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Indigenous Enterprise Success: In Our Peoples' Voices

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Abstract: This paper showcases the diverse worldviews of First Peoples, Māori, and Indigenous Ugandan enterprise success. This scope highlights both historical and contemporary challenges related to colonial legacies and Indigenous knowledge systems. It discusses how First Peoples in Australia and Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand have utilised their unique cultural assets and traditional values to drive economic self-determination in a globalised economy. Similarly, Uganda's Indigenous entrepreneurship is highlighted through the lens of social enterprise, grounded in the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which emphasises relational accountability and communal prosperity. Secondary qualitative data is provided from three separate scholars' higher degree research, illuminating Indigenous entrepreneurs' culturally anchored conceptions of success. Indigenous methodologies, such as yarning and kaupapa Māori, are employed in two of these studies to weave worldviews into a fuller understanding of enterprise success. The other study reclaims Ugandan studied social enterprises as Indigenous enterprises and applies Ubuntu philosophy to situate their success. The literature remains dominated by Global North framings and industrial titans; our work repositions success as a tapestry of community values, intergenerational thinking, spiritual continuity, and cultural resilience. Success, refracted through frameworks such as the 7Ps (First Peoples), kaupapa Māori philosophy, and Ubuntu, encompasses the relational, spiritual, cultural, and economic aspects. Despite the enduring violence of colonial structures and deficit discourses, Indigenous entrepreneurship represents a resurgence: an affirmation of being, belonging, and becoming. Our findings offer a relationally grounded alternative to prevailing economic narratives in this time of global instability, one that is egalitarian in nature and speaks to the connection of both the spiritual and physical worlds. We contribute to the decolonisation of enterprise success by centring Indigenous epistemologies and affirming that the reinvigoration of Indigenous knowledge systems is essential to building sustainable, culturally responsive, and equitable economic futures.

Keywords: Enterprise success, Māori, First Peoples, Indigenous Ugandans, values, Ubuntu, social enterprise

Introduction

Indigenous entrepreneurship (IE) is a broad discipline encompassing the dearth of entrepreneurial practices among the many Indigenous groups worldwide. One could argue that the term "Indigenous entrepreneurship" is highly reductionist, considering its connotations of explaining entrepreneurial practice among the global population of over 476 million people, making up over 5,000 distinct groups (United Nations, 2021), as one amalgamated phenomenon. However, IE presents differently across diverse Indigenous cultures. To that effect, there are various definitions of IE, which tend to be either broad or context specific. For example, Hindle and Lansdowne (2005, p. 132) define IE as "the creation, management, and development of new ventures for Indigenous people by Indigenous people for the benefit of Indigenous people", whereas Foley (2000, p. 11) is more specific in describing IE in Australia as First Peoples "alter[ing] traditional patterns of behaviour by utilising their resources in the pursuit of self-determination and economic sustainability via their entry into self-employment, forcing social change in the pursuit of opportunity beyond the cultural norms of their initial economic resources". Awatere et al. (2017, p. 81) define a localised version of IE, Māori

entrepreneurship, as "the process by which a Māori person (or people) operating within a Māori worldview generates value by identifying and exploiting new products, processes or markets for economic, social and cultural purposes of benefit to themselves, their whānau (family), hapū (clan), iwi (tribe) and the wider community". While there has not been a specific and contextualised definition of IE in Uganda, researchers (Rooks et al., 2009; Tukamushaba et al., 2011) have instead described it through broader frameworks that emphasise communal values, local knowledge, and the Ubuntu philosophy. Although significant progress has been made in the theoretical development and mainstreaming of IE, the notion of what constitutes Indigenous enterprise success remains inconclusive (Mrabure, 2019).

Performance indicators such as profit and growth have come to dominate how success is defined within mainstream economic thinking. Economist Milton Friedman famously stated that firms exist to maximise profits (Friedman, 1970), an ideology still prevalent in contemporary enterprise circles. This neoclassical view of the firm prioritises profits over people, a concept that is incongruent with the holistic outlook of Indigenous worldviews (Cheung, 2008; Jones, 2023; Kyejjusa & Romijn, 2024). This holistic orientation extends to economic activity, influencing how Indigenous entrepreneurs approach their enterprise endeavours (Dana, 2015; Lindsay, 2005). While progressive mainstream ideas of holistic considerations have emerged, such as the triple bottom-line theory (Scholtz & Louw, 2024) and stakeholder theory (Miles, 2017), Indigenous concepts of relational accountability between the physical and the spiritual are glaringly omitted. A First Peoples' worldview is holistic, exuding connectedness to people and the natural environment, including the physical and spiritual worlds.

Indigenous worldviews significantly influence why and how Indigenous Peoples around the globe engage in economic exchanges (Jones, 2023; Manganda, 2022). This paper draws from research previously conducted by the authors to conceptualise Indigenous business success. The authors identify as First Peoples and African and work in an Indigenous-led research centre situated within a western academic setting. The frame of reference utilised for this paper is the lived experience of First Peoples, Māori, and Indigenous Ugandan entrepreneurs who lead, own, manage, and control enterprises engaging in market exchanges in pursuit of economic self-determination.

The First Peoples author is Karajarri Yawuru, and they acknowledge the 650 sovereign nations whose unceded lands, sky, oceans, and waterways, known as Country, represent an enduring relationship of 65,000 years or more with place. Place also represents our identity and, as such, is deemed the most respectful way to acknowledge the Founders' dialogical contribution to this research connected to Terra Cognita Australis, since 1901 known as Australia. The First Peoples author preferences the term "Founders" acknowledging Indigenous enterprise literatures have used the desciptors enterprisers (Gladstone, 2021), entrepreneurs (Colbourne, 2021) and owners (Mika et al., 2019). The application of Founder represents First Peoples' voices as a central tenet in research that is for, with, and by Mob (Jones et al., 2025). The second author is an African-New Zealander of Zimbabwean Shona descent and is connected to Māori culture through marriage. He acknowledges the more than 70 Indigenous ethnic groups of Zimbabwe as vana vevhu (children of the land) and Māori as the traditional owners of the treasures of Aotearoa New Zealand. The third author is a Mugyeri clan member of the Bakiga People of Uganda. The Bakiga are part of the larger Bantu ethnic group in Africa. He acknowledges the 65 ethnic Ugandan tribes as recognised by the country's constitution (Uganda Government, 2005).

In this paper, we employ the term "Indigenous" with considerable apprehension. The term is problematic as it further contributes to the erasure of the diversity of sovereign nations. Homogeneous and reductive explanations disrupt social and family structures, dismantle language and cultural constructs, and disturb life and being, while diminishing entrepreneurial opportunities (Rose, 2021). However, the term is utilised in this composition overtly in line with standard convention to refer to the collective while discussing lived experiences with nuance and respect. We also utilise the term "First Peoples" in reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Australian context, acknowledging there is no universally accepted terminology that fully embraces the diversity of the hundreds of sovereign nations, custodians of Terra Cognita Australis for 65,000 years or more, of the land relatively recently, since 1901, known as Australia.

No academic or practitioner language has universally encompassed Indigenous worldviews of enterprise success; more often than not, it is the imposed language of the coloniser, hegemonically positioned by the Global North's powerful elites (Phipps, 2019). First Peoples, Māori, and the Bantu of Uganda have differing lived experiences of the colonial project, both historical and in modernity. The only semblance of homogeneity is the shared lived experience of the brutality of British colonisation and the ongoing colonial load that continues to invade our being. This paper draws on primary data from Founders, managers, and leaders of enterprises in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Uganda. We present what an Indigenous worldview of enterprise success entails during a time of global economic crisis as "a mechanism that enables the transformation of the speech of the oppressed into the language of revolution" (Henry & Foley, 2018, p. 217).

First Peoples: A People of Entrepreneurial Genius

With mabu liyan (the aspiration in the Yawuru language meaning "good wellbeing") influencing my thoughts, I commence this composition vastly different from whence I commenced my doctoral studies within a colonised settler space (Kidman, 2020) some time ago. Searching keywords, "First Peoples enterprise" and "success" returned a somewhat barren literary landscape. I literally drowned in the considerable outpouring of deficit discourse research, outputs "on and about us, not with us". Tears would steadily stream down my cheeks as I sat isolated within the Business School's confines of an institution grappling with its own demons as to how best "be the beacons of light in delivering social justice agendas across its many curriculums and courses" (UA, 2022, p. 48). Despite the small number of First Peoples within Australian universities (UA, 2020; UA, 2023), our significantly outnumbered academic warriors within the enterprise disciplines battle the enduring vestiges of colonisation and capitalism in addition to the colonial load (Locke et al., 2022). Elevating the voices of Nilangany Ngarrungunil, "owners of knowledge" in the Yawuru language, goes someway to addressing the considerable imposition of colonisation. Approaching 250 years of imperialism, such is but a blip on the radar for the longest continuous living cultures in the world who are re-emergent in pursuit of political, intellectual, and economic self-determination.

A non-linear narrative necessitates commencing with historical truths, despite the reticence of the coloniser (see Messenger, 2024), if we are to understand the current First Peoples economic landscape. In Terra Australis Incognita, a falsely claimed British discovery, First Peoples custodians engaged in commerce and ceremony successfully in community, as well as across national boundaries (Tindale, 1974), for 65,000 years, or longer (Broome, 2010; Jones & Rose, 2018). Commerce, influenced by environmental advantage, among the 650 or more First Peoples sovereignties (Collins et al., 2017; Maddison, 2019) included items such as pearl, ochre, wooden implements, greenstone, and smoked eels (Indigenous Australia, 2018; UNESCO, 2019). Overseas international trading partners included the Qing Dynasty from China (La Canna, 2014), the Macassans (Peters, 2017), and the Baijini from the Indies (Gammage, 2012). A complex and well-orchestrated First Peoples economy flourished, traversing the entirety of the continent through a network of trade routes (Mowaljarlai & Malnic, 1993; Pascoe, 2018) well before the arrival of British invaders (Bodle et al., 2018). After Britain's illegal invasion in 1788, government policies deliberately excluded First Peoples from their resource-rich lands and meaningful inclusion in the economy (Altman, 2004).

More recently, Collins et al. (2017) decry that minimal advances have been made by the three tiers of Australian government in rectifying First Peoples' socio-economic disadvantage as portrayed annually in the Closing the Gap (CTG) reporting (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024). Successive research studies of the componentry of social determinants—the elements contributing to the aspiration of what it means to lead a good life—indicates the gap between First Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians is a gap too far (Biddle et al., 2018), and one that shows no ablation. An abyss, cultivated through marginalisation, has seen the disintegration of trans-generational enterprise knowledge, enterprise networks, employment opportunities, inter-generational fiscal wealth accumulation, and accompanying role models—all considerable impediments contributing to the maintenance of the current state whereby we are positioned as less than (Foley, 2012; Rose, 2021; Shirodkar, 2021).

Before the 1967 Referendum, Australian Government policy was one of assimilation, integration (Altman et al., 2005), and annihilation. A changing of the political guard post-1970, saw the Whitlam government's Indigenous Affairs Policy propagate at times with both self-determination (Carey & Prince, 2015; Thomas et al., 2014) and self-management agendas (Altman & Sanders, 1991), albeit within colonial hegemony. The current policy climate has evolved into one purporting the importance of recognising First Peoples' voices (Referendum Council, 2017), focused on economic independence through developing sustainable, for-profit, Founder-led enterprises so as to contribute to economic self-determination.

The aspiration of economic self-determination for First Peoples through led, owned, managed, and controlled for-profit enterprises provides a crucial opportunity to create a positive cycle of social and economic empowerment. "Indigenous businesses create outsized benefits for Indigenous Australians" (Supply Nation & First Australian Capital, 2018, p. 2); given such, the increased standards of living realised by First Peoples enterprise Founders and their families (Collins et al., 2017) contributes to social mobility (Côté & Evans, 2025). Further, there is a significant multiplier effect achieved through generating increased First Peoples employment opportunities (Eva et al., 2024), while contributing to the economic development and leadership within communities (Evans et al., 2021).

Māori Entrepreneurship: Influenced by Kaupapa Māori

Māori entrepreneurship is a distinct form of IE in Aotearoa New Zealand (Mika et al., 2024). As far back as AD 950, Māori have had a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation (Petrie, 2013; Spiller et al., 2011). With the arrival of Europeans

in the early 19th century, Māori were actively involved in national trade and commerce (Frederick & Henry, 2004; Wanhalla, 2007). The Māori economy is worth an estimated $70 billion and is projected to reach $100 billion by 2030 (PricewaterhouseCoopers New Zealand, 2024). Māori are renowned worldwide for their entrepreneurial streak and are one of the most entrepreneurial Indigenous groups in the world (Frederick & Henry, 2004).

Māori entrepreneurship is adjusting to political, economic, and social changes. Contexts include Māori aspirations for tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) (Mika, 2018) and treaty settlements for Crown breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840 (Wheen & Hayward, 2012). The breaches were justified by colonial narratives casting Indigenous people as being disinclined to commerce and resource exploitation for material gain (Mika et al., 2022).

Treaty settlements provide the foundation for iwi to build upon for economic growth through enterprise and investment (Katschner, 2005) and successive New Zealand governments recognise the potential for Māori enterprises to transform the New Zealand economy. Since 1987, the country has experienced extensive economic reforms to restore the competitiveness of Māori enterprise (Zapalska & Brozik, 2017) through policies and programs to stimulate and sustain Māori economic development (Reihana et al., 2007).

Kaupapa Māori (Māori philosophy) has increasingly been accepted as the basis for Māori-defined approaches to development in research, education, health, social, and economic spheres (Coleman et al., 2005; McIntosh et al., 2021; Smith, 2000). In Māori entrepreneurship, cultural context and values influence economic decisions (Cain & Spoonley, 2013; Henry & Dana, 2019; Houkamau & Sibley, 2019). Māori values and Māori enterprise ownership are the defining characteristics of Māori enterprise and economic activity (Mika et al., 2019; Tapsell & Woods, 2008). Contemporary Māori entrepreneurial activity, therefore, consists of a mix of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) and a western worldview (Warren et al., 2017). The embeddedness of economic rationality and cultural elements has been proven effective (Henry et al., 2018; Mika, 2014).

Ugandan Indigenous Entrepreneurship: The Bantu's Ubuntu Perspective in Social Entrepreneurship

Uganda was ranked as the most entrepreneurial country in the world, with 30% of adult Ugandans (aged 18–64) owning an enterprise (Balunywa et al., 2013). However, despite this high rate of entrepreneurship, many challenges persist. Success and failure are influenced by a combination of social, economic, political, and cultural factors (Mpeera Ntayi et al., 2013).

A recent United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) entrepreneurship policy review of Uganda notes gaps in entrepreneurship education through the formal educational system (UNCTAD, 2023). The report indicates that "current training programmes [on entrepreneurship] have not been successful due to inadequacies of their curricula, which are considered too theoretical and not in touch with the realities of the entrepreneurial activities in Uganda" (UNCTAD, 2023, p. 6).These shortcomings reflect the lingering influence of colonial-era systems, as Uganda's entrepreneurship policies, like those of many other African countries, remain aligned with colonial frameworks, raising concerns about neo-colonialism and coloniality (Irene et al., 2025; Lange, 2004; Mwanika et al., 2021; Olaitan & Oloruntoba, 2023; Othieno, 2024; UNCTAD, 2023). Uganda gained independence from British colonial rule in 1962, after colonisation began in 1894. Unlike settler-colonial states such as Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, Uganda was governed as a British protectorate through indirect rule using existing traditional leadership, with the primary objective of economic exploitation (Lange, 2004; Mwanika et al., 2021). Though there is a desire for Uganda to distinguish itself from westernisation, this process remains "incredibly complex and problematic, causing a continued subjugation of dominance rather than a liberation from the colonial legacy" (Armitage, 2015, p. 1).

The current entrepreneurial ecosystem, including social entrepreneurial organisations, reflects colonial influences. It still heavily depends on foreign funding, which has shifted the priorities of Ugandan Entrepreneurial Support Organisations (ESOs) (UNCTAD, 2023). The social entrepreneurship sector, which is closely linked to the African philosophy of Ubuntu (Du Toit, 2021), is still emerging, and it lacks a guiding policy framework and a national social enterprise body (Musinguzi, Baker, et al., 2025; Tamale et al., 2020; Turyakira et al., 2021), as well as a focus on Indigenous worldviews (Musinguzi, Baker, et al., 2025; Tamale et al., 2020; Turyakira et al., 2021).

In Uganda, emerging research points to the need for an Indigenous-focus in entrepreneurship development (Kyejjusa & Romijn, 2024; Musinguzi, Mukembo, et al., 2025; Mutya & Ilankadhir, 2024). IE (including social entrepreneurial organisations) in Uganda continues to receive limited attention, with entrepreneurs facing significant challenges such as restricted access to capital, low market patronage, high competition, and minimal government support (Mutya & Ilankadhir, 2024; Tamale et al., 2020; Turyakira et al., 2021).

These issues underscore the broader problem: the persistent dominance of western and European frameworks that do not accommodate Indigenous African philosophies (Crawford et al., 2021; Kupangwa, 2024; Mangaliso et al., 2022). Western and European perspectives marginalise Indigenous African philosophies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018); Metz, 2018; Muchie et al.,2016; Nyoni, 2019), yet these are essential for Africa's socio-economic transformation.

Research Methodology

Jones (2023) enacted an Indigenous research approach utilising yarning, a cultural form of conversation underpinned by relationality, in elevating the perspectives of Founders, who are Nilangany Ngarrungunil, "owners of knowledge" in the Yawuru language. This qualitative study, thematically analysed, represents 24 First Peoples Founders of for-profit enterprises predominantly working off-Country in partnerships and small to medium enterprises in urban locations across Australia. The research was grounded in Indigenous standpoint theory, which is both a theory and a practice (Jones et al., 2024) in demonstrating for, with, and by Mob (Jones et al., 2025).

The Māori entrepreneurship study (Manganda et al., 2023) was part of a PhD thesis (Manganda, 2022) that applied a methodological weaving of kaupapa Māori, Indigenous standpoint theory, and western approaches. The data for the (Manganda et al., 2023) study was collected through semi-structured interviews with people from 10 Māori enterprises on the east coast of Aotearoa New Zealand. An inductive approach was then utilised to thematically analyse the data. Kaupapa Māori precepts were utilised in the research process to meet the requirements for culturally responsible research, for example, having Māori research supervisors and kaitakawaenga (facilitators) in engaging Māori entrepreneurs. A raranga (Māori weaving) metaphor was then used to integrate these diverse paradigms, producing a whāriki (woven mat) that represents the synthesis of Indigenous and western worldviews in enterprise research.

The Ugandan study (Musinguzi, Baker, et al., 2025) was a component of a PhD thesis (Musinguzi, 2022) that applied semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions for data collection. While the study was initially framed through a western lens, in this current paper, the third author re-centres the African Indigenous philosophy of Ubuntu (Mugumbate et al., 2025; Wamara et al., 2023) and reclaims the social entrepreneurial organisations studied as African Indigenous enterprises. Ubuntu is presented not as a theoretical adornment but as a lived philosophical anchor for the Ugandan conceptualisation of social enterprise success. In doing so, the study actively reclaims and elevates Indigenous Ugandan knowledge, challenging the dominance of colonial perspectives that have long underpinned academic and policy discourses in Africa (Ochonu, 2018). This is an initial step in the third author's process of "purposeful return to the past in order to reclaim, reinterpret, and reapply valuable cultural knowledge for the present" (Dumavor, 2025, p. ii), an inspiration from the Akan People's philosophical concept of Sankofa (Ahmed & Gyamerah, 2025; Dumavor, 2025; Slater, 2019).

Across the three distinct research studies, common philosophical threads emerged. Each situates Indigenous entrepreneurship within relational, collective, and spiritually grounded paradigms that contrast with western perspectives centred on individuality and profit maximisation. These convergences highlight the need for an integrative framework that articulates Indigenous enterprise as a multidimensional and relational construct.

We utilise a Triadic Relational Model (TRM) as an analytical framework for bringing together how Indigenous business success was conceptualised in the three studies. TRMs have been used in social science research to explain complex, multi-context phenomena by integrating interdependent cultural, social, and economic dimensions, rather than isolating them. For example, Moore (1995) employed a strategic triangle to examine value creation within public governance systems; Shove et al. (2012) used a triadic social practice model to interpret how social change occurs through the integration of materials, competences, and meaning.

The Triadic Relational Model of Indigenous Enterprise Success offers a meta-framework for comparing and dialoguing about Indigenous entrepreneurship across distinct epistemological foundations. It highlights the aspirations of success, emphasising the uniqueness of each community, shaped by their land.

We contend that Indigenous methodologies are not an afterthought. They are central to epistemic justice and critical for disrupting extractive research logics. We affirm that relational ethics, cultural protocols, and community-grounded knowledge must shape not only what we study, but how we study it, and why.

Indigenous Worldviews of Enterprise Success: Posited as New Knowledge

First Peoples Enterprise Success: The Aspiration of Mabu Liyan

First Peoples research on enterprise Founders has asked, Do entrepreneurs view, value, and measure success differently than their non-Indigenous counterparts? (Austin & Garnett, 2018; Collins et al., 2017; Manero et al., 2022; Nikolakis, 2008). Findings suggest that, in addition to enterprise survivability and being informed by the past, success is contingent on the unique community values of First Peoples, which comprise multiple non-market considerations. First Peoples' worldviews are influential predicators and contribute to the understanding of why and how Indigenous Peoples globally engage in economic exchanges (Jones, 2023; Manganda, 2022). A First Peoples' worldview is holistic, exuding connectedness to people, the natural environment, and spiritual worlds. Jones (2023), in elevating the voices of Founder aspirations of success, represented such thematically as a First Peoples' Worldview of Economy, the 7Ps, summarised in Table 1. The 7Ps are further expanded upon as considerations to a differentiated value system contributing to economic self-determination.

Table 1: First Peoples' Worldview of Economy: The 7 Ps (Jones, 2023)

The 7 Ps	Description
Purpose	First Peoples' lived experiences continue to be influenced by British colonial legacies underpinned by continuing racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Moved to the fringe, excluded from our resource-rich lands, designated as sub-human, subjugated to assimilation policies with genocidal intent, we were meant to die out. This re-emergent Founder generation spoke of impoverished upbringings and how they have benefited from the political activism of those who walked before them. A major motivation was demonstrating to the Australian populous that we are "more than".
Place	Place, Country, is our cultural inheritance. "Country is centrally about identity" (Dodson, 2008, p. 6). Founders expressed the importance of place and one's identity being emmeshed into the enterprises' "ways of doing" while also recognising cultural protocols.
People	Founders are committed to sharing opportunities with First Peoples as employees or within their supply chains, a multiplier effect positively contributing to self-determination in addressing the CTG indicators.
Partnerships	Founders networking with First Peoples and non-Indigenous enterprises through partnerships to expand First Peoples' economic opportunities is considered a growth imperative.
Prosperity	Profit, while important, is only one factor contributing to a far broader conceptualisation of prosperity which is influenced by cultural values.
Perpetuity	Founders focused on the prosperity of future generations. Demonstrated by a range of "giving back" practices demonstrated through financial endowments, mentoring, and sharing knowledges.
Power	Leading, owning, managing, and controlling a First Peoples for-profit enterprise facilitates the opportunity for Founders to self-determine individual and collective priorities in addressing the socio-politico-economic status of the day among immediate family and the elements comprising the enterprise ecosystem of First Peoples.

The 7 Ps are the values, customs, and practices that Founders enact within the enterprise ecosystem, creating, sustaining, and expanding the economic landscape of First Peoples, and contributing to economic self-determination and the continuance of the world's longest living cultures.

Māori Enterprise Success

Māori enterprise success goes beyond the profit motive and is related to the success factors that facilitate it. This relationship is not causal but synergistic—the exploitation of success factors enabling "objective" success and success measured against the economic activity's impact on the preceding success factors. For example, a Māori entrepreneur may utilise whakawhanaungatanga (build relationships) within Māori enterprise networks to gain strategic information. As they become more successful, they will have a net positive impact on the quality of the enterprise network, for example, through mentoring and resource sharing.

Due to the dynamism of culture, Māori's success factors comprise cultural heritage and values while adopting western enterprise concepts to be competitive in the market. This strategising is not new; Hargreaves (1959) posits that Māori adopted new agriculture methods to their benefit when the European settlers first came to New Zealand. Māori contributed greatly to the large agricultural export of the invaded lands. Hybridity is evident in contemporary Māori enterprises, with both cultural and commercial success factors helping guide firm decisions and stakeholder relationships, fostering adaptability, innovation, and skills development.

Applying kaupapa Māori philosophy to enterprise practice ensures cultural preservation and perpetuation, thereby paralleling cultural priorities with commercial objectives. Cultural artefacts, language, systems, and symbolism are leveraged to create competitive advantage, differentiation, and long-term resilience, for example, Māori media, which is instrumental in language revitalisation and nurturing of Māori journalists who may later influence mainstream media institutions (Daubs, 2021). In a study of 10 Māori entrepreneurs, Manganda et al. (2023) found that, in the balancing of cultural and commercial imperatives, tikanga (Māori practices and values) was a mediating factor for success (see Table 2).

Table 2: Examples of Tikanga that Mediate Māori Entrepreneurial Success

Tikanga	**English equivalent**
Whakawhanaungatanga	Establishing relationships
Taonga tuku iho	Treasures handed down (generational wealth)
Mahi tahi	Working together
Kotahitanga	Oneness / Unity to achieve common goals
Whakaute	Respect
Kaitiakitanga	Guardianship
Manaakitanga	Hospitality
Māhaki	Showing humility when sharing knowledge
Titiro, whakarongo, kōrero	Look, listen, then speak (seek understanding first)
Mana	Power, dignity, respect (Do not trample on the mana / dignity of a person)
Kia tūpato	Cautiousness (politically savvy, reflexive, culturally safe)

Māori enterprises create a distinctive synergy by incorporating cultural values such as tikanga into their business practices. This blend promotes resilience, innovation, and long-lasting success. Furthermore, the enterprises highlight that success encompasses not just financial results but also the enhancement and preservation of Māori culture, familial relationships, community wellbeing, and legacy.

Ugandan Enterprise Success: An Ubuntu Social Enterprise Perspective

As in education and social work (see Kaya, 2014; Mugumbate et al., 2025), western theories, concepts, and worldviews still dominate social entrepreneurship, especially in defining success (see Sharir & Lerner, 2006). While IE research is emerging in Africa (Adeola, 2023; April & Itenge, 2020), including Uganda (Kyejjusa & Romijn, 2024; Musinguzi, Mukembo, et al., 2025; Mutya & Ilankadhir, 2024), most studies continue to apply western frameworks to analyse Indigenous enterprises (Musinguzi et al., 2023; Musinguzi, Mukembo, et al., 2025).

Given Africa's postcolonial context, there is a growing need for Afrocentric understandings of social enterprise success (Mofokeng, 2023) rather than a purely western view (Musinguzi, Baker, et al., 2025). One such framework is Ubuntu, a philosophy found across Africa (see Mugumbate et al., 2025; Wamara et al., 2023), which promotes relationality, shared humanity, and interconnectedness. Ubuntu challenges dominant paradigms by offering culturally relevant, context-specific understandings. As Wamara et al. (2023, p. 1398) note, "The goal of Ubuntu is to bind people together and enhance connectedness between all peoples at all levels."

Incorporating Ubuntu in social entrepreneurship encourages the use of local knowledge alongside formal institutions to support inclusive market activity (Farhoud et al., 2023). This contributes to building decolonised, Ubuntu-Afrocentric Indigenous social enterprises, disrupting western dominance and advancing Indigenous knowledge production (Crawford et al., 2021).

Although the original study by Musinguzi, Baker, et al. (2025) employed a western analytical lens to examine Ugandan social enterprise success, this paper argues that Ubuntu offers a more legitimate framework for interpreting success as narrated by Indigenous communities. Seven Ubuntu concepts (see Table 3) offer a meaningful way to categorise the success factors identified in that study.

Table 3: Application of Ubuntu Philosophy Concepts to Social Enterprise Success (adapted from Musinguzi, Baker, et al., 2025)

Ubuntu concept	**Equivalent social enterprise success**
Compassion	frugal innovation, human capital
Survival	entrepreneurial orientation, strategic planning, frugal innovation, social enterprise marketing, technology, external financial support, government support
Group solidarity	leadership, community engagement, social salience
Respect	leadership, community engagement
Dignity	leadership, community engagement
Collectivism	leadership, community engagement
Stewardship and accountability	social impact measurement, triple bottom-line planning

The Ubuntu framing shifts the emphasis from the individualistic and profit-focused western and European models to a more holistic view grounded in community, dignity, and collective wellbeing, which are essential for sustainable success in the Ugandan context.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

To integrate the findings from the Jones (2023), the Manganda et al. (2023), and the Musinguzi, Baker, et al. (2025) studies, we use the TRM (see Table 4) to conceptualise Indigenous entrepreneurship as a dynamic equilibrium among people, place, and purpose, maintained through relational ethics, spirituality, and collective wellbeing.

Table 4: Triadic Relational Model of Indigenous Enterprise Success

Core dimension	Conceptual description	Analytical function	Illustration across the three contexts
People	Reflects the centrality of relationships, kinship, and collective wellbeing as the foundation of enterprise activity.	Highlights social connectedness and reciprocity as the ontological basis of Indigenous entrepreneurship.	**First Peoples:** Kinship networks and multiplier effects supporting self-determination. **Māori:** Whakawhanaungatanga (building relationships), mahi tahi (working together). **Ugandan:** Community solidarity, compassion, and dignity.
Place	Anchors identity, belonging, and purpose in land, Country, and environment, linking the physical and spiritual realms.	Positions enterprise as an extension of ecological and cultural responsibility.	**First Peoples:** Country as identity and source of wellbeing. **Māori:** Kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and whenua (land) as living ancestors. **Ugandan:** Stewardship and accountability to community and environment.
Purpose	Represents self-determination, spirituality, and intergenerational continuity as measures of success beyond profit.	Defines success through the regeneration of culture, autonomy, and sustainable futures.	**First Peoples:** Economic self-determination and empowerment of future generations (7Ps: Purpose, Power, Perpetuity). **Māori:** Tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) and taonga tuku iho (heritage transmission). **Ugandan:** Shared prosperity, stewardship, and collective survival.

The model recognises relationality as the ontological foundation linking community to the physical and metaphysical realms (Jones et al., 2024), self-determination as the political and economic expression of Indigenous agency (Manganda et al., 2023), and intergenerational continuity (Jones et al., 2024; Manganda et al., 2023; Musinguzi, Baker, et al., 2025) as the measure of enduring success. Our collective lived experiences, continuously impacted by the ongoing violence of British colonisation, still influence our peoples' economic trajectories. Whether in profit-driven or social enterprises, First Peoples, Māori, and Indigenous Ugandans embed values into their ways of knowing, being, and doing that have supported us since time immemorial.

Indigenous enterprise success is not reducible to conventional metrics. It is a contextually anchored, relationally rooted, and spiritually informed pursuit of intergenerational prosperity, community uplift, and cultural continuity. We assert that, within Indigenous entrepreneurship, success represents a living, dynamic interplay of cultural, spiritual, ecological, and economic imperatives.

In a period of global economic vulnerability, arguably triggered by capitalist extractivism, Indigenous knowledges present an alternative path forward. They offer worldviews that prioritise harmony, responsibility, and reciprocity, both in tangible and intangible realms. These perspectives are vital for imagining and building sustainable futures. Indigenous knowledge, still often called new knowledge in the western academy, contains the means to help humanity re-centre itself. By emphasising relationality, spirituality, and self-determination as key aspects of Indigenous enterprise success, the Triadic Relational Model of Indigenous Enterprise Success encourages further comparative research into how Indigenous worldviews can guide more sustainable and equitable enterprise systems. Everything is connected.

Limitations

The Founder samples do not speak for all First Peoples, Māori, and Ugandan Indigenous enterprisers. What has been shared is a rich and thick source of qualitative data as an alternative to the academy of the west's prevailing deficit discourse and extractive intent in preferencing research on and about, not for, with, and by.

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