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Success factors of Māori entrepreneurs: A regional perspective

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(Received 4 July 2017; revised 30 December 2017; accepted 11 July 2018; first published online 28 August 2018)

Abstract

This paper reports on an exploratory study into critical success factors as they are perceived by Māori small- to medium-sized enterprise (SME) owners in the Otago/Southland regions of New Zealand. We draw on interview responses from 11 Māori business owners and four representatives of SME support services. The aim of this study is to explore Māori SME characteristics in terms of the critical success factors that help or hinder the achievement of their business aspirations. The findings indicate three main thematic concerns: Māori SME owners' perception of being Māori impacts on how they position themselves as a business; the regional business environment has particular features that impact in a particular way on Māori SMEs; and, notions of business strategy are culturally nuanced. We propose that a culturally constituted regional business support system will better enable Māori SMEs to achieve their aspirations.

Keywords: Māori business; small- to medium-sized enterprises; regional development; Indigenous economic development

Introduction

Small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a fundamental role in the national economies of countries around the world. Māori are the Indigenous population of New Zealand and as with indigenous communities around the world, economic development through business ownership is viewed as being a critical avenue for the realisation of their aspirations (Anderson, Dana, & Dana, 2006; Peredo & McLean, 2013). Recent reports on Māori SME regional activity have highlighted the significant contribution of Māori SMEs (Leung-Wai & Sanderson, 2008; Schulze, Generosa, & Molano, 2012; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2014a). However, as reports are primarily based on statistical estimates, they aggregate out context and meaning, seriously underestimating the true value of Māori SMEs to the regional and national economy. This has repercussions for the way policy around Māori economic development is designed and implemented.

Research on Māori business in New Zealand has increased with specific attention being afforded to business characteristics, specifically socio-cultural values (Warriner, 2007; Spiller & Stockdale, 2013; Mika & O'Sullivan, 2014), leadership (Katene, 2010; Ruwhiu & Cone, 2013), and entrepreneurship (Haar & Delaney, 2009; Henry, 2017). However, Reihana, Sisley, and Modlik (2007) argue that there is a growing need to explore more deeply the specific conditions, both internal and external to the firm that influence Māori enterprise creation and growth. Two factors strengthen the call for further research into Māori SMEs. First, Māori SMEs are a

significant and critical component of the Māori economy, which is viewed as the foundation for Māori developmental aspirations. Second, is the concern SMEs, irrespective of the ethnicity of ownership, have low survival rates in New Zealand, with just 42% of 2010 start-ups continuing to exist by 2015 (Ministry of Economic Development, 2011; Small Business Advisory Group, 2012). Therefore, in this paper we seek to explore, from the perspective of the Māori owners, characteristics of Māori SMEs and the critical success factors (CSFs) that can help or hinder achievement of their aspirations.

Boynton and Zmud (1984) provide a useful definition of the term ‘critical success factor’ as attributes associated internally or externally to the firm that must go well, or be well organised to ensure success for a manager or an organisation. They suggest that CSFs represent those managerial or enterprise areas that must be given special and continual attention to bring about high performance to sustain current operating activities and to ensure future success. This study focuses on the CSFs as they are perceived by Māori SME owners in the Otago/Southland regions of New Zealand (specifically: Otago, Southland, and the Southern Lakes), as being necessary for successful operation. Specifically, research asks: *What are the CSFs for Southern Māori SMEs?*

Our contribution is deeper understanding of how the theorisation and practice of SMEs in general can be enriched by giving weight to the processes and relations of socio-cultural exchange that occur in a localised setting. This paper is structured to first provide a literature review of SMEs, highlighting the unique characteristics of Māori SME owners and their businesses (for details as to the meaning behind Māori language, see Appendix 1), followed by the research methodology. The analysis presents three key themes identified as being critical to the success of the Māori SMEs. Finally, we discuss the implications of these three themes in terms of future research, policy, and practice, along with research limitations.

Literature Review

SMEs

SMEs are undoubtedly important to maintaining economic growth and meeting the foreign trade agenda of most national economies (Ates, Garengo, Cocca, & Bititci, 2013; Battisti, Jurado, & Perry, 2014). Therefore, the importance of small and medium enterprises and the owners who create them is attracting increased attention from policymakers and researchers alike. Understanding the different factors influencing small business growth can assist in anticipating critical requirements as SMEs expand, consolidate, undertake succession planning, or develop strategies for exit (Storey, 2011). However, SMEs are facing increasing pressure from global competition, making it difficult to maintain and improve business performance, unless they can actively manage these pressures (Kraus, Rigtering, Hughes, & Hosman, 2012).

Blackburn, Hart, and Wainwright (2013) explored factors that contribute to the performance and growth of SMEs: business characteristics (including size, age, sector and location, lifecycle effects and resource availability, and utilisation), owner–manager characteristics (including growth aspirations and motivations, education and gender, and entrepreneurial style), and business strategy (including planning and collaborative activity). In their research they illustrate that all three factors are interrelated and strongly determines the performance and growth of SMEs. The structural landscape in which SMEs operate emphasises the individual and collective sets of characteristics that position the process of entrepreneurship that occurs within a community of interdependent actors (Isenberg, 2010; Zahra & Nambisan, 2012; Stam, 2015). Although there is no exact formula for the creation and sustenance of an entrepreneurial ecosystem (Isenberg, 2010), there are several attributes that are considered to be influential, including system leadership, intermediaries and mentors, network density, talent, support services, and local or national government support (Stam, 2015).

Research also acknowledges the role of individuals themselves as important in setting the strategy of the enterprise and, in turn, influencing its interaction with the ecosystem (Zahra & Nambisan, 2012). In much of the small business literature, the entrepreneur or business owners demographic, psychological, and behavioural characteristics, in combination with managerial skills and technical know-how are often cited as the most influential factors related to the performance of an SME (Man, Lau, & Chan, 2002). Generalised characteristics of SMEs are that they have limited access to resources, personalised management styles, and little formal structure (Battisti, Lee, & Cameron, 2009). This emphasises that, to assure positive performance and growth, SMEs need to gain business acumen, that is, 'strategy development and implementation', including rethinking the 'role of the owner/manager and the absence of formalised HR policies and practices' (Darcy, Hill, McCabe, & McGovern, 2014: 402). At the business owner level, there is a need for advanced managerial practices with appropriate levels of training and business education to advance and sustain managerial capability of an SME as it moves from the start-up phase (Ates et al., 2013).

The SME context in New Zealand

A Māori SME is defined as where the owner identifies as a Māori business, is not owned by another enterprise, is not a Māori authority (Statistics New Zealand, 2016), and has fewer than 50 employees (Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment, 2016). The report reveals that 29% of the workforce (i.e., 599,880 people) are employed in enterprises that employ fewer than 20 people, with 97% of New Zealand's enterprises (i.e., 487,602 enterprises) being classed as small (Table 1).

Dominated by primary production due to a diverse and rich natural resource base, New Zealand's regions vary significantly in terms of their economic performance (Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment, 2015). It is not surprising, therefore, that the regions with large urban centres account for the majority of New Zealand's SMEs. The regions of interest to this study (see Table 2) are the combined Otago/Southland regions, which account for only 13% of New Zealand's total SME sector (Ministry of Economic Development, 2011).

Recent studies have indicated that there has been an increase in Māori business activities, brought about by a combination of government economic and social strategy, combined with iwi (tribal) land claim settlements (Barr & Reid, 2014; Hanita, Rihia, & Te Kanawa, 2016; Statistics New Zealand, 2016). Compensation from Treaty of Waitangi settlements with the New Zealand Government have contributed to a significant increase in the Māori economic asset base from NZ\$36.9 billion in 2010 to an estimated NZ\$50 billion (Chapman Tripp, 2017). Iwi have become significant asset holders in the agriculture, fishing, forestry, and tourism sectors, with greater levels of economic self-sufficiency. Yet the Māori economy is more than just the sum of tribal resources, with an increasing contribution of Māori SMEs (one in five) contributing NZ\$44

Table 1. New Zealand small- to medium-sized enterprise (SME) categorisation

Number of employees	Number of businesses	% of business units	Number of employees	% of total SME employee
Zero	353,070	70.3	-	-
Micro (1–5)	97,293	19.4	227,850	11.1
Small (6–19)	37,239	7.4	372,030	18.2
Medium (20–49)	9,459	1.9	280,240	13.7
Large (50+)	5,109	1	1,165,510	57

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment (2016).

Table 2. Overview of Otago and Southland regions

Indicator	Year of data ^a	Otago region	Southland region	New Zealand
Population	2016	219,200	98,000	4,700,000 (est)
Māori % of population	2013	7%	13%	15%
Employees	2015	120,811	54,998	2,425,173
GDP per capita	2015	NZ\$48,000	NZ\$50,000	NZ\$53,000
GDP as % of NZ	2015	4.3%	2.4%	
Average household income	2015	NZ\$85,514	NZ\$84,836	\$NZ91,198
Average weekly rent	2016	NZ\$377	NZ\$228	NZ\$407
Average house value	2016	NZ\$405,287	NZ\$220,788	NZ\$568,681
Employment rate	2016	65%	72%	66%
Unemployment rate	2016	4%	5%	5.2%
Employment growth	2015	1.1%	0.5%	1.4%
Industry sector diversity	2015	Winemaking, 60% of NZ's summer fruit crops, tourism, sheep/beef farming, hydroelectric generation	Dairy industry, sheep/beef farming, Tiwai aluminium smelter, tourism	
Household income distribution	2015			
\$100,001 or more		18.1%	17.8%	
\$70,001–\$100,000		16.0%	17.0%	
\$50,001–\$70,000		13.7%	14.6%	
\$30,001–\$50,000		17.1%	17.3%	
\$20,001–\$30,000		11.0%	11.1%	
Up to \$20,000		10.5%	9.6%	
Not stated		13.3%	12.3%	

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment (2015), Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment (2016).
^aLatest data available.

million to the burgeoning Māori export industry valued at NZ\$485 million in 2015 (Statistics New Zealand, 2016).

Māori SMEs

Today, Māori business owners have created enterprising businesses operating across a wide variety of sectors, including tourism, agriculture, forestry and fishing, technology, geothermal energy, manufacturing, mining, property development, and business services and retail trade (see Reihana, Sisley, & Modlik, 2007; Warriner, 2007; Tapsell & Woods, 2008, 2010; Bargh, 2011; Henry, 2007, 2017). A number of studies have sought to determine features that distinguish Māori business from non-Māori (Reihana, Sisley, & Modlik, 2007; Spiller, Pio, Henare, & Erakovic, 2011b; Mika & O'Sullivan, 2014). Although we acknowledge that 'business is business' and there are similarities, our notion of Maori business highlights differences, such as obligations to

extended family groups; responsibility and accountability to a broader range of stakeholders; application of *tikanga* in the business environment; and an ethos that mirrors the broad goals and values of the Māori world.

For Māori, as with other indigenous groups, these values are traditionally based and commonly derived from their own unique cultural viewpoint. As with Indigenous communities around the world, Māori draw from a socio-historical value-system embedded within their worldview to inform their everyday lives, including modes of organisation and business practice. *Te Ao Māori* represents the Māori world, which has a strong connection to traditional wisdom passed through the generations. From a Māori perspective, there exists an inherent interdependency between all things: physical, philosophical, and cosmological. Thus, logic and practice are driven by a culturally oriented value-system that privileges the sanctity of relationships and connection, which influences the structure, governance, and practice of Māori business.

As suggested by Henry (2017, p. 25), 'Indigenous entrepreneurship incorporates cultural characteristics, in terms of collective or communal orientation, inclinations towards kin-based enterprise and emphasis on employing forms of exchange as much or more for social and cultural purposes as for material gain'. That is, the Māori entrepreneur or business owner adopts a holistic and symbiotic consideration towards people and environment, as well as profits. The willingness to include community in their wealth or job creation activities gives Māori enterprises dual, and sometimes multiple, roles because they contribute to both the social and economic objectives of communities: *whānau*, *hapū*, and *iwi* (Henry, 2007; Foley, 2008; Eketone, 2013; Barr & Reid, 2014). Case study analysis by Foley (2010) identified that cultural links with networking among Māori entrepreneurs was very strong and that the role of family was an important element of business support. Therefore, suggesting that networking and the networking skills of the Māori entrepreneur were essential business attributes and an extension of their cultural life.

Research reveals that social-cultural norms have a significant influence on Māori business activity (Broughton, Wilson, & Ruwhiu, 2006; Tapsell & Woods, 2008; Spiller, Erakovic, Henare, & Pio, 2011a). Māori values and cultural expressions are integral to Māori business owners, who place considerable importance on the incorporation of Māori *whanonga pono* (values) and *tikanga* (protocols and practices) Māori into their businesses (Devlin, 2007; Warriner, 2007; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2014b). For Māori socio-cultural factors play a significant role in the creation, structure, and activity of their businesses (Reihana, Sisley, & Modlik, 2007). Therefore, performance is not merely an outcome of economic activity, but is also derived from combinations of distinct socio-cultural resources and capabilities.

Māori business is as likely to be influenced by socio-cultural objectives as economic success (Haar & Delaney, 2009; Tapsell & Woods, 2010; Spiller & Stockdale, 2013; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2014b; Hanita, Rihia, & Te Kanawa, 2016). Therefore, defining 'success' for Māori SME owners is difficult and complex (Tapsell & Woods, 2010) as Māori business enterprises often have noneconomic explanatory variables, likely to include socially driven objectives, and some of their cultural values are often incompatible with the basic assumptions of mainstream theories (Spiller et al., 2011a). The challenge for Māori business owners is often how to balance aspirations for cultural enrichment with more modern elements of growth, commerce, and economic advancement. A task made difficult for many Māori small enterprise owners who view the business world landscape as a murky terrain and the discourse in many respects being 'alien' to them (Broughton, Wilson, & Ruwhiu, 2006). Lack of business skills are still viewed as being a significant barrier for Māori small businesses, driving increased attention on upskilling and education for Māori businesses (Reihana, Sisley, & Modlik, 2007). In addition, issues such as a lack of capital or access to funding, balancing family and business interests, and access to expertise were also concerns (ANZ Bank, 2015).

Methodology

The research question ‘*What are the CSFs for Southern Māori SMEs?*’ seeks to better understand how Māori SME owners view their role and activity. A key deciding point in creating a qualitative research design was the concern with particularities rather than generalisability of findings. That is, the project team did not begin with hypotheses nor assume that claims can be made beyond the setting that is studied. Such an approach enables researchers ‘to learn how people make sense of their worlds and how they interpret their own actions and circumstances through one-to-one conversations of an interview’ (Rakow, 2011: 417).

Kaupapa Māori Research

As Māori researchers, we ensured that the assumptions, values, and priorities of our study followed appropriate protocols for kaupapa Māori research (Walker, Eketone, & Gibb, 2006; Smith, 2012). Although, as an Indigenous research tradition, kaupapa Māori research does share similarities with general approaches to research in management and organisation, there are differences stemming from underlying paradigmatic qualities in this instance drawing from Mātauranga Māori, Māori epistemology. In a paradigmatic sense, kaupapa Māori research sets the field of study, and defines what needs to be studied and what questions should be asked (Smith, 2012). As such, it presents a regime that provides a template for a culturally attuned response to researching in Māori contexts (Ruwhiu & Cone, 2010). Specific details as to the research processes undertaken within our kaupapa Māori approach are discussed in the subsequent subsections.

The methods of research design involved in kaupapa Māori research are not particular to Māori. It is a framework that allows for a suite of methods providing they are consistent with kaupapa Māori principles (Awatere, Mika, Hudson, Pauling, Lambert, & Reid, 2017: 82). Therefore, certain kinds of qualitative research, for example open-structured interviews, fit comfortably with the kaupapa Māori approach by allowing perspectives and interpretations of the subject to be shared and meaning ascribed by the participants (Ruwhiu & Cathro, 2014). However, a key principle or standpoint of kaupapa Māori research is that of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination); it is about a Māori-centred agenda where the issues and needs of Māori are the focus and outcomes of the research (Smith, 2012; Rewi, 2014). As Brewer, Harwood, McCann, Crengle, and Worrall (2014) describe, these include:

- forming reciprocal relationships with the research community that last beyond the study;
- having credibility as a researcher which may include relational linkages;
- having respect for people, which includes sharing findings, being culturally safe and politically astute and having a humble approach;
- being a ‘seen face’ and fronting up to people; and
- having a joint approach to research.

In addition, unlike traditional research in organisation and management, any data collected from kaupapa Māori research do not become the ‘property’ of the researcher: rather the data remain under collective guardianship (Walker, Eketone, & Gibb, 2006). That is, there is an inherent sense of connection between the researchers and the participants, which bring a significant sense of obligation and responsibility to how the data are managed.

Participants

The aim was to ensure through purposive sampling that our respondents would adequately represent a sample population of Māori SMEs and enabling agencies that could offer insight.

Table 3. Participant details of Māori small- to medium-sized enterprises

Lifecycle phase	Business operation	Code
Start-up: 0–5 years fledgling enterprise	1. Pet services	B1
	2. Information technology services	B2
	3. Cultural tours ^a	B3
	4. Restaurant ^a	B4
Early growth: 3–8 years demonstrated capability	5. Suppliers and installers of energy-efficient products	B5
	6. Consulting company	B6
	7. Environmental management consulting company	B7
	8. Ecotourism	B8
Established/maturity: 6–10 years + established trading record	9. Business and hospitality specialists ^a	B4
	10. Cultural tourism	B9
	11. Financial consulting ^a	B3
	12. Wine tours	B10
	13. Independent television production company	B11

^aTwo participants have an established business and a new business start-up each.

Table 4. Participant details enabling agencies

Business operation	Code
1. Iwi representative – business development	A1
2. Iwi representative – governance	A2
3. Māori focused service	A3
4. Non-Māori focused service	A3

As such, we followed the Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment (2016) definition of what constituted an SME in New Zealand (fewer than 50 employees). We also included key local and national government business agencies as well as the main tribal group, Ngāi Tahu that act as ‘enabling agencies’ in the Southern region. The Southern region was chosen predominantly not only for ease of accessibility but also in recognising a stable economic environment for SMEs in these regions (Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment, 2014).

The fieldwork involved interviews with 11 Māori business owners, noting that two of our participants had two businesses, one established and the other a new venture, which they spoke about separately. In addition, we included interview responses from four representatives of support services specific to the Southern region (Tables 3 and 4), three of whom were working in Māori focused business service support, and one who was a Tauwiwi (non-Māori) business advisor from a non-Māori organisation.

Data collection and analysis

Empirical data were gathered using open-response interviewing, which enabled responses to emerge as a result of the participants' and researchers' conversations (Yeo, Legard, Keegan, Ward, McNaughton-Nicholls, & Lewis, 2014). The one-to-one interview approach was semi-formal and undertaken *kanohi-ki-te-kanohi* (face-to-face). The interviews conducted at participants' workplaces usually lasted between one and several hours and were recorded. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher began with an introduction and explanation of the projects research objective. An important element at this stage was the opportunity for *mihi*, noted here as a form of introduction and a way to establish connections between ourselves and our *whānau*, to establish the connection between the researcher and the participant. It would be simplistic to note this as a trust-gaining exercise; rather, it is viewed as *whanaunatanga*, being strongly connected to collective responsibility captured by the ethic of belonging and traditional way of thinking about relationships (Bishop, 1996; Smith, 2012).

The participants were encouraged to speak about their own experiences and what they deemed as important (Yeo et al., 2014) in relation to CSFs of their business. The interviewer did ask some questions, but more in response to points participants raised and allowed for meanings to be expanded upon. Open-ended, semi-structured interview style allowed the interview to be constructed as a dialogue, although semi-structured questions provided direction (Rapley, 2004). Guiding the discussion was a series of questions which were provided to participants prior to the interview (Appendix 2). The intention was not to have a question/answer approach to the interview, rather a more general discussion.

Full transcriptions and, where requested, the voice recordings of interviews were sent to each participant for their review. Participants were provided the opportunity to read and accept their transcript (or offer changes/clarification as to what was said). Transcripts averaged 12 pages each (single line spacing, 12 font text).

The initial coding phase of analysis was the interviewer reading and coding themes using the word document commentary function. This was then followed up by a second team member to add a further coding layer to the same document. Given there were two sets of interpretation occurring, the two researchers then met to discuss the different sets of codes and pull themes together. Through a process of vigorous discussion in relation to the transcripts, and themes, careful attention was paid to codes that were deemed to be outliers (e.g., a code or theme that emerged through one researchers perspective only). The resulting 28 themes were a result of both researchers having thoroughly debated and rationalised the inclusion of the themes for the second level of analysis.

A second level of analysis was conducted by loading the transcripts into the NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) computer software package. NVivo is an ideal technique for researchers working in a team, since it facilitates combining the work of individuals working on one project (Hilal & Alabri, 2013). NVivo enables researchers to manage and query data and ideas, visually model conceptual and theoretical data, and formulate reports (Bazeley, 2007). Through, selective coding, data were inductively organised thematically and descriptively, to refine the themes from the first level of analysis, which saw themes being clustered into higher level subjects (Gibbs, 2002). A final level of analysis abstracted three broader thematic categorisations of CSFs for Māori SMEs (Table 5). Specifically, the utility of this approach was that it enables analysis at each stage and supports an iterative process of identifying, refining, and reflecting on constructs throughout the research cycle.

Analysis

I think sometimes that the small business owners often get forgotten and overlooked, but they're just as important because that's where the growth is going to be. [A3]

Table 5. Thematic development

Initial coding	Selective coding	Thematic category
1. Māori identity 2. Customer focus 3. Social/human value	Business values	
4. Definition 5. Lifestyle 6. Whanau 7. Financial	Success	Being a Māori Business
8. Location 9. Opportunities 10. Challenges 11. Conservatism	Regional context	
12. Support mechanisms (agencies) 13. Council, business networks 14. Mentoring (formal support services) 15. Mentoring informal (whanau) 16. Challenges	Networks and relationships	Regional landscape
17. Motivation 18. Whanau influence 19. Intergenerational 20. Entrepreneurial orientation	Start-up	
21. Education (value of) 22. Upskilling 23. Staffing and human resources 24. Tipping points and opportunities 25. Exit strategy/succession	Growth	Business strategy
26. Adaptation and implementation 27. Enabler 28. Monitoring/monetizing business	Technology/Information and Communication Technology	

The following section presents the interview responses to highlight CSFs identified for Māori SMEs as narrated by Māori SME owners. Our findings are organised into three themes. The first theme related to notions of identity and how Māori SMEs position themselves as Māori business. Specific business characteristics were identified, including factors such as business type, operational activities, ownership structure, and governance. The second theme was related to the external business environment in which our Māori SMEs operate and the nature of the opportunities and barriers that present themselves in the Southern region environment. The third theme focused specifically on how the participants viewed strategic aspects of their businesses. Concluding this section are responses from participants wherein they identified specific challenges to success.

'Being' a Māori SME

Participants acknowledged and were very 'proud' of being a Māori business, a Māori entrepreneur. When asked about how Māori businesses were perceived and defined, our participants acknowledged the similarities to 'mainstream' businesses in terms of operation. However, other

features highlighted that there are specific signifiers of Māori SMEs related to practice and socio-cultural values.

Enterprise in the Māori context ... it resonates with me because it makes sense to our values and who we are. [B6]

I'm actively learning about my whakapapa and cultural knowledge but like as you say, it's more of a subtle pride knowing that you're part of something bigger and something that's being connected to the country that you're in and the place that you're in. [B1]

The issue of noneconomic factors of success was also discussed during interviews, as the Māori SME participants were asked to reflect on what success meant to them. While economic success was important, our participants considered their values and cultural capital as integral to their business success. Primarily, our participants highlighted the importance of taking care of whānau, as an influence on being in business and on the outcomes being aspired to.

Everything we do ... that's to feed back into our whānau. [B6]

For Māori it is not all about the profits. It's about what they can do for their whānau and how they can support their whānau in their business with succession planning and also their view of business is different too. [A3]

My main motivation behind business is, I've got five children to bring up and that is not an easy task. The realities is that it is a high financial burden and I want the ability, ...to bring them up well. And for them, ... I talk to them about things ... for them to see me in action. See me operating and I'm sure that will come through. [B1]

In addition, how our respondents saw themselves as a Māori business influenced whether they saw themselves as part of the Māori economy, for it was clear that the 'notion' of Māori economy for them was one that went beyond economic notions of production, distribution, employment, cash flow, and productivity, but extended to socio-environmental relationships and values. This is noted specifically by [B6], when she stated that 'Even defining economy for Māori, it's everything. It's not just a dollar. It's not the dollar value. It's everything'. As shown by [B6], the notion of a Māori economy is seen as more encompassing than is perhaps commonly understood. Our participants viewed the economy as diverse and multifaceted with deep linkages to the area in which it operates.

I think there is a Māori economy, but I think it is broken up into a few parts. There's whānau enterprise ...they're very focused around a Māori kaupapa, but it is whānau driven. [A1]

An additional feature that emerged from the narratives was that participants saw intrinsic linkages amongst iwi, hapū, and whānau enterprises, even though these different organisational forms were not necessarily aligned in a business sense. There was recognition that the different forms of organisation and enterprise – from tribal to individually owned – which constitute the Māori economy operate both independently and interdependently, contributing to the way that communities are nurtured and sustained. We specifically probed our participants about whether they had realised 'opportunities' as a result of tribal Treaty settlements. While the majority had no direct benefit, they acknowledged the role of iwi enterprise in the region:

Ngāi Tahu is more a company really. I feel that they've done a good job, what Ngāi Tahu have done and I'm proud to see that they're doing really well. I know they don't do much for us, but I'm very proud of what they've done. [B10]

You know I understand and I respect where that's coming from but for me directly, has absolutely no relevance whatsoever to me. [B4]

Several participants made positive comments on the growth of Ngāi Tahu business enterprises and the important role a collective iwi enterprise has in regional development. There was also the feeling that the tribe's wider presence, while not directly influential, seemed to have had an indirect influence at the level of making Māori business more acceptable at a broader societal consciousness level. That is, the collective success of Ngāi Tahu had brought about a more conducive environment for Māori business generally in the South.

Regional landscape

Both business owners and business support agencies spoke of the positive aspects for locating or maintaining a business in Otago/Southland. Several interviewees commented that their regional location offered opportunities that might not be available elsewhere. For some, the decision to base their business in the Southern region was as a result of the long-lasting ties that the individual business owner had with the region. However, even more recent arrivals appreciated the unique opportunities that the Otago/Southland region offered. Thus, for some, the key driver was to be *'[able to work] on my own whenua ...on behalf of the wider whānau'* [B8]. Others viewed the conservatism and small size of Otago and Southland as having some business advantages. For instance, one participant viewed Dunedin as a good place for smaller entrepreneurs compared to Auckland where there was *'almost like a vibe that you've got to make it bigger'* [B11]. Others considered that the conservative nature of the Southern regions was a positive business attribute as you could still do business *'with a handshake ... [creating] obligation to do a really good job'* [B7]. This observation was echoed by a business support agent who commented favourably on the *'sustainability, environmental bottom lines, long term approach and the intergenerational approach to businesses ... long history, long established families, a closer, smaller community'* [A4]. Such a comment highlights the favourable links between community and business that make it easier to contribute to the community, whether it be through sponsorship, working for or with the local whānau or marae, or by contributing to the wider economic development of the region.

Mentoring featured as a prominent theme in most interviews and was commonly cited as a critical aspect for our Māori business owners. Sources of mentoring included both formal professional services (accountants, lawyers, financial advisors, etc.) and informal sources such as friends and family. The importance of relationships was recognised by all the business owners; though interestingly, it was considered in the context of region, with regional relationships with other non-Māori business enterprises viewed as favourable.

It's all about relationships. It's all about making friends with the right people. Especially the way my business works ... I've had to work quite hard at establishing (a) reputation, (b) all that type of stuff because you're the new girl on the block to get people to trust you and Southland is notoriously conservative and very much works on who is who and what's what. You're not going to know everybody. [B1]

They have been people with similar businesses to us. Support's been with good friends who have similar businesses; so those are mentors. We always ask 'how are you doing?' 'what do you think I should do?'... Yeah, there's a lot of sharing of knowledge and support within the Queenstown community. [B10]

For one owner new to the region, a Māori business service provider was important because the owner did not have the ‘grass root’ connections in place. Other business owners spoke of the value of entities such as the central government-funded Māori Business Facilitation Service and KUMA (Te Kupeka Umaka Māori ki Araituru, the Southern Māori Business Network):

Finding an established organisation that wants to work with you and really working hard to form that relationship is really critical.... it was able to give me a snapshot of where you are. So that was a good part of me moving here, becoming part of KUMA and again, I don't think I would have done that in Auckland. It's been quite good. I'm new in town, I don't know anyone so I started to go to the breakfasts. [B11]

That networking really helped and I think KUMA made it easier to get involved...I haven't been involved in any other business networks other than Māori business networks. I just find it easier. [B7]

While appreciating the Māori context of Māori support services, SMEs also looked to develop a rich network of non-Māori connections. This aspect was reiterated by a business owner who was positive about the collaboration between the Māori Business Facilitation Service and the local Chamber of Commerce to put on training courses:

So to be exposed to organisations that have expertise and industry knowledge, its gold really. I know that's what the MBFS programme was always about. Just knowledge sharing more than anything ... I've been given one really nice opportunity again through Māori Business Facilitation Service, which they collaborated with the Otago Chamber Commerce to put on a training course of about eight weeks, once session a week and it was all around organisational governance. That was brilliant, and MBFS put me on that course. [B2]

Business support agencies, in particular interagency collaboration, are viewed as being a vital factor for Māori SMEs at all stages of their business lifecycle, both to mitigate business risk and to enable SMEs to grow. However, in the above-mentioned narrative, participants make specific reference to distinctive regionally focused support services as being critical to their success. One service provider participant identified one rationale for this focus as being ‘*I suspect in each region it is quite different, because it is different resources, different access to service*’ [A3]. This is to be expected in a region where there has been a reduced national government presence in relation to economic development.

Business strategy

I don't want to create a big, a big dead wood business. I quite like it small enough that I know everyone who works for me. I can face to face with everyone that I contract and talk to them. Small business suits me and it's yeah, sort of like a conscious decision to keep that, to run and keep a small business, it suits me. [B11]

Although there is some debate as to the veracity of government support for small businesses, current national level policy seems to encourage SMEs to grow, with a focus on international export (Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment, 2015). This is not always what SMEs have in mind for themselves, as is shown in the above quotation. As is common with many SMEs, formal strategic planning, beyond initial business planning, was not common. However, there was a strong connection between the owners’ values and decision-making:

If an SME is identifying itself as a Māori SME, then they're identifying themselves for a variety of reasons. They've got probably a strong ancestral whānau cultural focus around their business that drives its performance or its strategy, its direction. [A1]

It's built upon the three of us, when we met, you know like consciously wanting to learn more about Māori cultural values. As we learnt we immediately kind of started? installing those values into our company and they weren't hard to find actually to be honest, once you start looking. It's a community. All we had to do was put our hands up and say we want to learn and we've just been surrounded by it. Lots of kotahitanga, unity and whakawhanaungatanga were really big parts of everything we do and yeah, so as we learn we're developing those values and installing them straight into our company and how we express ourselves. [B2]

Performance and growth are dependent on factors, both internal and external to the business. Participants varied in motivation, aspirations, and visions for their business, with a number of them having previous business experience which had shaped their views of what were essential business operations skills. Human resource management was deemed as critical to ongoing SME success, with staff being valued and provided with ongoing training, but being driven by a kaupapa or philosophy that emphasised human value. Indeed, many of our participants viewed it as akin to the concept of whanaungatanga (relatedness) and building relationships with staff to engender a sense of belonging:

We call it human value so everything has been placed and I've actually just taken a presentation with my managers last week on human value. So everything, where we are, the company is nothing without our staff because it is our people and their emotions and their performance that make the restaurant what it is. So for us human value meaning we put a lot of emphasis on our people in regards to their training, to their welfare. Making sure that they are fairly looked after. [B4]

Some acknowledged the importance of technology as a vehicle for increased productivity, efficiency, and revenue. The procurement, implementation, and knowledge around technology varied amongst our research respondents. In some cases, the role of information technology, social media, and online technology was considered important, but the Māori owners realised that they did not have sufficient capability, so they outsourced. In relation to 'innovation' tools such as information technologies, there was evidence that technology needed to be filtered through a kaupapa Māori approach:

We look at it with a cultural lens. That cultural growth happens because of the tools that you develop and use in order to create new things and change and diversify. New technology is just our new tools. You can do new things and break new ground and get new perspectives on things by using the tools. [B2]

As noted earlier, opportunities for training and business education are readily available to SMEs. Throughout our research, participants acknowledged the importance of continual learning, training, and business education to future success, as is evident in the following comment:

It could be a really important tipping point if you don't. As your business matures, if you're not maturing as a business leader and taking that wider view of where you are as an individual and where your business is in society and your legal obligations and implications, then you're not maturing. [B2]

Challenges

Although participants were, in general, positive about the business environment, they also referred to some distinct challenges facing Māori SMEs. Firstly, the reducing footprint of government services in terms of a regional presence was highlighted as a concern for some. Regional development had not '*really been a kaupapa for the government*' [A2] and the reduced footprint of government services, such as the Inland Revenue Department or District Health Boards, had a

perceived detrimental impact on regions and their economies. This drew one participant to consider the impact of a national policy that appeared quite disconnected from regional needs, with a consequent impact on how Māori SMEs operate:

It is so important to understand what the landscape is for Māori SMEs in different regions because if we don't understand the complexity they are operating in, then how can we actually make sure that we're targeting the right services to the right people. How do we know we're actually combining the rights sets of services to move into the pathways that they want? [A3]

Although participants acknowledged the importance of 'mainstream' agencies like the Otago/Southland Employers' Association and Inland Revenue Department, there was some feeling that Māori SMEs often 'don't have easy access' [A3] to these. This contrasted to the less transactional and more whānau-oriented approach adopted by Māori-focused business agencies. Given that some of these agencies are under continual review, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a 'one size fits all' approach might be to the detriment of Māori SMEs unless, as noted by one participant, such business support agencies engage productively with Māori:

We have a very rich Māori culture here but it's not necessarily as visible as other places so a little bit more under the radar. It's part of the Southland culture as well so we don't necessarily see all these things to actually recognise the importance. I have felt that some of the civic entities here need to be more aware of and conscious and more strategic and active to engage with the iwi and with the Māori community. [A4]

Location plays a positive part in business start-up opportunities, but can also expose a Māori enterprise to attitudes that still remain as a result of New Zealand's colonial legacy. A second challenge was the hesitancy of some Māori SMEs to brand themselves as a Māori business in the region, with one owner suggesting that her business might consider 'key words perhaps in some of the things you do ... there's actually not stopping anything, you know, there to be family, whānau or you know, there's no reason why that couldn't be incorporated. I think it needs to be subtle ... a little bit because of the region perhaps, but also making it fit in for it to be right because it is such a sensitive area. You have to tread a really sensitive careful line' [B1]. This reluctance meant that some business owners preferred to be known as a 'mainstream' business with no Māori references. Some reasons for this were provided by the business owners themselves. For example, there is the low visibility of Māori, with the region seen as 'white middle class New Zealand' [B12]. There was also the perception that Māori things happened elsewhere and only in areas which had an already distinct Māori brand, as expressed by one participant who described how 'when I first started out and they said to me – what are you doing here, doing Māori things? If you want them to do a Māori thing, let them go to Rotorua' [B10]. Finally, some businesses experienced a kind of 'soft' racial prejudice evidenced in comments of customers who stated 'We've never had Māori's in our house before. We get comments like that all the time' [B5]. These perceptions led some of our participants to prefer to 'sit under the radar', fearing that being overtly 'Māori' could negatively affect their business.

A final challenge for participants was the need for them to develop and exercise fundamental business knowledge and skill. One participant commented that although 'the greatest need (for support) really is in the start-up phase', even mature businesses 'still don't have their systems and processes tied up properly' [A3]. Another participant spoke of the need for Māori SMEs to develop and maintain business acumen in order to cope with transition over periods of change, pressure, and growth:

You know that was one of the challenges, issues for Māori small businesses, is that there is so much support and they get it and that's great but then it stops and then there's no transition into the next stage [B2]

This becomes even more critical with changes in employment and health and safety regulation:

Employment law is becoming trickier and trickier. It is a minefield regardless if you're white or brown and it's just, if you do not know your way around it, you're going to be in big trouble because once again, I hate to say it, but being you know being beautiful, good, gorgeous New Zealand people, we're trusting. If you say the wrong thing at the wrong time, you're going to get an ERA and you will be paying a minimum of between \$5–8,000. Just if you get it wrong. [B4]

A few established businesses had developed strategies to foster long-term growth, while others were grappling with making the transition from start-up success to developing the resources and infrastructure to progress to the 'next level':

The next level would be business development and all I'd do is find the opportunities...but we're not quite there yet. How do you get to that level where we can afford to employ someone to do my job, but also pay me to do business development? That's the next level for us. How do I get there? [B7]

Much of the above may be summarised as having business 'acumen', a trait that support service participants believed could be developed and honed. Thus, while the participants in this study had entrepreneurial skills to start a business, business acumen was critical to ongoing Māori SME success and survival.

Discussion

This study focused on CSFs as perceived by Māori small businesses based in the Southern regions of Otago/Southland in New Zealand. Our findings highlighted three areas that impact on the success of Māori SMEs in the Southern region and which conform to the three factors identified in SME research in relation to performance and growth (Blackburn, Hart, & Wainwright, 2013). Each contributes to providing a better understanding of the business characteristics and needs of Southern Māori SMEs. In this section, based on the thematic analysis presented above, we argue that the perceptions of success by our participants are significant, not simply as a detailed set of requirements, but rather as a process of identifying critical areas of concern and to provide initial descriptions (Boynton & Zmud, 1984). More detailed research of these three categorisations would yield more precise and comprehensive factors.

This research confirmed the need for more effective strategic planning and performance management to facilitate clearer pathways for performance and growth. Some of these are common to SMEs in general, such as education and training, staff relationships and human resource management, research and development, information technology, managing finances and legislative requirements, and providing the means by which to manage opportunities and risks (Ates et al., 2013; Darcy et al., 2014). There was evidence that formal strategic planning was not common amongst Southern Māori SMEs, which may indicate undeveloped business acumen in some cases. Consequently, purposeful and/or strategic mentoring, either through formal or informal networks, can be seen as a critical activity to transition businesses through different phases of growth (Reihana, Sisley, & Modlik, 2007; Tam & Gray, 2016).

We found evidence of this amongst our Southern business owners, particularly those who had been able to see the opportunity to adapt or begin a business due to an improved environment for things 'Māori' more generally as a result of more Māori-friendly government economic strategies in the context of the Treaty of Waitangi and tribal settlement processes (Barr & Reid, 2014). However, things were not all plain sailing. Whilst location plays an important part in any business start-up opportunity, it also exposed the SME owners in this study to certain attitudes, a legacy of New Zealand's colonial history (Tapsell & Woods, 2008). The ability to be entrepreneurial in a region that has 'low visibility' of a Māori populace has been a key influence on

Māori SME survival. Our study found that Southern Māori SMEs ranged from those that identified as distinctly Māori, whilst others tempered their identity dependent upon the nature of their market demographics, which in the Southern region is predominantly 'white' and 'conservative'. It is not surprising that the obverse of this conservatism was suspicion of or lack of familiarity with that which was not 'mainstream'.

All participants had similar business expectations to non-Māori SMEs although for some Māori cultural considerations were seen as important success factors. This causes us to reflect on the nature of business for indigenous enterprises and the strategic decisions that individual Indigenous owners take in order to survive. While systemic factors can make it harder or easier for Indigenous SMEs to exist, our study shows that at the micro level, individuals can take an important role in helping to create or shape the business environment to keep it healthy from an Indigenous perspective (Stam, 2015). Thus, all our participants at whatever level of the Māori identity spectrum they viewed themselves, acknowledged that Māori 'kaupapa' (purpose) and 'tikanga' (protocols/practices), specifically enacted by a strong sense of accountability to whānau and community, were helping to creating a more positive environment. These results are in accordance with previous studies, indicating that success for Māori business is as likely to be influenced by socio-cultural objectives as economic success (Warriner, 2007; Spiller & Stockdale, 2013; Hanita, Rihia, & Te Kanawa, 2016).

Māori SME networks and relationships, both formal and informal, at the regional level play a critical role in helping Māori SMEs succeed. Informal networks, whether immediate family members and friends, or broader whānau, hapū, and iwi, are not only important for both the advice and support they offer individual enterprises but also because of the Māori context they can provide, which might be summed up as whanaungatanga, or a sense of relatedness (Haar & Delaney, 2009; Foley, 2010; Spiller et al., 2011a). That is, they help to maintain the owner as either a Māori business owner or as an individual connected to something that is larger than themselves and that has a certain identity relevance to them as a person. Thus, even those businesses that were not consciously Māori – either in their product offering or in the individual owners' outward behaviours – could see the value of this relatedness, with participant B4 going so far as to more explicitly label her human resource practices in Māori terms.

Likewise, support agencies played a valued role in business development, both to mitigate business risk and enable SMEs to grow through providing practical 'hands-on' support and by influencing the business environment (Reihana, Sisley, & Modlik, 2007). Although many general business services were available to Māori SMEs across phases of the business lifecycle, there were only a small number of Māori-focused agencies. Consequently, some Māori SMEs may miss out on the type of culturally appropriate mentoring that assists a business owner to move through all stages of business development. Therefore, creating better linkages with and across support agencies was one area that some saw might be improved across the region. This aligns with the previous reports that to overcome the barrier for Māori SMEs to access experienced advice and mentoring, there needed to be better collaboration between agencies (Broughton, Wilson, & Ruwhiu, 2006; Reihana, Sisley, & Modlik, 2007).

This research reinforces the view that the creation of an enterprise culture, which fully respects cultural traditions and at the same time successfully navigates the market economy, has the ability to empower people as economic agents (Reihana, Sisley, & Modlik, 2007). Successful Māori entrepreneurs have learned how to balance business commitments with traditional demands (Zapalska, Dabb, & Perry, 2003). Albeit, at times, conflict may occur between traditional values and business efficacy. The ability to resolve these and to accommodate values with contemporary business practices are key factors in successful Māori entrepreneurship. The convergence of Māori ethnicity and business success arguably means that a new and exciting business paradigm is emerging in New Zealand (Devlin, 2007; Spiller et al., 2011a).

Implications for research, policy, and practice

Approaches to improve the success rates of Māori SMEs require dedicated strategy development and policy, keeping in mind that economic-based strategies can sometimes be in conflict with social or environmental obligations of Māori. This ongoing tension is complex and requires very careful negotiation. Consequently, from a regional policy perspective, there is recognition and acknowledgement of the interdependencies between public and private actors in regional economies to create a conducive environment in which Māori SMEs can flourish. From this, it follows that regional SME policy should not only be about maximising traditional measures, such as quantum of 'self-employment' or 'small business' (Stam, 2015), but also about identifying and strengthening more qualitative measures. Although Stam (2015) suggests that these might include indicators such as 'growth-orientation', our study indicates that from a Māori business viewpoint, identifying qualities such as 'tikanga' (how a business operates as a Māori business) and 'kaupapa' (Māori-defined success) might also become useful indicators of SME regional health. With an improved understanding of these qualities, policymakers can assist in developing economically strong clusters (Isenberg, 2010; Stam, 2015). Regional formal business advice agencies might play their part by coordinating their services better and making efforts to collaborate with Māori focused agencies to support Māori SMEs in order to access the advice and people to develop and maintain the acumen identified as important for business success. That is, development of a regional system is culturally constituted and capable of responding to the myriad of opportunities and challenges facing Māori SMEs.

Conclusion

The potential of Māori business, SMEs in particular, is yet to be fully realised. Our research approach recognises that many Māori SMEs may not necessarily want to 'take over the world', drawing from very specific kaupapa that maintains their connection to a specific region, landscape, and/or people. That is, success for Māori SMEs tempers decisions around financial growth with consideration of factors derived from socio-cultural norms. We see transformational and positive change emerging when Māori SMEs are supported to operate in ways that make sense to Māori. Therefore, a culturally constituted regional business support system will better enable Māori SMEs to achieve their aspirations. This is crucial for sustainable economic development in a manner accommodating both Māori values and commercial endeavours, locally and globally.

Future research and limitations

The most important limitation of this research is it focuses on participants from the Southern region of New Zealand. However, the intention was never to provide an overarching narrative purporting to identify the CSFs for all Māori SMEs. As we have argued above, the regional basis provides a context-specific landscape on which to identify themes from which useful findings can be extrapolated. As we work collaboratively and focus on outcomes driven by our Māori SMEs, we can highlight critical incidents or signposts for strategy and policy development at the regional level.

In addition, we recognise the role Māori SMEs play in building and maintaining the sustainability of the social, cultural, environmental, and economic development of communities. In addition, there is an emergent literature that recognises the role Māori business has in consolidating the role of cultural values. Importantly, we see future avenues of research in considering the similarities and differences between Māori and non-Māori (Indigenous/non-Western vs. Western) SMEs and the convergence of regional development and Māori businesses to understand more fully the implications of socio-cultural context.

Acknowledgement. The authors would like to thank the participants of our research for sharing their experiences and reviewers for their guidance and suggestions towards improving our manuscript.

Financial Support. The research on which this article is based was funded by Ngā pae o te Māramtanga (Māori centre of Research Excellence).

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Appendix 1

Term	Meaning
Hapū	Subtribe/clan
Iwi	Tribe
Kaupapa	Purpose/guiding framework
Kaupapa Māori	Maori way
Kanohi-ki-te-kanohi	Face to face
Kotahitanga	Unity
Marae	A communal or sacred place
Mātauranga	Knowledge, epistemology
Mihi	Introduction
Tauiwi	Non-Māori
Te Ao Māori	Māori world
Tikanga	Protocols and practices
Tino rangatiratanga	Self-determination
Whakapapa	Genealogy
Whakawhanaungatanga	Process of establishing relationships
Whānau	Family
Whanaungatanga	Sense of relatedness
Whanonga pono	Values
Whenua	Land

Appendix 2

- Guiding discussion points for interviews:
- Participant profile: Iwi affiliation, age group, gender, business experience.
- Business profile: Industry, type of business entity, employee numbers, sales turnover, overall business strategic objective, any long-term strategic plan for future proofing the business.
- Business lifecycle: When was the business established, can you identify specific business lifecycle stages that your business went through, were there main challenges or opportunities identified at these stages.
- Community/networks: What core networks do you engage with for support of your business, are they formal or informal, what role do relationships with the Māori community play in your business philosophy and practice?

General/open discussion: Any specific challenges or opportunities that you have encountered, any further relevant points or issues that you wish to mention.