

## The business essentials of Kiwi National Culture

National cultures can be ranked or classified and compared using empirically verifiable, largely independent “*dimensions*”. There is remarkable agreement on New Zealand’s rankings between the different researchers and approaches. The combination of *dimensions* creates a unique K-Code® and explanation for a number of our behaviours. Overwhelmingly, we have a preference for the initiation rather than implementation parts of the innovation process. These dimensions compound to create a CONVERSION barrier between initiation and implementation. That reduces the value that we create and harvest from our inventiveness, impacting adversely on our productivity, profitability and prosperity.

☉ We are strongly individualistic but at the same time egalitarian – or more correctly we have low tolerance to power differentials within our society. The Tall Poppy Syndrome may be the egalitarianism keeping the individualism in check. We have a particularly negative attitude towards failure, especially where money is involved and an endemic and striking inability to give and receive feedback and criticism, no matter how constructively it is intended. That is a significant barrier to the transition from the relatively safe stage of creativity to the riskier stage of implementation and it makes it difficult if not impossible to manage performance, especially poor performance. That same low assertiveness and high harmony seeking probably accounts for us being very likeable.

☉ We accord respect on the basis of achievement, especially practical achievement but not business success and especially not on the basis of wealth accumulation. We separate the respect accorded at work from that given outside of work. That reduces the motivation to accumulate wealth and in Maslow’s terms, accumulating wealth is not a path to self actualisation. The separation of social life and work, and a great reluctance to express emotion at work may explain the perception that we are less fun to do business with than our Australian cousins.

☉ We are universalist and tend to believe that there is one right or wrong for every situation (black or white or “our way”). We therefore “think for our customers”, assuming that what we think is important and what we take for granted will be the same for our customers. We thus fail to understand the opportunity to align our *supplier value proposition offer*® with the *customer value proposition demand*®. We are then viewed as having a “take-it-or-leave-it” approach that undermines the value we harvest.

☉ We are intensely self-reliant. That plays out in the capital and ownership structures that we adopt resulting in increased risk aversion. Our reluctance to delegate and to collaborate caps the size and growth potential of our businesses. We prefer generalists to specialists and widely adopt “do-it-yourself” and in combination with other factors pay insufficient attention to preparation and presentation resulting in a “make-do”, “she’ll be right” appearance.

☉ We have very low assertiveness but high action orientation (just get on with it!). Our short *time horizon* means that we do not take the time to “court” our prospects even where that is essential resulting in an apparent reluctance to understand other cultures and a preference for transaction rather than relationship based business. That compounds the “take-it-or-leave-it” perception. Of course some cultures prefer to do business the same way we do while other find it offensive. The secret is in knowing the difference and acting accordingly.

☉ Weak negotiation skills are attributable to low assertiveness and high harmony seeking. A lack of confidence to launch products and risk unfavourable feedback traps us in a “pathology of serial initiation” and reluctance to engage early with our customers, even though speed to market is increasingly a competitive necessity. Our natural comfort zone is in the laboratory or workshop rather than the market place.

☉ We have very high affective autonomy and low work centrality which means that we prefer the individual pursuit of pleasure and an exciting and varied life rather than co-operation and work. The low work centrality and preference for pleasure (outside of work) and variety means that work goals are in very strong competition with personal and recreational goals. As a result we “satisfice” or reach thresholds of satisfaction at quite low levels (wealth creation, quality, engagement etc) after which, motivated by our preference for initiation, we switch to the next new thing. This may play out in further lack of attention to preparation and presentation.