variety of relationships as a wise organization seeks to contribute to stakeholders through meaningful relationships. Wise organizations demonstrate environmental well-being through a commitment to being stewards of the environment. In producing economic well-being, wise organizations seek to add value not only to their products and services but also to all relationships and processes. Therefore, to be wise and truly responsive to the environment, the inner voice or conscience must permeate an organization’s processes and be incorporated as a part or extension of itself (Sama et al. 2004).

Our position on wisdom through *kaitiakitanga* makes two distinct contributions. First, *kaitiakitanga*, stewardship, incorporates an Indigenous Māori view, to demonstrate how “ancient philosophical traditions can provide guidance in our relationship to ourselves, to the cosmos, and to other human beings” (Hadot 1995, p. 274) and assist organizations with moving “beyond the traps of conventional thinking” (Bolman and Deal 1995, p. 39). This leads to its second advantage of a wisdom position, that is, it offers a meeting place for wisdom in organizations drawing together an Indigenous perspective with Western. The values which comprise our woven universe emerge from a Māori wisdom tradition (see Table 5 for a glossary of Māori words). These values, acting in concert, offer an elegant simplicity designed to communicate with both researchers and practitioners (Suddaby 2010), thus addressing concerns about the lack of practitioner interest in organizational scholarship (Rynes et al. 2001).

Waddock (2004) discusses the need to create a tipping point for making corporate citizenship real through responsibility-management systems and responsibility-assurance systems. Future studies could develop performance measurements for stewardship. Measuring such outcomes from business activity may help us to address failings in the current price-system where valuable resources such as air have generally had a “zero” price (Stiglitz 2006), although this attitude is changing to some extent as governments seek to put a price on pollution. In an era of social networking, such as Facebook and Twitter, crowd sourcing where consumers self-assemble (Anderson 2006), and the exponential growth of worldwide movements for social and environmental justice (Hawken 2007),

Table 5 Glossary of Māori words

| Te reo Māori | English |
|------------------|--|
| Aroha | Love, kindness, respect, compassion |
| Hāpai | Lift up, raise |
| Hau | Vitality of human life, vital essence of land |
| Hinātore | Twinkle phosphorescent, luminescent, enlightened |
| Kaitiaki | Guardian, keeper, preserver, conservator, foster-parent, protector |
| Kaitiakitanga | Guardianship, preservation, conservation, fostering, protecting |
| Kotahitanga | The principle of alliance; unity |
| Mana | Spiritual power, power, authority, sovereignty |
| Manaaki | Show respect or kindness to; entertain |
| Māramatanga | Enlightenment |
| Mātauranga Māori | Māori knowledge |
| Mauri | Life force, life principle, bonding element of universe; conscious |
| Mauri ora | Awake, conscious, well, in health |
| Mōhio | Know, understand, comprehend, realize, recognize |
| Ora | Alive; well, in health |
| Rangatira | Māori leaders |
| Tangata whenua | People of the land |
| Tawhito | Expert, authority |
| Taonga | Highly prized object, or asset |
| te hōhonutanga | The research principle of deepening knowledge |
| te whānuitanga | Research principle of expanding knowledge towards light |
| Tika | Just, right, correct, appropriate behaviour |
| Whakapapa | Genealogy |
| Whanaungatanga | Relationships |

it would be worthwhile exploring how stewardship fosters, reinforces, and establishes connections in these contemporary arenas.

We acknowledge the need for further research on the “dark side” of wisdom, that is, it is important not to assume that wisdom is inherently good, beyond critical analysis, or not susceptible to being silenced, subsumed, and or assessed according to alternative views (Rooney and McKenna 2007, p. 131). Exploring the dark side of wisdom provides a rich terrain for strengthening the organizational journey toward transforming their potential as the creators of well-being through the service of others and the environment. To wise up and create wisdom through *kaitiakitanga*, organizations can begin by taking the journey toward wisdom as reflected in this Māori proverb:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Ma te kōrero ka mōhio</i> | By discussion comes understanding |
| <i>Ma te mōhio ka mārama</i> | By understanding comes light |
| <i>Ma te mārama ka mātauranga</i> | By light comes wisdom |
| <i>Ma te mātauranga ka ora</i> | By wisdom comes wellbeing |

Acknowledgments We acknowledge with thanks Nga Pae o te Maramatanga, the centre for Maori research excellence, for their financial support. We would also like to thank the editors of the *Journal of Business Ethics* and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments; Pro-Vice Chancellor Maori, Dr. Pare Keiha, for his mentorship; and Isaac Pio and Dr Rodger Spiller for their steadfast encouragement.

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