

Advancing critical biography with Indigenous methodology: understanding Maori entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to advance the application of critical biography through a decolonised research methodology that places Kaupapa Maori as the primary analytical lens for understanding Maori entrepreneurship. This paper explores the life of 19th-Century Maori chief, Hongi Hika, in Aotearoa (New Zealand).

Design/methodology/approach – Applying a dual method approach that first integrates Kaupapa Maori, then critical biography, provides an improved approach for identifying historical and cultural complexities often missed in Western-centric methods when analysing historical Maori entrepreneurs.

Findings – The findings of this study support the view that Kaupapa Maori methodology should be used first, and critical biography second, in an integrated way, when analysing Maori entrepreneurs. This approach deepens

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Erratum: It has come to the attention of the publisher that the article, Rogers J., Laferriere R., Birdthistle N., and Bodle K. (2025), “Advancing critical biography with Indigenous methodology: understanding Maori entrepreneurship”, *Journal of Management History*, Vol. ahead of print No. ahead of print. <https://doi.10.1108/JMH-10-2024-0178> incorrectly listed the affiliations of authors Jason Rogers, Naomi Birdthistle, and Kerry Bodle. The affiliations should read:

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our understanding of each character and connects the research to Maori principles, values, historical narratives and customs, while supporting the need to expand entrepreneurship theory to include Maori worldviews.

Research limitations/implications – While this paper focuses on a single experience in Hongi Hika's life, it lays a foundation for a broader application of a combined Kaupapa Maori–critical biography framework. Researchers must recognise the heterogeneity of the Maori experience and the ongoing effects of colonisation when engaging in Maori research. This dual approach encourages the decolonisation of management and scholarship and highlights the importance of Indigenous-led methodologies.

Originality/value – This paper's contribution to the research community is through integrating Kaupapa Maori with critical biography, therefore advancing both methodological discourse and Indigenous entrepreneurship studies.

Keywords Critical biography, Kāupapa Māori, Indigenous methodology, Māori entrepreneurship, Decolonisation, Management history, Contextualisation

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

There is an old Māori whakatauki (proverb) that states, 'Ka mua, ka muri.' Translated it means, 'we look back in order to move forward.' This whakatauki reminds us that our histories, identities, and ways of knowing are guides as we move forward. Understanding the past is not just an academic exercise but a cultural imperative that is founded in whakapapa (connection, ancestry), Tino Rangatiratanga (self-determination) and whanaungatanga (relationship, kinship). For Māori in Aotearoa (New Zealand), historical narratives have too often been constructed through colonial lenses that do not consider the complexity of who we are as Māori. Many influential Māori figures in management history have been marginalised or misrepresented. This paper responds to this gap by applying a framework that enriches and transforms research paradigms in management history and entrepreneurship.

Management history is a field of study that has developed alongside the rise of business schools in the late 19th and 20th centuries, embedding a Western-centric approach to management ideas (Spicer and Alvesson, 2025; Starkey and Tempest, 2025). This approach was usually founded on industrial capitalism, managerialism and euro-American epistemologies, while underrepresenting the roles, contributions and identities of non-Western characters (Dar *et al.*, 2021). In particular, Indigenous leaders and entrepreneurs were either excluded or misrepresented in ways that stripped away their cultural identity, resulting in misalignment of Indigenous values and contexts (Walker, 1990; Banerjee, 2022).

This inclusion has not gone unchallenged. Critical management studies (CMS) has long called for an expansion of management history to include alternative voices, epistemologies and contexts (Spicer and Alvesson, 2025). Critical biography has re-emerged as a valuable methodology for exploring the lives of historical characters in management theory, organizational behaviour and leadership (Gibson *et al.*, 2016; Deem *et al.*, 2023). However, McLaren and Durepos (2019) share that critical biography remains deeply embedded in Western epistemological traditions that privilege individualism, linear progression and culturally narrow interpretations. This presents a challenge when the historical character being studied is from a non-Western or Indigenous context.

Addressing this challenge requires methodologies that are grounded in the cultural values and contexts of the characters being studied. This paper explores the potential of integrating Kāupapa Māori methodology with critical biography as a dual-method approach that provides a more nuanced and culturally contextualised understanding of Māori entrepreneurship, when analysing the life of Māori entrepreneurs. This approach addresses the challenge that exists with critical biography, CMS and the wider management history field of study.

Kāupapa Māori as a research methodology emerged in the 1980s–1990s, founded in response to decades of Western research marginalisation of Māori voices (Walker, 1990; Smith, 1999). Developed by scholars like Graham Smith and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who

faced institutional resistance and academic dismissal while asserting the validity and rigour of Māori knowledge (Smith, 1999; Bishop, 1995). The reality for contemporary Māori is that many do not have a connection to Te Ao Māori, including a connection to language, land and tikanga because of the historical effects of colonisation (Walker, 1990; Smith, 1999). Kāupapa Māori provides researchers with a culturally grounded methodology that upholds the principles of Tino Rangatiratanga, ensuring research is conducted by Māori, for Māori, with Māori (Wilson *et al.*, 2022; Ormond, 2023). Kāupapa Māori doesn't just offer a "perspective", it also constitutes an ontological and methodological framework founded in Tikanga Māori (customs and practices), values and whakapapa (Ormond, 2023).

Applying this integrated methodology to a Māori historical character demonstrates its value. This paper proposes that Kāupapa Māori must be the first lens when analysing the lives of Māori characters, when a researcher is applying critical biography. By following this approach, it supports the decolonisation of the research, by repositioning Māori knowledge at the centre of the research analysis, rather than treating it as a supplementary approach to Western theory. This approach supports a richer and improved contextualised understanding of Māori entrepreneurship, one that recognises relationality (whanaungatanga), reciprocity (utu) and collective well-being (kotahitanga) alongside economic activity.

This paper focuses on the life of Hongi Hika, a prominent early 19th-Century Māori Chief from Aotearoa (New Zealand). Hongi Hika is often portrayed in colonial texts as a fearsome warrior chief (Cloher, 2003; Smith, 2012). This paper reframes his actions and behaviours through a dual lens of Kāupapa Māori and critical biography, portraying Hongi Hika as a strategic thinker, diplomatic leader and entrepreneurial innovator, working for the survival and advancement of his people.

Analysing his life through these lenses not only reframes historical narratives but also demonstrates how Indigenous methodologies can enrich, CMS and management history. The next section in this paper critically reviews the literature, focusing on entrepreneurship in an Indigenous context; critical biography in management history; Kāupapa Māori theory; Kāupapa Māori and critical biography in management research.

Literature review

Entrepreneurship in Indigenous contexts

Entrepreneurship research has evolved significantly over the years, traditionally being understood in Western literature as the process of identifying opportunities, mobilising resources and assuming risks to create and manage ventures for economic gain or social value (Drucker, 1985; Newton and Gary Shreeve, 2002). Recently, various definitions have evolved, with some focusing on opportunity recognition, resource orchestration and value creation in dynamic environments (Brush *et al.*, 2019; Wales *et al.*, 2023; Pinto *et al.*, 2024). Brush *et al.* (2019, pg. 393) argue that entrepreneurship includes social and community value creation, not just solely profit maximisation. The common elements that exist in the definition of entrepreneurship (from a Western-centric lens) include opportunity identification; risk-taking, resource mobilisation and value creation (economic, social and cultural) (Brush *et al.*, 2019; Wales *et al.*, 2023; Pinto *et al.*, 2024).

Recent studies have challenged these Western-centric elements, offering a broader, culturally situated understanding of entrepreneurship (Allui and Park, 2023; Calvo and Morales, 2023). Indigenous entrepreneurship is now a widely recognised form of enterprise that is based on elements of collectiveness, value-driven and embedded within cultural traditions, systems and practices (Manganda *et al.*, 2023; Dell *et al.*, 2024). Māori entrepreneurship has emerged as a significant focus in both academic research and practice, because of the growing economic and social impact of Māori-led enterprises in Aotearoa.

The concept of Māori entrepreneurship is both contested and adaptive, emerging at the intersection of Indigenous values and colonial structures. Scholars continue to debate how Māori enterprises balance the imperatives of Tino Rangatiratanga (self-determination) with the realities of participating in market economies that have been shaped by colonialisation distancing Māori entrepreneurs from their cultural values (Mika *et al.*, 2017; Haar *et al.*, 2021). Some scholars describe Māori entrepreneurship as a culturally distinct form of enterprise grounded in manaakitanga, whanaungatanga and kaitiakitanga, emphasising collective well-being and intergenerational responsibility (Spiller *et al.*, 2015; Dell *et al.*, 2024). Others argue that Māori entrepreneurship must navigate tensions between upholding tikanga values and responding to market pressures (Henare *et al.*, 2014; McAleer, 2024).

Māori people are not a homogenous collective, and experiences of entrepreneurship are shaped by diverse engagements with colonial history and its ongoing impacts (Walker, 1990; Smith, 1999). Māori identity today exists along a continuum, from those who are deeply grounded in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) to those who are not (Greaves *et al.*, 2023; Lemon, 2025). The detrimental impact of land loss, language suppression and institutional exclusion continue to influence access to resources and participation in economic life, meaning that contemporary Māori vary in their grounding of culture, worldview, and access to Te Ao Māori (Greaves *et al.*, 2023; Lemon, 2025).

This paper positions Hongi Hika's actions as an early expression of entrepreneurial leadership that engages directly with these debates. His strategies of resource acquisition, alliance building and risk-taking can be understood as entrepreneurial behaviours, yet they were firmly embedded in Māori cultural beliefs and principles (Cloher, 2003). Analysing his actions through both Kāupapa Māori and critical biography enables a deeper engagement with the complexities of what constitutes Māori entrepreneurship, and how cultural priorities shape entrepreneurial decision-making.

Critical biography in management history

Critical biography as a qualitative narrative methodology has been used in management history to explore the interaction between individual lives and the broader organizational and societal contexts (Gibson *et al.*, 2016; Deem *et al.*, 2023). Deem *et al.* (2023, p. 120) used critical biography in their analysis of Walt Disney's life experiences, explaining that "we were able to demonstrate how the lived experiences of Walt Disney's childhood and early adult life carried over to influence his behaviour through his lifetime." In the past few years, academics have increasingly used critical biography as part of CMS, seeking to question power, context, and marginalised voices (McLaren and Durepos, 2019; Deem *et al.*, 2023). McLaren and Durepos (2019, p. 82) explained that if a phenomenon of an individual is being analysed, then it is important to situate the individual within a context, sharing that, "we must embed context into our research and explain how and why the relevant context was formulated."

The development of management education is intricately linked to the rise of business schools, particularly in the USA (Spicer and Alvesson, 2025; Starkey and Tempest, 2025). These institutions established Western-centric principles of thought, often marginalising Indigenous and non-Western perspectives (Banerjee, 2022). Banerjee (2022, pg. 2) explains that "attempts to broaden the contexts of management theories and develop Indigenous theory are still very much embedded in Western knowledge[...][...]which is produced through the political economy of colonialism."

Contemporary CMS has critically examined this knowledge imbalance, with postcolonial scholarship challenging the euro-American dominance of management theory and advocating for more inclusive and contextually grounded approaches (Dar *et al.*, 2021; Spicer and Alvesson, 2025). The use of critical biography in CMS lies in its potential to

address such exclusions by incorporating values, roles, contexts, contributions and characters that have historically been overlooked. CMS have called for methodologies to better reflect the values, identities and contexts that go beyond the dominant Western-centric approach (Banerjee, 2022). This highlights the limitations of critical biography, specifically a lack of ability to effectively contextualise complex constructs and embed diverse value systems within interpretive analysis (McLaren and Durepos, 2019; Spicer and Alvesson, 2025).

Practicing entrepreneurs, may benefit the most from understanding the ancestral actions of Māori entrepreneurs, as they are impacted on a daily basis when operating within a hybrid system that sees them attempting to be culturally aligned while operating in Western capitalist systems, because of post-colonial factors (Mead, 2003; Mika *et al.*, 2024). Kāupapa Māori allows Māori entrepreneurs to consider culture, customs, values, their connection to Te Ao Māori, and their identity as Māori when analysing ancestral characters.

Kāupapa Māori theory

Kāupapa Māori, by contrast, is an Indigenous research methodology that is grounded in values like Tino Rangatiratanga, manaakitanga, whanaungatanga and kaitiakitanga (Bishop, 1995; Smith, 1999). Kāupapa Māori methodology emerged in the 1980s in response to the marginalisation of Māori perspectives in education research, which fuelled a Māori-led resistance to reclaim Māori language, culture, and knowledge systems from assimilation policies within education (Smith, 1999; Graham, 2005).

While it is often introduced as a methodology, Kāupapa Māori is also an epistemological stance that asserts Māori knowledge as valid, rigorous and sovereign (Pihama, 2010; Ormond, 2023). It is not a single, static approach but a living methodology shaped by iwi, hapū and the researchers positioning. This means its application in management research requires contextual specificity; it must be aligned to the values, history and practices relevant to the research subject.

For this study, Kāupapa Māori provides the necessary ontological foundation for analysing Hongi Hika's life. His actions cannot be meaningfully interpreted without reference to the tikanga, whakapapa and collective responsibilities that shaped his leadership and entrepreneurship. Using Kāupapa Māori in combination with critical biography ensures that his entrepreneurship is not abstracted from the Māori worldview that informed it.

Critical biography and Kāupapa Māori in management research

There is potential to integrate Indigenous methodologies with critical qualitative approaches (Denzin *et al.*, 2008; Held, 2019). There are not many examples that exist where Kāupapa Māori and critical biography have been intentionally combined. This paper proposes that when researching Māori historical characters like Hongi Hika, Kāupapa Māori must serve as the primary lens, providing critical cultural elements that allows a deeper analysis of the behaviours being analysed through critical biography.

If this framework is followed, then critical biography could be used to analyse Indigenous characters, with meaningful insights, avoiding misrepresentation or reductive analysis. Integrating these two approaches, not as separate or sequential but as a synthesised framework, represents a methodological innovation. It allows for a critical interrogation of biography that does not limit or erase the Māori worldview or perspective. This approach also addresses the calls within CMS to decolonise knowledge production and expand methodological diversity (Banerjee, 2022).

Kāupapa Māori brings the necessary depth of context, ethics and cultural grounding to interpret Māori entrepreneurship, while critical biography offers a flexible structure for analysing lived experiences in relation to broader systems.

Understanding Māori concepts

There are several Māori concepts defined in [Table 1](#) that will assist the reader in understanding ideas identified in the analysis of this paper. The key Māori concepts discussed in [Table 1](#) include structured societal concepts and traditional values.

Māori societal structures, cultural practices and traditional values exist within Kāupapa Māori. Therefore, Kāupapa Māori as a methodology aligns well with the use of critical biography when reviewing the history and life experiences of a person of Māori origin. The next section of this paper outlines the methodological approach to this study, including the justification for the dual method framework, data sources and cultural knowledge, analytical tools and processes, the researcher's positionality and ethics, and limitations of the research.

Methodology

This research adopts an integrated dual-method approach that combines Kāupapa Māori and critical biography to examine the entrepreneurial life and leadership of Hongi Hika, a prominent Ngāpuhi chief that lived in the early 19th century. This approach does not treat Kāupapa Māori and critical biography as sequential tools but rather as a synthesis of both methodologies to generate deeper, culturally grounded understanding of Māori entrepreneurship within its historical and Māori societal context, when analysing the life of Hongi Hika.

Justification for a dual-methodological framework

This paper applies Kāupapa Māori as not only a methodology but also the primary epistemological foundation from which the analysis emerges. Kāupapa Māori provides the cultural and contextual grounding necessary to interpret Hongi Hika's leadership and entrepreneurship in ways that are aligned with Ngāpuhi values and historical Māori realities. This foundation informs the selection of sources, interpretation of historical events and ethical positioning of the researcher.

While Kāupapa Māori achieves deeper cultural contextualisation than critical biography, critical biography remains necessary because it offers a structured and systematic framework for organising life events, identifying behavioural patterns and linking these patterns to broader theoretical constructs in entrepreneurship and leadership. Where Kāupapa Māori explains the "why" of Hongi Hika's decisions through cultural principles, critical biography structures the "what", tracing how these culturally grounded decisions manifest in identifiable

Table 1. Māori social structures and Cultural Values - Definitions

Māori structures and values	Explanation
<i>Māori social structure*</i>	
Whānau	This is the most basic unit of Māori societal structure, which is the family
Hapū	As the whānau grew larger over several generations, it acquired the status of hapū; it consisted of several whānau sharing descent from a common ancestor
Iwi	The largest group of people that existed in Māori society; extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality and race
<i>Māori traditional values**</i>	
Kaitiakitanga	Guardianship, stewardship, trusteeship and trustee
Manaakitanga	Hospitality, generosity, support and process of showing respect
Tino rangatiratanga	Self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy and self-governance
Whanaungatanga	Belonging, togetherness and family

Note(s): *Adapted from [Walker \(1990\)](#) and [Moorfield \(2011\)](#); **adapted from [Harmsworth et al. \(2002\)](#) and [Mead \(2003\)](#)

entrepreneurial behaviours. The synthesis of the two, ensures both a culturally grounded and methodologically sound approach to this study.

The Kāupapa Māori analysis applies key values of Tino Rangatiratanga, manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, whakapapa/kaitiakitanga and mana/utu, as analytical codes to interpret significant decisions, relationships, and events in Hongi Hika's life. These values form the interpretive framework for understanding the deep, cultural motivations of Hongi Hika's decisions and actions.

The critical biography analysis applies the entrepreneurial behaviour framework outlined by [Brush et al. \(2019\)](#), [Wales et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Pinto et al. \(2024\)](#), which identifies four common entrepreneurial behaviours including opportunity identification, risk-taking, resource mobilisation and values creation. These categories are used to organise and code Hongi Hika's life events that makes them visible and comparable within broader entrepreneurship theory.

Importantly, the entrepreneurial behaviours identified in the critical biography phase are not analysed in isolation from cultural values. For example:

- Opportunity identification is analysed alongside Tino Rangatiratanga.
- Resource mobilisation is analysed alongside whanaungatanga and manaakitanga.
- Risk-taking is analysed alongside mana/utu.
- Values creation is analysed alongside whakapapa/kaitiakitanga.

This ensures that the entrepreneurial analysis remains integrated with the Māori worldview and that the cultural interpretation is not separated from entrepreneurial categorisation.

Data sources and cultural knowledge

This paper sources data and information from a variety of sources including written historical sources and Indigenous oral knowledge. The written sources include:

- missionary diaries (e.g. Samuel Marsden and Thomas Kendall);
- ship records and correspondence ([Cruise, 1824](#); [Elder, 1932](#));
- historical biographies ([Raeside, 1977](#); [Cloher, 2003](#)); and
- academic accounts of early Māori European encounters.

Māori historical knowledge has traditionally been orally transmitted; this paper also engages with whakapapa, tribal narratives and intergenerational storytelling passed down by Māori communities ([Walker, 1990](#); [Mahuika, 2019](#)). These stories provide critical context for interpreting Hongi Hika's motivations, responsibilities and decision in ways that written colonial accounts cannot capture. Wherever possible, the author prioritises Māori interpretations over colonial ones, using Kāupapa Māori to guide which sources are considered valid, and how they are interpreted.

Analytical tools and processes

The analytical process in this study follows three distinct but integrated phases, each grounded in the dual method framework of Kāupapa Māori and critical biography. The goal of this process was to ensure cultural interpretation and entrepreneurial analysis were treated as interdependent layers of the same inquiry.

Phase 1: contextual grounding of Kāupapa Māori first: This included the life of Hongi Hika was first analysed through a Kāupapa Māori lens. Events were interpreted using Māori cultural factors of Tino Rangatiratanga, manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, whakapapa/kaitiakitanga and mana/utu. The goal was to understand why certain decisions were made and what cultural imperatives or obligations underpinned these decisions.

Phase 2: behavioural coding (critical biography second): Drawing from the established definitions of entrepreneurship (Brush *et al.*, 2019; Wales *et al.*, 2023; Pinto *et al.*, 2024), a set of entrepreneurial behaviours were identified, which included opportunity identification, risk-taking, resource mobilisation and value creation. Events from Hongi Hika's life were coded against these behaviours to identify patterns of entrepreneurial action.

Phase 3: synthesis and integration: The findings were then synthesised to explore how cultural values and entrepreneurial behaviours intersect. Rather than treating the cultural and entrepreneurial as separate domains, this phase explored how Hongi Hika's actions were simultaneously strategic and culturally grounded.

Researchers' positionality and ethics

I am a Māori researcher working in this Indigenous space; therefore, positionality is central to this work. This paper adheres to the ethical principles of relational accountability (Wilson *et al.*, 2022) and cultural integrity. I recognise my responsibility to represent Māori knowledge with humility, accuracy and care, and to ensure the Māori voices are clearly articulate over colonial interpretations.

All interpretations are grounded in whakapapa and tikanga protocols that govern how the stories are told, shared and protected. I acknowledge that my understanding and assumptions of Māori whakapapa and tikanga protocols are biased by my own upbringing, experiences and connection to my own Māori worldview. I acknowledge that some knowledge remains with iwi, hapū and whānau and cannot be fully represented in this paper.

Limitations of this research

This study is constrained by the nature and availability of historical sources. Colonial records such as missionary diaries and ship logs provide valuable insight into Hongi Hika's interactions with Europeans but often reflect the biases of their authors. While Kāupapa Māori helps decolonise these accounts, interpretation remains limited by what has been recorded and what can be ethically shared.

Cultural protocols shape the scope of this analysis. Certain knowledge remains iwi, hapū and whānau and cannot be fully represented in academic writing. Also, not all Māori have the same appreciation and access to Te Ao Māori as others, depending on circumstance or upbringing. It is hoped that the approach suggested in this article allows the reader (Māori or non-Māori) to connect with Te Ao Māori.

Additionally, the focus on Hongi Hika's 1820 voyage to England means that broader aspects of his life are beyond the scope of this paper. These limitations do not undermine the validity of the dual method approach but highlights the importance of ongoing research that combines Kāupapa Māori and critical biography.

Hongi Hika: an entrepreneurial chief

Hongi Hika: early years

Hongi was born in 1772 near Kaikohe, in the Bay of Islands. His father was Te Hōtete (from Kaikohe) the Chief of Te Uri O Hua, and his mother was Tuhikura (Ngāti Kahu woman from Whangaroa) (Cloher, 2003). Hongi descended from a line of renowned warriors whose role was to protect and lead their people (Cruise, 1824; Elder, 1932). Hongi had an older sister Waitapu and an older brother Houwawe. Tuhikura was Te Hōtete's third wife of five wives. This is important because the half-brothers and sisters of the other wives had an influence on Hongi's early life (Raeside, 1977; Cloher, 2003). It is typical Māori practice to live within an extended family (whānau) environment where everyone shares responsibilities for day-to-day living.

Hongi spent most of his childhood at Pakinga Pa in Kaikohe, training in warfare and tribal leadership at what could be described as a military academy for his people. This training was

driven by mana (respect, power, control and authority) for Hongi's whānau, hapū and iwi. Without mana, a Māori person was nothing. Hongi had developed at an early age the tendency to train, learn and problem-solve (Cloher, 2003). The Bay of Islands was a place of frequent contact with European ships that had berthed, and Hongi participated in trade or supplies of flax, timber, food and water (Cloher, 2003). In 1815, when Samuel Marsden had purchased land from Hongi for the first missionary station to be Rangihoua in the Bay of Islands, a problem arose because Māori were illiterate, and the deed needed to be signed by Māori. Hongi swiftly suggested that Māori sign the deed with an engraving of their facial tattoos, which would indicate they had agreed to the document.

Hongi in his early years developed a deep sense of duty to his whānau and hapū. The most traumatic experience that affected Hongi was the battle of Te-kai-a-te-karoro at Moremonui. Hongi was a young warrior fighting alongside his father (Te Hotete), sister (Waitapu) and brother (Houwawe). The opposition (Ngāti Whātua) were waiting for them, having arrived the night before to battle, and were hiding in the flax and bushes. Ngāti Whātua ambushed Hongi and his people, slaughtering about 200–300 warriors. During this battle, Waitapu had seen the slaughter of Houwawe and urged Hongi to run, because she was concerned about the continuation of their family line. Coming back along the clifftop, Hongi saw Ngāti Whātua slice into Waitapu's body to remove her uterus, filling the cavity with sand, which was a symbolic attack on the continuation of Hongi's family line of descent (Waitapu had sacrificed herself to give time for Hongi to run away).

Hongi Hika: the visit to England in 1820

On 2 March 1820, Hongi, Waikato and Thomas Kendall departed the Bay of Islands for England. Hongi understood that survival amid increasing European arrival required adaptation and resource acquisition. To achieve utu for past losses and secure his people's future, he sought to obtain muskets. The journey to England presented that opportunity.

They arrived in England on 8 August 1820. However, their arrival went unacknowledged, which Hongi viewed as a breach of manakitanga (hospitality and respect for visitors). Kendall had not informed Hongi and Waikato that the visit was not sanctioned by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) of which Kendall was responsible for. On the voyage from Aotearoa to England, Kendall wrote a letter to CMS explaining that the purpose of their trip was to assist with the Māori Language Dictionary being developed by Professor Samuel Lee at Cambridge and other matters (which is likely code for the securing of muskets).

A few days after arriving in England, Hongi and Waikato travelled to Cambridge University where they met Professor Lee and began the work of assisting with the Māori dictionary. They stayed at the University, eventually spending nine weeks helping with the dictionary. Some of this time Hongi was ill with a chest infection. On the 25 August, Professor Lee informed CMS that he was concerned about Hongi's health. The news of the chiefs in Cambridge attracted both town and gown. Hongi and Waikato were introduced to several upper-class families and gentry of England, which was driven by Sir John Mortlock. On the 28 October 1820, Hongi and Waikato were presented to the House of Lords. On the 13 November 1820, they were presented to King George IV. During this visit, King George picked up on Hongi's interest in weapons, so the King took Hongi and Waikato to his armoury, giving Hongi a couple of muskets, a coat of mail and a helmet, which he later wore in battle. The visitation of Hongi and Waikato to the House of Lords and to King George IV would have pleased Hongi and increased his mana. Meeting with people as important as the Lords and Ladies of England and the King himself would have helped Hongi achieve kotahitanga (unity, togetherness, solidarity and collectiveness) and whanaungatanga (belonging, togetherness and family). Hongi would have felt that he was accepted and was forging an alliance with England.

One oral story handed down about Hongi was when he got back to Aotearoa, he heard King George was preparing for war, and it is said that Hongi shouted, “if my brother (King George) was going to war, then we will go to war”.

The most important meeting that Hongi had while in England occurred in October 1820, between Baron De Thierry, Kendall and Hongi. There are two accounts of this meeting, one by Kendall and the other by De Thierry, but the following occurred. De Thierry was interested in migrating to New Zealand and wanted to acquire land. Hongi was interested in purchasing muskets but did not have any money to pay for them. In the transaction, Kendall produced a drawn-up parchment deed with blanks on it declaring De Thierry would be given land in exchange for a “quantity of goods”, deliberately not specifying muskets.

On 22 December 1820, Hongi, Waikato and Kendall boarded the “Speke” to return from England to Aotearoa. They went to Australia first where they were able to uplift the muskets that were waiting for them at Port Jackson. Hongi had been able to achieve his goal of securing muskets for his whānau, hapū and iwi. He must have been elated at this point. They arrived home on 12 July 1821.

Hongi Hika: the later years

It has been suggested in a biography of Hongi Hika that he had decided who and in what order he was going to target a full-scale musket attack before he even arrived back in Aotearoa from England (Cloher, 2003). The mana of his whānau, hapū and iwi had to be avenged (utu was to be implemented). In November 1821, Hongi’s first battle was against Ngāti Poua (a hapū of Ngāti Whātua) at Mokoia Pa and Mauinaina Pa, on the Tāmaki River. Hongi had approximately 2,000 warriors and 1,000 muskets. They had destroyed the whole tribe that was living at Mokoia Pa and Mauinaina Pa, beheading most of the chiefs, and taking slaves back up North.

The next battle was with Ngāti Maru (their major Pa was Te Totara), which occurred in December 1821. Hongi arrived with 27 canoes filled with warriors and attacked Te Totara Pa at night, killing everyone who was inside the Pa. It was estimated from these battles that Hongi had amassed 2,000 slaves that were distributed among the various Northland tribes that participated with Hongi.

Two months after arriving home from this battle, Hongi again prepared for War. He was on his way to the Waikato, arriving at principal Pa, Matakītiki, where approximately 5,000 Waikato people had gathered to fight. The Waikato people were no match for the musket-armed Hongi and his warriors. In March 1823, Hongi and his army went to Rotorua to battle Te Arawa iwi. More than 1,200 warriors set off with Hongi for Rotorua. The Te Arawa iwi retreated to Mokoia Island in Lake Rotorua, which provided the iwi the ability to defend the Island, but some felt that if they were overpowered it would be difficult to escape. It is said that 170 Te Arawa warriors died that day, and only 50 warriors from Hongi’s army died. Some of the Te Arawa people tried to swim to safety. These people were chased and killed by Hongi’s warriors. It was a total defeat for the Te Arawa people.

The final major battle that Hongi fought was against Ngāti Whātua, the same tribe that killed his brother and his sister in 1807. In 1825, Hongi and 400 warriors set off again for war. When they went to battle, it was said that Ngāti Whātua lost 1,000 men in battle that day, and Hongi lost 70. It was another annihilation. Ngāti Whātua were left scattered and largely leaderless, and Hongi’s warriors chased the survivors off their land and killed most of those that were left. The land that was occupied by Ngāti Whātua was left barren as no one lived on this land for years. This was the climactic battle for Hongi that closed the personal vendetta for him. In 1827, Hongi was shot in a small skirmish in the Hokianga. He lived for fourteen months later dying from the infection.

The next section focuses on Phases 1 and 2 of the analysis using the dual method framework.

Analysis of Hongi Hika's life – dual method framework

This analysis applies a dual-method framework, beginning with Kāupapa Māori to interpret Hongi Hika's actions through values in Table 2. Table 2 summarises the Kāupapa Māori interpretation.

Table 2 applies the Kāupapa Māori lens to interpret Hongi Hika's behaviours and actions through Kāupapa Māori values. The second stage of analysis applies a critical biography lens to examine Hongi's behaviours through entrepreneurial concepts identified in the literature, outlined in Table 3.

Table 3 applies the entrepreneurial behaviour framework (Brush *et al.*, 2019; Wales *et al.*, 2023; Pinto *et al.*, 2024). Each category is interpreted in connection with the cultural values identified in the Kāupapa Māori analysis to maintain cultural grounding.

The integrated insights from the Kāupapa Māori and entrepreneurial analysis in Tables 2 and 3 form the basis for the key findings, which outline how cultural values and entrepreneurial behaviours intersect in Hongi Hika's leadership.

Findings

The integrated dual-method approach used in this research (combining Kāupapa Māori and critical biography) analysis, examined Hongi Hika's life. This analysis produced four key findings, each with implications for understanding Indigenous entrepreneurship within management history and for refining methodological approaches when analysing historical Indigenous figures.

Table 2. Kāupapa Māori lens applied to Hongi Hika

Kāupapa Māori cultural factors of values	Hongi's behaviour and actions
Tino rangatiratanga	From an early age, Hongi's training emphasised the survival, mana and whakapapa of Ngāpuhi. He learned to trade with the English, form alliances with missionaries and navigate shifting socio-political conditions to preserve tribal sovereignty and well-being. His 1820 voyage to England was an act of Tino Rangatiratanga, advancing Ngāpuhi interests internationally
Manaakitanga	Hongi embodied manaakitanga during his time in England, engaging respectfully with the nobility, king George IV and the academic communities. His participation in the Māori–English dictionary project reflected reciprocal exchange. His discomfort at the lack of welcome upon arrival highlights his expectation of mutual respect embedded in manaakitanga
Whakapapa/Kaitiakitanga	Hongi's leadership reflected obligations to past and future generations. Acquiring muskets was a strategic act to secure Ngāpuhi's safety, mana and legacy. His stewardship extended beyond land to cultural survival and intergenerational well-being, leadership and custodianship
Mana/Utu	Following the 1807 Battle of Moremonui, in which his siblings were killed, Hongi's pursuit of utu became central to his leadership. Securing muskets served both military and cultural purposes, restoring mana and fulfilling ancestral duty consistent with Māori concepts of justice and reciprocity
Whanaungatanga	Hongi's diplomacy skills with missionaries, British nobility and Māori leaders were grounded in whanaungatanga. His alliances were relationship-based grounded in whakapapa, hospitality and reciprocity rather than opportunism. Negotiations with Baron de Thierry and king George IV exemplified this relational approach

Table 3. Behavioural coding of Hongi Hika's life using critical biography

Entrepreneurial behaviour	Examples demonstrated by Hongi Hika
Opportunity identification	Recognising England as a source of key resources; participation in 1820 voyage; cross-cultural negotiations; early trade with Europeans; alliances with missionaries; and coordination of intertribal strategies
Risk taking	Engaging in early trade with whalers; 1820 voyage to England; negotiations with Baron de Thierry; coordination of alliances; warfare strategy and execution
Value creation	Strengthening Ngāpuhi's security and influence; proposing moko as a legal signature on missionary deeds; contribution to the Māori–English dictionary; and developing alliances that enhanced both cultural and economic well-being
Resource mobilisation	Acquiring muskets and armour from king George IV; coordination of intertribal alliances; and distributing resources strategically to strengthen Ngāpuhi

Finding 1: cultural context reshapes entrepreneurial interpretations

When examined through a mainstream entrepreneurship framework (Brush *et al.*, 2019; Wales *et al.*, 2023; Pinto *et al.*, 2024), Hongi Hika's behaviours demonstrate the four core entrepreneurial behaviours:

- (1) *Opportunity recognition*: identifying England as a source of critical resources, navigating cross-cultural negotiations, engaging in early trade with Europeans and negotiating with Baron De Thierry for muskets;
- (2) *Resource mobilization*: securing muskets from Baron De Thierry, coordinating inter-tribal alliances for warfare and strategically timing military campaigns upon return;
- (3) *Risk taking*: engaging in political and military negotiations, participating in the 1820 voyage to England, coordinating inter-tribal alliances and planning warfare strategies; and
- (4) *Value creation*: strengthening Ngāpuhi's security and influence, participating in the 1820 voyage to England, negotiating for muskets and enhancing inter-tribal alliances.

Viewed through a Kāupapa Māori lens, these same behaviours take on deeper cultural meaning, as summarised in Table 4.

Without the Kāupapa Māori perspective, Hongi's entrepreneurial behaviours could be misinterpreted as self-serving. When viewed within Māori cultural frameworks, these actions are revealed as strategies to ensure the social, economic and political survival of the Ngāpuhi people. This reframing aligns with Kāupapa Māori, and aligns with the broader developments of management history and entrepreneurship theory, where contextual interpretations have been recognised as important to understand entrepreneurial behaviour (Brush *et al.*, 2019). By placing Māori cultural principles at the core of this analysis, it complements CMS calls to diversify management history research (Spicer and Alvesson, 2025).

Finding 2: integration of Kāupapa Māori and critical biography improves contextualisation

Integrating Kāupapa Māori with critical biography enhanced the application of both methodologies within management history. The dual-lens approach demonstrated how deep contextual analysis can enrich historical interpretation, enabling a more holistic understanding of Indigenous characters.

Kāupapa Māori provided the cultural awareness, interpretive framework and ethical foundation to understand Hongi Hika's actions, as grounded in responsibilities to his people. It enabled the researcher to move beyond colonial narratives, uncovering not just what Hongi did but also why he acted, in alignment with Māori customs, values and principles.

For example, [Table 4](#) illustrates that Hongi *identified opportunities* throughout his life not for self-gain but for the survival of the people he was responsible for (Ngāpuhi people). Hongi was a *risk-taker*, taking a voyage to England in 1820, engaging in political and military negotiations not for wealth accumulation, or improving self-worth, but improving and maintaining mana and reciprocity of past grievances. These examples provide the deeper cultural understanding that Kāupapa Māori provides when integrated with critical biography.

The integrated approach reflects the broader evolution of management history towards methodological diversity. This dual-lens approach contributes to the ongoing diversification of analytical tools in CMS and management history ([Spicer and Alvesson, 2025](#)). This positions Kāupapa Māori, not as an isolated Indigenous method, but part of a recognised trajectory of expanding and deepening, the theoretical base of management research.

Finding 3: contribution to management history and critical studies

Management history has historically overlooked Indigenous contributions, often portraying Indigenous peoples as subjects of colonial management rather than as leaders and innovators in their own right ([Walker, 1990](#); [Smith, 1999](#)). This research contributes to redressing that imbalance by positioning a Māori leader at the centre of methodological and theoretical innovation.

In doing so, it responds to calls from CMS scholars to integrate alternative epistemologies, challenge dominant historical accounts and develop more inclusive theories of leadership and organisation ([McLaren and Durepos, 2019](#); [Banerjee, 2022](#)). Demonstrating that Hongi Hika was not only a warrior and leader, but he could also negotiate complex alliances and navigate socio-political environments motivated by Tino Rangatiratanga.

Table 4. Alignment between entrepreneurial behavioural framework, critical biography lens and Kāupapa Māori lens

Critical biography lens - Entrepreneurial behaviours framework (Brush et al., 2019 ; Wales et al., 2023 ; Pinto et al., 2024)	Kāupapa Māori lens (Spiller et al., 2015 ; Mika et al., 2017 ; Haar et al., 2021 ; Dell et al., 2024)
<i>Opportunity recognition:</i> England as a source of critical resources, navigating cross-cultural negotiations, engaging in early trade and negotiating alliances	<i>Tino rangatiratanga:</i> Ensuring the social, economic and political survival of Ngāpuhi iwi, hapū and whānau (it was about the people); forming alliances and navigating colonial contexts to preserve sovereignty and well-being
<i>Risk-taking:</i> Engaging in political and military negotiations, participating in the 1820 voyage to England, coordinating inter-tribal alliances and planning warfare strategies	<i>Mana/utu:</i> Maintaining and enhancing mana through reciprocity and strategic action; alliances; strategy; and warfare were acts of balance and justice in Māori society
<i>Resource mobilisation:</i> Securing muskets, coordinating inter-tribal alliances for warfare and strategically timing military campaigns	<i>Manaakitanga:</i> Building alliances with English nobility, king George IV and missionaries to safeguard the people's future and well-being
<i>Value creation:</i> Strengthening Ngāpuhi's security and influence, participating in the 1820 voyage to England, negotiating for muskets and enhancing inter-tribal alliances	<i>Whakapapa/kaitiakitanga:</i> Acting as guardian of whānau, hapū and iwi; <i>Whanaungatanga:</i> Building and sustaining key relationships that ensure intergenerational continuity

Situating Kāupapa Māori within management history strengthens its legitimacy as a methodological innovation. By centring a Māori character in both methodological and theoretical innovation, this study demonstrates how Indigenous epistemologies can operate within the broader principle of management history while reshaping it from within.

Finding 4: wider implications of this study

The implications of this study extend beyond Hongi Hika's biography. It highlights the need for researchers, particularly non-Indigenous scholars to engage in methodologically and culturally responsible ways when reviewing Indigenous characters. Indigenous methodologies should not be peripheral or tokenistic but central to knowledge development.

The findings also suggest that management curriculum, which continues to rely heavily on Western business models, would benefit from incorporating Indigenous principles and values as foundational, rather than supplementary. As Māori-led enterprises grow in scale and influence, understanding their cultural basis will become increasingly important for research, governance, policy and practice.

Furthermore, this study provides a model for future work: Indigenous entrepreneurship should be not only acknowledged, but also interpreted through Indigenous methodologies. Critical biography, when applied across cultural contexts, must be recalibrated to reflect the cultural epistemological foundations of the characters being studied.

Implications

The use of critical biography in an Indigenous context offers significant and timely opportunities for research, particularly when undertaken by Indigenous scholars. This methodological approach provides a structured way to trace the lives, decisions and legacies of Indigenous characters who have contributed to business, management and organisational practice.

For Indigenous researchers, critical biography provides a disciplined means to examine historical figures by linking personal actions, events and wider social contexts. However, it is the integration of Indigenous cultural frameworks, such as Kāupapa Māori in this study, which enables a fuller and more meaningful interpretation of these characters. These cultural lenses provide the contextualisation necessary to situate individual behaviour within the values, norms and worldviews of their communities. Without such integration, the analysis risks being incomplete or overly filtered through Western conceptual frameworks.

The implications extend well beyond methodology and research design. The growing inclusion of Māori-led content in management curriculum presents a timely opportunity for critical biography to shape teaching learning. Biographical accounts of Māori leaders and entrepreneurs offer culturally grounded examples that can diversify and enrich management education.

The economic and social contributions of Māori business further substantiate the value of this approach. As Māori businesses expand their impact across different sectors, critical biography provides a means to capture and analyse the unique governance models, leadership practices and entrepreneurial strategies that underpin their success. These insights not only enhance academic understanding but also offer practical guidance for organizations seeking to work in partnership with Māori entities or adopt Indigenous informed business models.

For Western researchers, the implications are equally significant. Any attempt to examine the lives of Indigenous historical figures must begin with the subject's cultural worldview as the primary analytical lens. This approach aligns with the broader efforts to decolonise research by expanding the conceptual boundaries of management history and incorporating

diverse epistemologies. Where critical biography is used by non-Indigenous researchers, collaboration with Indigenous scholars should be treated as essential rather than optional. This is not simply adding cultural commentary; it is about grounding interpretation within the cultural knowledge systems, relationships and practices for the individual being studied.

Further research

This study focused on a single episode in Hongi Hika's life, the 1820 voyage to England, to demonstrate the dual-methodological potential of integrating Kāupapa Māori with critical biography. While this episode provides valuable insights into his entrepreneurial vision, leadership strategies and cross-cultural engagement, it represents only a portion of his life story. A complete analysis of Hongi Hika's entire life, using the same dual-method approach, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how he consistently demonstrated entrepreneurial behaviours and how these behaviours were shaped by Māori cultural values.

Future research should, therefore, adopt a broader scope examining multiple phases of Hongi's life, his early leadership, military campaigns, political negotiations and later years. Analysing these stages holistically would help reveal how entrepreneurial decision-making evolved over time and in response to shifting socio-political dynamics. This broader analysis would also allow for greater refinement of the methodological integration between Kāupapa Māori and critical biography.

Importantly, while Kāupapa Māori is culturally specific to Māori contexts, the principle of integrating culturally grounded methodologies with critical biography can be adapted for other Indigenous communities. For example, researchers working with Indigenous peoples in other nations would need to develop parallel methodologies that reflect the cultural frameworks, values and epistemologies of those communities. These locally grounded approaches could then be integrated with critical biography to produce similarly rich and culturally valid accounts of Indigenous leaders.

In addition, the methodological approach demonstrated here, could also be extended to the study of other marginalised or underrepresented groups. Migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities often operate within unique cultural logics that influence their entrepreneurial and organisational practices. Embedding cultural frameworks as a foundational element in critical biography could yield more nuanced, inclusive and accurate historical accounts of their contributions to management and business.

Thus, research has both a specific trajectory, expanding the analysis of Hongi Hika's life, and a methodological trajectory, adapting and applying culturally grounded critical biography to other contexts, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a new integration of Kāupapa Māori and critical biography, demonstrating the value of applying Indigenous methodologies within management history and entrepreneurship research. By analysing the life of Hongi Hika, this study has shown that entrepreneurial behaviour can only be fully understood when interpreted through the application of Kāupapa Māori as the first lens. This approach identifies entrepreneurial values and behaviours of Tino Rangatiratanga, mana and whanaungatanga and situates these values in the context of tikanga Māori.

The critical biography framework provided a structured means to analyse historical events, while Kāupapa Māori grounded those events in cultural meaning. Together, they form an improved approach to analysing historical characters of Indigenous origin. This dual method approach demonstrates that Indigenous methodologies are not simply alternative perspectives but central to re-shaping theoretical and methodological paradigms in management history. It

provides a foundation for re-evaluating historical figures such as Hongi Hika, whose actions may be misunderstood when assessed through Western concepts of leadership, power and enterprise.

This paper contributes to the body of knowledge, reaffirming the need for Indigenous-led research founded in cultural integrity, collective accountability and epistemological sovereignty. Future researchers are encouraged to continue applying and refining Kāupapa Māori-critical biography approaches, to not only expand understanding of Māori leadership and entrepreneurship but also extend Indigenous methodologies into the wider field of management and organizational studies.

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