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A Māori Relational Approach to Building Value Chains in Tourism

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Introduction

This case examines value chain innovation through the networks of a Māori tourism company, Navigator Tours. The network represents a weaving together of various activities (*flaxes*), pulled together by hub firms, into a value chain (*kete*). The ultimate service experienced by the tourist is woven from a range of individual suppliers that come together to each add more value than they could individually. The chain of activities gives the service more added value than the sum of the added values of all activities. By taking advantage of upstream and downstream inputs, Navigator Tours has created a new business model which maximises value creation while minimising costs. The *kete* of value, added through the collective value chain, offers unique worth to the customer and the individual suppliers. It constitutes an example of innovation at work in a cultural context.

“Life did not take over the globe by combat, but by networking . . . in the end aggressors destroy themselves and those who cooperate survive.”¹

1 Margulis, L. and Sagan, D. (1986). *Microcosmos*. Summit: New York.

Sense connections

Amanda clasped the handles of the flax basket which, as John had explained, was called a *kete* in Māori. Water flowed through the holes, which were large enough to let undersized *pipis* fall through and small enough to hold the larger pipis. The water felt cold. She couldn't believe that just a few minutes ago she had been sitting in a bus wondering what on earth John Panoho was saying to her — something about *pipi* hunting, out there in the chilly ocean, just shorts, T-shirt and this *kete*? It was as far removed from New York as she could imagine. Soon, water was up to Amanda's waist.

'Form a line,' John shouted over the surf. 'Can you see what I am doing?'

Not really thought Amanda, he seemed to be twisting one leg in an Elvis Presley dance move and then reaching down into the water and coming up with a clutch of small white shellfish.

'*Pipis* form feeding chains,' John explained. 'They create clusters, so that where you find one you will often find half a dozen or so.'

The icy-cold chill of the water melted away under the warm pleasure of at last working out how to twist and shuffle her foot to expose the shellfish. Amanda slowly filled her *kete*. She really felt like a *pipi* hunter, and didn't want to let any of the burrowing bivalves escape her efficient footwork. Every now and then one of the others in the group would come over, cradling their bounty in their T-shirt, and pour their *pipis* into her *kete*. Tony, the Tahitian tour leader from Hawaii, seemed to have a natural knack, but Buck, the Midwest American boy hurled himself into the experience and collected more than anyone.

They were still well under the official limit of 50 *pipis* per person by the time they returned to shore and placed the *kete* on the beach. Each person took turns having a photo taken with the haul.

A couple of Kiwis passing by peered into the bags and one offered helpful advice: 'If you chuck them in buckets of water with a bit of flour they will spit all the sand out.'

Afterwards, the group went to a nearby hot pool to warm up and relax before climbing back on board the coach and driving to a seaside apartment where they would have dinner. A Kiwi couple, Gary and Lisa, owned the apartment.

There were twelve of them altogether, seven on the tour and five locals including John, who was their Māori guide and the owner of the tour company taking them around New Zealand's northern region. As far as Amanda could work out, John's company was based in Auckland and handled all the ground arrangements, while the company Tony worked for promoted and sold the tours throughout the US, especially in Hawaii. A number of the group had heard about the tour through their local wine shops in Hawaii, which had been running a special campaign.

Valuing loyalty

John topped up the wine made by Tapata Wines, a South Island-based Māori-owned wine company that often worked with Navigator Tours on offshore promotions.

'This tour is going really well,' Tony reflected. "It's just how I hoped people coming to New Zealand would experience Māori culture. I want them to look back and say, "Wow, I've just been on a tour and enjoyed a Māori meal, I met Māori people, experienced their land . . . touched their land." I want them to understand that they would never have found these special activities unless they were linked with a Māori company that knows the Māori land, and to realise that this experience is priceless. It's packages that we put together like that, John, which make people tell others: "If you want to experience Māori culture tours, you've got to go with these Māori companies because they will take you to the right places to experience Māori culture".'

'It's my bottom line, as you know, people enjoying themselves,' John replied. 'It's important that we give them what they expect, in fact, that we give them more than they expect.'

Tony agreed: 'We're here to please people, to make them smile, make them happy. When that is accomplished, it makes us happy. It was never about the money because if it was all about money, I'd be in a different industry.'

'Along the way, there is no reason why you can't make some money out of these tours,' said John, 'but money doesn't drive me — I don't really care about it, you can't take it with you — what is it? I just want to try and do the best that we can do.'