Using the Past to Inform the Present: The Influence of Folklore on CEO Leadership[1]

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines how contemporary interpretations of CEO leadership are influenced by folklore. The study utilised a constructivist grounded approach to examine the interplay between leadership and social context. The findings disclosed that New Zealand's colonial legacy transmitted via folklore contributed to the formation of an institutionalised interpretative schema informing CEO leadership. The social processes within this schema contain aphorisms that act to define the CEO role and how it is enacted. The study addresses an identified gap in the literature by providing an examination of the influence of context on CEO leadership.

KEYWORDS: CEO Leadership; History; Tradition; New Zealand; Folklore; Comeback Themes; Corporate Anthropology

Introduction

This paper explores, via a comeback theme, the influence of tradition, conveyed by the means of folklore on CEO leadership in large New Zealand (NZ) organisations. The longevity of the business/trade discipline has resulted in an ongoing supply of proverbial wisdom. This in turn has contributed to the formation of a set of established management traditions and aphorisms informing business cultures (Loomis 1964; Dent and Bozeman 2014). These aphorisms can be considered as folklore (Glassie 1995) and have become so pervasive within the management discipline they have achieved the status of immutable fact (Buckley and Eder 1988) as cited in Buckley et al. (2015). Over the passage of time this folklore has become institutionalised and strengthened by activities such as teaching and research (Smith and Smith 2011; Mika and O'Sullivan 2014). This institutionalization creates an on-going influence on leadership behaviour and organisational performance (Buckley et al. 2015). The term institutionalised is used as a term to describe 'a situation or a phenomenon that is so deeply embedded within an organisation, society or a group, that it has become as a convention' (Pearsall 1999). However, there is little if any empirical work examining the influence of folklore in wider society

and specifically on the enactment of business leadership (Dent and Bozeman 2014; Mika and O'Sullivan 2014; Smith and Smith 2011).

Within grounded studies, a comeback theme provides an opportunity for researchers to return to themes in a study and research them in more depth (Glaser 1998). In this case the comeback theme: *Using the Past to Inform the Present*, explores two themes from the original research: *Acknowledging History and Tradition and Retelling the Stories* to investigate how history, tradition and folklore inform CEO leadership in NZ. The study's goal was to identify CEOs' perceptions of their role and the interpretative schemas informing the role. The research question arising from this objective was: How does the context in which the CEO role is situated influence the definition and enactment of the role? Therefore, the aim of this paper is to advance the discussion of context and its influence on CEO leadership. Specifically, the contribution of folklore to the development of perceptions of the CEO role and the latitude of discretion experienced by CEOs in the enactment of their role.

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Background

New Zealand (NZ) is a geographically isolated island country in the south-west Pacific. Initially, the country was settled by a Polynesian people who developed their own cultural matrix which is still distinct today though much modified by the European colonisation period which began approximately 250 years ago (Mika and O'Sullivan 2014). Subsequent European immigration, primarily from the British Isles, occurred in waves to become the majority population moulding the culture of the country (Belich 1996).

This European colonisation informs different aspects of NZ's business culture, such as the development of conflicting attitudes to wealth. As Belich (1996) writes, these attitudes have their genesis in the 1840's gold rush where gold diggers were treated with contempt and considered a dangerous breed. However, as their wealth was redistributed to the community through their commercial endeavours this contempt dissipated (Belich 1996). Belich (1996) goes on to contend that in the contemporary world there is a desire to become wealthy and achieve a greater status. However, a greater respect is accorded those who have achieved this through their own efforts, as opposed to inherited wealth, or that achieved as a result of the efforts of others. Consequently, a self-employed or small business owner is perceived to be deserving of more respect and status than a CEO of a large organization.

The early European immigrants to NZ were individuals who were resourceful and determined to make the most of the opportunities afforded

them in the young colony (Phillips and Hearn 2008). A previous Prime Minister Jim Bolger made the point in a Radio New Zealand interview[2] that New Zealanders, no matter their origin are not timid people. The geographic isolation of the country has meant considerable hardship for all peoples who have settled in New Zealand. Whether by Polynesian canoe or the long voyages in the sailing ships of the European colonial period, or refugees fleeing their homeland, the journey would not have been undertaken by timid people. One of the early settler groups was the whalers and sealers. Rejecting the traditional class laden conventions of the time for those of egalitarianism and mateship, grounded in hard-work and liberty, the whalers and sealers are deemed responsible for introducing a strong egalitarian base into NZ society (Ballantyne 2015). When combined with the desire of some of the early colonists to escape the restrictive class structures present in Britain, these egalitarian principles became firmly embedded as part of NZ's social norms. New Zealand was envisaged as a place where an individual could achieve wealth and success no matter what their social origins (King 2004).

The geographic isolation of NZ has both positive and negative aspects. For Māori, epidemics, war and other injustices suffered at the hands of the European colonial Governments were mitigated by the rapid spread of Christianity, the official faith of the British Empire and most colonists. The promise of justice would eventually deliver equality before the law and the desire to share an equal role with the new arrivals within the Empire. The rapid decline of the Māori population into a minority and lacking any other close neighbours meant the European colonial foundations could be considered to be more firmly embedded than would be the case in a country with a larger different ethnic groups or close neighbours. However, this geographic isolation has contributed to a low population density, the current population numbering 4.7 million people (Statistics-New-Zealand 2017). A consequence of this is that in the global sense, NZ companies are relatively small and they are forced to compete with much larger multi-national corporations for resources (Hutchison and Boxall 2014). In response, NZ has developed a style of leadership that is multifaceted and transactional, as opposed to one based on specialist leadership competencies (Hutchison and Boxall 2014; Kennedy 2000).

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[2]   Podcast available from http://www.radionz.co.nz/programmes/the-9th-floor/podcast

Literature Review

The work of Selznick (1957) was one of first to consider the importance of understanding social context if the leadership role is to be properly appreciated. However, as Rieche et al. (2017) argue, business leadership in the global environment still remains ill-defined and under-researched with respect to context and the social processes contained within. Yet, as (Barker 2001) argues social processes could be considered the vessels of leadership.

Barker (2001) goes on to make the distinction between a social process and a social relationship. He comments that social relationships tend to be contractual, with performance standards and evaluations, whereas, social processes, while including social relationships, also provide for the development and definition of roles and role expectations. Glaser and Strauss (1967) theorised that social processes can be either a basic social structural process (BSSP), or a basic social psychological process (BSPP). The logical relationship between the processes is that a basic social structural process abets *or* facilitates the basic social psychological process (Glaser 1978). However, it has been noted that the majority of empirical research has concentrated on the psychological processes rather than on the social structure and its influence on the individual in a role (Gordon 2008; Schreiber and Stern 2001; Robert 2016; Porter and Mclaughlin 2006; Densten and Sarros 2011). The social interactions occuring within these social structures produce a set of frameworks and scripts that create schemas of meaning (Bartlett 1932; Berger and Luckmann 1971). Known as interpretative schema, they validate and legitimise the shared assumptions about why events happen, how people come to know how they are to behave in different situations and how the shared understandings within a specific context, about a specific role, occur (Bartunek 1984). When these schemas become long-term, structural and institutionalised, they work to construct meaning in a social or collective way, thereby becoming more deeply embedded (Giddens 1991; Gergen 2003; Dent and Bozeman 2014). Understanding the schemas within which a CEO operates enhances the individual's self-efficacy, thereby contributing to their success in a role (Bandura 1997a).

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The Interrelationship Between History, Tradition, Folklore and Business Culture

If, as Berger and Luckmann (1971) and Barker (2001) contend, leadership is socially constructed, then it may be argued that the history and traditions within a specific context could influence the formation of the interpretative schemas informing a specific role and how the

preceptions of the role are formed (Dundes 1980). For, as Garrison (1998) argues:

> Experiences such as "war, revolution and colonialism, shape the public consciousness in such a manner they dictate long-chain behaviours and attitudes which are hard if not impossible to demolish (p.42)

Garrison (1998) goes on to state that every business context has its own culture situated within a bedrock steeped in the historical, political, economic and religious traditions of the wider society. As such, tradition can be considered a symbolic process that presupposes past symbolisms and helps us makes sense of them in contemporary life (Handler and Linnekin 1984). Moreover, tradition can be defined as a process where: 'history, culture, and the human actor meet and is a volitional, temporal action' (Glassie 1995 p. 409). Glassie (1995) goes on to assert that a traditional culture arises from the actions of people when they connect in a cultural or social way. As such, tradition is defined in the present and does not exist apart from our interpretations of it. Thus, tradition can be deemed to encompass all those practices, art forms, objects and narratives by which people are able to construct meaning about the world in which they operate (Garrison 1998). Moreover, if something is considered traditional it is valued, even revered, by the participants in the culture in which the traditions are embedded (Wells 2006).

The anthropological literature recognises the phenomenon of folklore as a means of transmission of history and tradition. While it is possible to observe this transmission via dance, songs and stories (Ben-Amos 1972; Handler and Linnekin 1984) often folklore may have an invisible or unconscious, yet significant, impact on interactions. Consequently, it is not possible to isolate it from the setting within which it is situated (Reynolds 2007; Dundes 1980). More importantly, folklore is not set down in one official or correct form:

> Rather it is the stories we tell our children without reading from a book … the way we celebrate our holidays …campus legends we tell in university dorms, proverbs and stories heard. In short folklore is all of the many different ways we express who we are as members of a particular group (Reynolds 2007: 25).

Consequently, folklore encompasses a wide range of popular, traditional, vernacular, everyday forms of expression. Folklore includes ballads, tall tales, children's games, religious practices, urban legends, email lore, practical jokes and much more (Stout-Research-Centre 2007). Formal folklore or tradition is comprised of the stories, customs or norms and beliefs that are preserved in a culture. Usually this occurs through a

scholarly discipline documenting the traditions and folklore that occurs in the form of symbolic representations (Toelken 1996; Ross 1998). However, as Smith (2007) and Kuiper (2007) argue the academic study in this area is so sparse in NZ that it could lead one to believe that there is no such thing as NZ (European) folklore.[3]

Informal folklore is where folklore is used in the everyday sense, passing from generation to generation, and includes a set of broadly held ideas within a culture that have not or cannot be empirically verified. It is the informal folklore that underlies those implicit modes of behaviour that exist within a social context. (Ross 1998; Toelken 1996). Glassie (1995) contends that folklore links people and expression in a functional cycle thereby contributing to the formation of groups within a specific context. He goes on to suggest that a group exists because its members create levels and forms of communication that bind it together. As Wells (2006) argues, people use folklore to establish a political, social, ethnic, and/or religious connectedness. Consequently, the presence of folklore can act to inform the values, norms and practices of groups within that context.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the definition of group or role invariably reflects the relationship of the group or class to the dominant culture or to a regional or national identity (Wells 2006). For example, in New Zealand, European folklore is considered to have predominantly working class origins (Kuiper 2007; Smith 2007). However, a search of the literature could not identify any empirical research examining how other occupational groups are influenced by these working class traditions.

Therefore, this paper argues that when the management lore learned in the classroom is combined with the folklore contained within the wider social context, then a set of norms, values and behaviour have been created to inform roles such as that of the CEO. As a result, they act to contribute to the formation the business culture. For as Gergen (1991) argues

> We enter the present with a sack of history slung over our shoulders and this weight shapes our posture … each of us bring a host of preferences, interests and values that shape the way the present is understood (p206).

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[3]   The New Zealand Folklore Society was formed in 1966 with aim of collecting New Zealand's folklore, a genre that as Michael Brown wrote had not has received the attention it deserved (Brown 2007). The Society wanted to ensure a more widespread awareness of NZ folklore. One of the key people involved in the Society was Phil Garland. As a young woman I remember sitting in a club in Christchurch listening to him sing the songs he had collected. Since the New Zealand Folklore Society disbanded the primary vehicle for the academic publication of NZ lore has been the journal *Australian Folklore*. The Editor, J.S Ryan, felt that *Australian Folklore* had a responsibility to disseminate NZ folklore studies (Ryan 2015, ix).

Gergen (1991) goes on to state that within this sack of history are the symbolic representations that are transmitted through the stories and legends within a specific context. Consequently, the exploration of the comeback theme responds to the gap in the literature by providing a greater awareness of how history and traditions transmitted via folklore influence the definition and enactment of CEO leadership.

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Method

The principles and processes of the constructivist form of grounded theory were employed to collect and analyse the data (Charmaz 2000, 2003, 2005). In contrast to the *tabula rasa* approach of objectivist grounded theory proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the constructivist form recognises that there is an interactive relationship between the researcher and the participants (Charmaz 2008). This allows researchers to interact more fully with the research process when they have to probe beneath the surface and seek meaning (Birks, Chapman, and Francis 2008). As tradition is a temporal cultural construct, the following statement by Charmaz (2000) was acknowledged:

> Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the 'discovered' reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts. (p524)

Purposive, convenience and theoretical sampling were used to create a sample comprising 22 CEOs and 8 others who were closely involved with the CEO role. An attempt was also made to ensure that there was a gender/ethnic mix in the research sample. However, this effort was constrained by the gender/ethnic mix of the people holding positions that fitted the specified criteria. This resulted in a sample containing 10 females and 20 males. The primary data was sourced via 30 semi-structured formal interviews of between one and two hours. Informal interviews were used to clarify certain points or obtain a deeper understanding of a particular situation or theme. A total of 20 informal interviews were conducted. These interviews lasted between 10 minutes and 1½ hours. Secondary data was used to support the primary data and was obtained from document analysis. This secondary data was coded concurrently with the primary data. Comparative analysis of data was used to identify the major themes and began as soon as the data were collected.

The Writing of Memos

Keeping comprehensive memos is an integral part of grounded studies. It is these memos that lead to abstraction and theorising. Glaser (1978) deemed that all tasks in the conduct of qualitative research are subordinate to the writing of memos, as cited in Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008). He went on to state it is important that memos are written without constraints such as the necessity for good prose (Glaser 1978). What is important is that the idea is recorded as memo. Memo writing is a priority for the researcher to ensure the retention of ideas that might otherwise be lost, thereby capturing an idea in process and progress (Charmaz 2008). The memo process allows the researcher to engage with the data at a level that is difficult to achieve otherwise, immersing themselves and exploring the meaning this data holds (Birks, Chapman, and Francis 2008). Therefore, as Charmaz (2008) states, memo writing allows researchers to move beyond data description. For example, the memos captured aspects of tone of voice; body language etc., and used the word *robust* to describe the opinions that were voiced concerning the enactment of CEO leadership.

Development of Comeback Theme

Seminars and conference presentations conducted subsequent to the project completion elicited questions about different aspects of two sub-themes: *Acknowledging History and Tradition and Retelling the Stories*.
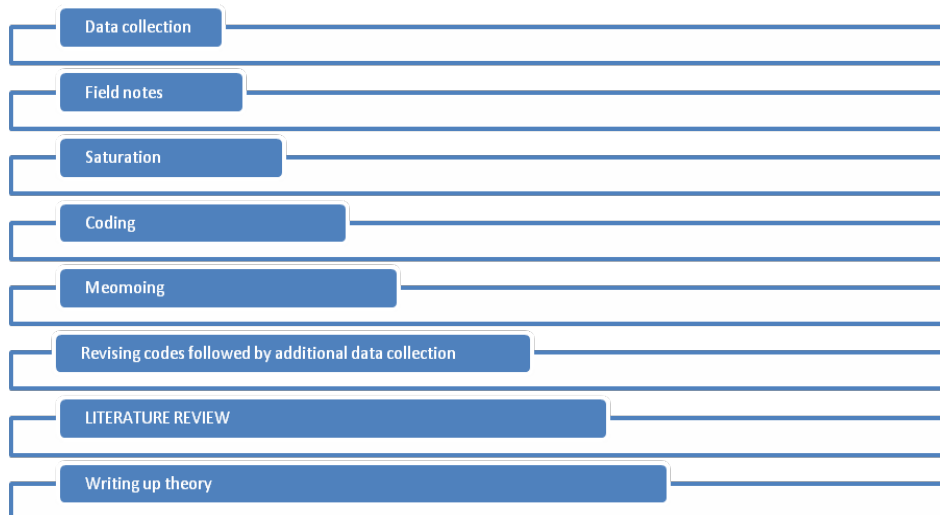

Figure 1. Positioning the literature in grounded theory. Source: Klenke 2008.

These questions led to a re-examination of the memos and further exploration of these themes. Consequently, the comeback theme: *Using the Past to Inform the Present* was formulated. The manner in which the literature is used in grounded studies supports the development of comeback themes. Klenke (2008) argues that using the literature too early in the research might condition or predetermine the development of preconceptions on the part of the researcher as to what to find. She provided the following outline of the grounded theory process and the recommended situating of the literature within a study: See Figure 1.

The use of the literature as outlined by Klenke (2008) allowed the researcher to turn to the anthropological literature to inform the frameworks within which to situate the investigation. Using the literature in this manner provided the freedom to explore empirical work outside the business discipline in order to provide a framework by which to inform the findings.

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Findings

The findings of the comeback theme uncovered the role of NZ's history and traditions in the formation of an *institutionalised interpretative schema* informing CEO leadership. The retelling of stories occurred in a manner where they could be deemed to be folklore thereby contributing to the formation of this schema. As per Garrison's (1998) argument, the folklore was similar to the hidden section of an iceberg below the waterline. Thereby contributing to the creation of perceptions of CEO leadership informing the definition and enactment of the role. For example, one comment received was:

> …a deep-seated suspicion of business and business leaders in New Zealand. It has its origins in the traditional Kiwi working class self-reliance.

There are elements of NZ's history and tradition transmitted via this folklore that are often indiscernible, yet may have a significant impact on business culture and business activity. This occurred at a level where CEO tenure in an organisation was compromised:

> … come in [to an organisation] believing this was the agenda and this was the way the organisation was and this was how decisions would be made. Then when they get in there and find that it's quite different, and they end up saying 'it's all too hard, it's not right', and walk away from it.

The social psychological processes contributing to the formation of the *institutionalised interpretative schema* are; *Acknowledging history and tradition* and *Retelling the stories*. These are now discussed further:

Acknowledging History and Tradition: A Social Psychological Process

Weaving throughout the memos was the presence of the concept of egalitarianism. Considered to have its genesis in the European colonisation period, egalitarianism is deemed responsible for the creation of social mores pertaining to equity of access to society's resources. As Belich (1996) asserts, these egalitarian mores are considered to have been responsible for the formation of contradictory attitudes toward wealth and power. The memos form commentary ranging from, cynical, to wry and humorous, as to how people may want to acquire wealth and power. Yet, if they do, they are frequently the targets of criticism. The following comment typifies those received:

> I mean I'm not a historian but if you go back to why people came here.
> They came to get away from huge differentials in wealth and the class
> system and it was the land of opportunity, egalitarianism. You know the
> stories of our child-hood, the perceived belief that if you are making
> money you are making it at the expense of other people.

While NZ's colonial legacy was understood to play a noticeable role in shaping egalitarian norms and values, there were a set of negative observations about how business leadership in large organisations was envisaged as a symbol of inequity. These observations were characterised by statements such as the following:

> The whole working class ethic that has pervaded New Zealand, the
> reasons why this place was settled during the colonial period, the equity
> of opportunity - the reasons why the early settlers saw it as a land of
> opportunity. If you are a self-made man [woman] then you have somehow
> achieved the kiwi [NZ] dream

> Maybe it's linked to nineteenth century or even seventeenth century
> England, when if you were a businessman you were looked down upon .
> ... There is an element of that, like somehow if you are a businessman and
> you're making money you are ripping other people off...

The reference to 'working-class ethic' was found throughout the memos and the phrase was used frequently to explain the anti-corporate sentiments that were expressed. These narratives were deemed to be an expression of folklore (Ben-Amos 1972; Kuiper 2007). The preference for small business as opposed to large multi-national organisations is evident in

different media sources. The departing CEO of Coke Cola in a 2013 interview commenting that:

> An anti-corporate mind-set resulted in many business people being happy with their firms remaining small (Adams 2013: B1).

However, a distinction was made between the positive and negative elements of egalitarianism. The memos noted that there was a sense of pride placed on the working class origins of the early colonists and the equity of opportunity that has evolved as a result. This was evidenced through government policy, for example, equity of access to education and medical services, a feature not always evident in more stratified societies. It was agreed that the positive features of egalitarianism must continue to be treasured and maintained. Nevertheless, there was a need to minimise the more negative aspects and place a greater value on meritocracy.

Valuing Meritocracy

The high level of priority placed on egalitarianism was offset by a perceived lessor importance placed on meritocracy. Often the CEOs felt as if they were 'stuck in the middle'. While working to achieve meritocracy, they often encountered attitudes and/or criticism designed to 'level the playing field'. The consequence is the creation of a set of tensions and paradoxes for the CEOs. The consensus view was that performance based on merit was not sufficiently valued, thereby constraining leadership and consequently the strategic success of the organisation. However, despite the espoused need to balance the tensions and paradoxes there was evidential pride associated with the concept of egalitarianism and NZ's colonial heritage.

Retelling the Stories: A Social Psychological Process

Within this there were three themes that contributed to the formation of the BSPP *retelling the stories*. These were *the tall poppy syndrome,* the *No 8 fencing wire*,[4] and *she'll be right*. The manner in which these stories were told and retold deemed them to be part of NZ's European folklore.

The Tall Poppy Syndrome

In Australia and NZ the Tall Poppy Syndrome (TPS) is defined as a term to describe what is seen as a flattening social attitude (Feather 1994a). Tending to be uncomplimentary in nature, the traits of the TPS are

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4   The concept of No 8 fencing wire will be outlined in the section devoted to this concept.

exhibited when an individual is overly envious, defamatory, or critical of someone else as a result of that person's presumed higher economic, social or political position (Feather 1994b). Hence the use of the phrase, 'to cut down the tall poppy' is used (Mouly and Sankaran 2000). The TPS was also deemed to contribute to the lessor value placed on meritocracy. The NZ born CEOs spoke of how they learnt that it is not appropriate to draw attention to oneself or to be seen as 'standing out from the crowd'. One CEO stating:

> The tall poppy thing is an over simplistic way of describing what happens in New Zealand. It's not because the tall poppies are higher, there's quite a lot more involved. Yes, we do criticise and we do pull down but, there is more to it, much more.

Yet, when asked for an explanation of the phrase 'there is more to it', the interviewee was unable expand on the comment. Non-NZ CEOs commented that one of the first things they noted was how deeply ingrained the perceptions about the TPS are. The CEO of Coke (NZ) during a departure interview made the following comment:

> That big business was seen as nasty and untrustworthy… that there was a 'love to hate' relationship with big business that was damaging … I do not think that it is healthy for the country … I think it is all part of the tall poppy syndrome (Adams 2013: B1)

The next day a flurry of commentary from union groups and social media followed –

> I am glad Coke boss is leaving NZ, even happier if coke went as well. He's right we do hate corporates. Long may it continue.

> First Union general secretary Robert Reid said Mr Adams' comments were 'breath-taking' as corporates got too much of an easy ride in New Zealand (Unauthored 2013: B1)

A New Zealand-born CEO with international CEO experience described New Zealand organisations, as displaying: 'cultures where it is NOT OK to stand out; it is important to be the same as everyone':

> There is a deep-seated suspicion of business and business leaders in New Zealand. It has its origins in the historical traditions of Kiwi self-reliance. Therefore, there is a deep-seated cultural perspective to how we understand the notion of business leadership in New Zealand.

This embeds the TPS folklore still further, minimising a value being placed on meritocracy:

Accordingly, a style of CEO leadership has developed that is primarily transactional, low risk and low profile. The reasoning was proffered as follows:

> It all stems from our colonial traditions and the working class ethic that has developed as a result … that and the tall poppy syndrome and the No 8 fencing wire the emphasis on egalitarianism and she'll be right … all conspire to create an environment where it is better to keep your head down and not draw attention by conspicuous behaviour…

While there were varying levels of interpretation and opinion, the consensus was, the TPS was so deeply embedded it was difficult to conceive of radical changes occurring in the short to medium term. One comment that summarised these views was:

> I think we have to somehow get over this tall poppy syndrome … it's a real problem in New Zealand…

Paradoxically, four respondents who had bemoaned the impact of the TPS on their own career were, in turn, unsympathetic towards colleagues who attracted unwarranted attention to themselves. Comments such as 'Oh well, there's the tall poppy syndrome … some of them have brought it on themselves'. Often a colleague demonstrated an inability to judge their context accurately and 'stood out from the crowd' therefore, they 'only had themselves to blame'.

The No 8 Fencing Wire Mentality and She'll Be Right

The term No 8 fencing wire is used in NZ to symbolise a resourcefulness and technical expertise and 'making do' that is a source of pride. As Dudding (2013) wrote New Zealanders do not have to go back very far in history to find the colonial attitudes of 'making do' with what you have. No 8 fencing wire is a grade of wire to construct fencing on farms. During the colonial period the distance from Great Britain necessitated a high level of practicality and ingenuity to overcome the shortage of supplies. Therefore, No 8 wire was often used to repair equipment and as a replacement for scarce supplies. In the twenty-first century, the concept has evolved to become a symbol of ingenuity and self-sufficiency and adaptability (Jones 2001). Within the business environment, the attitudes and behaviours symbolic of the No 8 wire are manifested as the ability to improvise, use whatever resources are available

to ensure a job is completed, make a piece of machinery work or find a unique solution to a difficult problem.

There was an agreement these New Zealand idiosyncrasies of ingenuity, adaptability and self-sufficiency should be maintained and valued, but not at the expense of specialist leadership knowledge and abilities. An ongoing concern was that the No 8 fencing wire has become a clichéd description to explain the acceptance of transactional managerial behaviour. One comment summarised these views was:

> The other thing is recognising leadership. People aren't actually recognising leadership … it is the management versus leadership debate that has been around for years. However, we also have the technical competence, like the No 8 fencing wire, and there is still a great deal of it in most organisations and there are a large number of people promoted on that No 8 fencing wire basis.

Again, as with the aphorisms associated with the egalitarian folklore and the TPS there was an expressed need to move past No 8 fencing wire mentality towards a greater recognition of specialist leadership attributes. The consensus was that while generalist managerial skills were an advantage during pioneering times and have served the business sector well, questions were now being raised as to the appropriateness of this thinking in the contemporary business environment. This confirms the view of commentators that there has been a too much emphasis on inguenuity and improvisation as opposed to the true innovation that New Zealand's economy needs (Dudding 2013)

The challenge will be for CEO leadership to achieve and maintain a balance between accentuating the resourcefulness that typifies the No 8 fencing wire mentality, while at the same time minimising the constraints it imposes. It is accepted that the almost mythological attributions accorded the TPS and No 8 fencing wire means their influence is unlikely to disappear entirely. This situation was made more complex by the use of the phrase, 'she'll be right'. The phrase was closely aligned with the No 8 fencing wire as in 'some good old No 8 wire to hold it together and she'll be right'.

She'll be right is an expression that illustrates a 'make do' solution. Once a solution is found or a quick fix is implemented, then the use of the phrase 'she'll be right' finalises the situation. Both the 'No 8 fencing wire' and the phrase 'she'll be right' are deemed to have become so well-established that it is difficult to conceive of a world without them. Anecdotal commentary also suggests that this comment is often used to justify doing nothing without the quick fix or solution. The images associated with these terms were viewed as comfortable, familiar and non-

threatening, a situation that has caused a sense of frustration on the part of CEOs:

> ...because it's a do-it-yourself , she'll be right, mentality, anyone can do anything in New Zealand ... we don't have enough people ... and companies won't pay for expertise in different areas ... same drivers ... it's in the same box as a lot of the other things we've been talking about, it's she'll be right mentality.

The behaviours related to this aspect of NZ folklore were deeply embedded making it difficult for a CEO to enact visionary long-term change oriented leadership. The need to achieve a balance between generalist managerial and specialist leadership behaviours is deemed a priority. One CEO with experience in both the public and private sector made the following comment:

> You can't sit there and say I can do everything any longer. It's not the mentality of she'll be right and I'll just get out there and do it. I have done enough (learning and training). It is good to have some of that attitude so that the individual can go and get stuck into problems and find solutions for them. But at the same time it is not appropriate to get like some societies where everybody is so channelled (into a speciality) that they are incapable of doing anything else. I think there is a happy medium.

This comment was typical of those received, thereby contributing to the identification of the *institutionalised interpretative schema*.

The Social Structural Process: The Institutionalised Interpretative Schema

Exploring the role of folklore as part of the social context of the CEO expands the work of writers such as Feather (1994a, 1994b), Jones (2001), Mouly and Sankaran (2000), Hutchison and Boxall (2014) and Mika and O'Sullivan (2014) by reinforcing the contribution of European history and tradition to the formation of the social structural process that informs the CEO role. This *institutionalised interpretative schema* is informed by the folklore conveying the legacy of NZ's European-centred history and tradition. The institutionalised frameworks of this schema inform how the role is defined and enacted. High value was ascribed to generalist managerial skills and to recruiting persons from the technical or professional fields. This is in preference to specialist leadership competencies, for example innovation, visionary and creative leadership. This has led to a more transactional style of strategic leadership (Mika and O'Sullivan 2014; Hutchison and Boxall 2014). All the participants spoke of the desire to move beyond the institutionalised frameworks informing

their role. However, this is difficult to achieve when the frameworks of the schemas informing CEO leadership are deeply ingrained.

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Discussion

The use of the grounded constructivist approach (Charmaz 2008) and the literature as per Klenke (2008) enabled consideration of the anthropological literature within which to situate the findings. Accordingly, the comeback theme *Using the past to inform the present* was developed. The paper expands the work of (Hutchison and Boxall 2014; Mika and O'Sullivan 2014) regarding the transactional nature of the CEO role by providing an explanation as to why this style of leadership has evolved. Folklore is viewed as real or factual and as such constrains the agency of managers who desire to change (Suddaby and Foster 2017). This is in keeping with Hambrick and Finkelstein's (1987) concept of the latitude of discretion. That is, CEOs can be so affected by the perceived constraints existing within their context that they are not permitted, or are unable, to undertake certain vital strategic actions. Bandura (1997a) asserts that the power of an individual to act falls within the realms of personal agency. Bandura (1997b) went on to argue that the ability or belief of an individual to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task is known as self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can play a major role in how one approaches goals, tasks, and challenges. He goes on to argue that personal agency cannot exist in isolation; rather it operates within a broad network of social structural configurations (Bandura 1997a). This leads to the creation of a collective agency (Bandura 2001). This collective agency is developed from the broad network of social structures that represent authorised systems of rules, social practices and sanctions designed to regulate and provide explanation of the social structural processes (Bandura 2001; Tollefsen 2015).

These social structures reflect the relationship of the CEO group to the dominant culture and national identity (Wells 2006). Many of the perceptions about the role evolve from the institutionalized historical traditions rather than the contemporary requirements of the role. Thus folklore took on the status of immutable fact thereby making change difficult, if not impossible (Suddaby and Foster 2017; Buckley et al. 2015). The traditions or folklore discussed in this paper have become embedded in NZ culture as clichés or metaphors representing 'the New Zealand way'. Thereby, creating perceptions that may enhance or impede the individual's ability to carry out the CEO role successfully.

The study responds to the identified gap in the literature by identifying the phenomenon that is New Zealand European folklore and its role in

establishing a business culture. Having its genesis in the European colonisation period, this folklore was part of the 'sack of history' referred to by Gergen and Gergen (1991). The influence of historical folklore combined with the relative smallness of the NZ business environment results in a higher degree of scrutiny of the CEO role in NZ than may occur in a larger business contexts. This making it more difficult for CEOs to act outside of the frameworks of the *institutionalised interpretative schema*. While the disquiet as expressed by Kuiper (2007) and Smith (2007) is applicable across all the scholarly disciplines, it is of particular concern in the leadership domain, specifically in strategic roles such as that of the CEO. The findings indicate the need for more context specific research to allow the social, cultural, legal and economic factors to build knowledge about the phenomenon that is CEO leadership. The preference for behaviours to be enacted or emphasised within the institutionalised interpretative schema influences all decisions pertaining to the CEO role.

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Conclusions

The exploration of the comeback theme *looking to the past to inform the present* confirmed that New Zealand's European colonial heritage does have an influence on the perceptions of CEO leadership. In doing so, it can be argued that it is possible to identify the social mores and how they enhance or constrain the enactment of roles. The comeback theme revealed how folklore contributes to the development of a business culture that is specific to New Zealand. In doing so, the study identified challenges as they pertain to the CEO role. Knowing the reasons for, and consequences of, these challenges can act as a catalyst for further discussion regarding the future form the role may take. Coming to know and understand the legacy of history and tradition in the contemporary business environment allows a better understanding of roles such as that of the CEO.

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