

How ancient wisdom can improve the workplace

18 August 2015

Indigenous cultures are a source of values and behaviours that can enrich our working lives and help restore the balance we lost with industrialisation, says Dr Chellie Spiller. Embracing those values can transform organisations, increase employee satisfaction, and make them more attractive to potential new hires.

"Indigenous values promote belonging, reciprocity, and mutuality. They teach how to live in concordance with each other and with the world," says Dr Spiller, who is Associate Dean Māori and Pacific, and a senior lecturer in the Business School's Department of Management and International Business.

Spiller is co-editor with Business School colleague Dr Rachel Wolfgramm of a new book, *Indigenous Spiritualities at Work*, which explores the contemporary relevance of ancient wisdom traditions. Subtitled *Transforming the Spirit of Enterprise*, the book gathers the views of a range of scholars, educators and practitioners in Indigenous development.



Dr Chellie Spiller

"A major change is taking place in the personal and professional lives of many organisational leaders and their employees as they aspire to integrate their spirituality and religion with their work. Many argue that the reason behind this change is that society is seeking spiritual solutions to better respond to tumultuous social, business, geopolitical changes," write the authors in the book's introduction.

"The purpose of an Indigenous business is to create wellbeing. Attention is paid to nourishing the life energy of a physical space, and to how the processes and activities in that space contribute to or block that energy, which Māori call mauri," says Spiller.

Indigenous values such as life force, balance, stewardship, relationship and kinship with all of creation are highly relevant in a world which is grappling with an array of intractable issues from overwork and personal isolation to unethical corporate behaviour and environmental damage, she says.

"What Indigenous cultures are showing others is a way of repairing the rupture that occurred in Western societies as a result of industrialisation – the separation of individuals from communities, of the past from the future, and the Cartesian split between mind and body."

Adopting Indigenous values makes business sense, says Spiller.

"Many Western organisations take a very short-term view. Indigenous economies tend to have great respect for the collective will of the community to help business achieve its purpose. And that purpose can be intergenerational."

People yearn to live meaningful lives and contribute to the world in a positive way, and many young graduates are keen to work for a values-based business, she says.

"Most of us are drawn to values that nurture the human spirit. Why should that be incompatible with business. It is not as though we inhabit parallel universes."

Enter the draw to [win a copy of *Indigenous Spiritualities at Work*](#).