



LEADERSHIP NEGOTIATION IN OCEANIA:

THE CONTEXT BEHIND THE CONTEXT

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DLP investigates the crucial role that leaders, networks and coalitions play in achieving development outcomes.

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Courtesy of the research team.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The 'Appreciating Pacific understandings of school leadership: Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Marshall Islands' project was funded by the Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) and began in April 2020. It looks at how school leaders negotiate understandings of leadership brought from their community with the leadership demands of the education system. It asks:

What concepts of leadership do school leaders in small island nations bring to their vocational activity?

How do these concepts affect the way school leaders understand their leadership role in school and beyond?

What non-indigenous leadership demands do school leaders experience as a result of their vocation?

What commonalities and divergences exist in concepts of leadership across small island nation contexts?

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INTRODUCTION

INTERROGATING CONTEXT

Leadership remains a key interest for development aid. Donor-funded interventions identify key people whose influence, whether it be positional, moral or practical, render them helpful in translating policy into actuality, guiding transformation as a result. These types of interventions are often particularly focused on the field of education.

School leaders in the Pacific include principals, deputies, supervisors, board members and community leaders interested in education, all of whom are charged in their own ways with maintaining and improving the education of the young. A cross section of these groups, with school principals well-presented, contributed to the research that underpins this paper.

Recent leadership initiatives in Pacific education include the development of professional standards, including for principals (Otunuku et al., 2019) and leadership development programmes such as the Graduate Certificate of School Leadership (Sanga et al., 2020), offered in various jurisdictions by the Institute of Education of the University of the South Pacific. However, Pacific school leaders do not come to their leadership positions as blank slates. They carry leadership socialisation from the family, clan, village and church. Leadership socialisation in the Pacific involves observed and absorbed local contextual values and practices that may or may not sit well with ideas about leadership introduced from afar based on other cultural contexts.

KEY FINDINGS

- School leaders learn about and negotiate leadership based on *kastom*, church and education
- School leaders' embeddedness in community is an important source of their legitimacy
- Conflicts are often resolved through Indigenous leadership which values social cohesion and the collective good
- An informed approach to leadership development involves appreciating the context behind the context
- Dialogic forms are useful for exploring deeply held contextual beliefs about leadership.

Development aid seeks to support communities to attain the potential available in their context. Because context is more than a location and the people who live there, development professionals who appreciate that contexts are soaked in time-tested ideas and longstanding practices are more likely to add value. Further, leadership programs that seek deep knowledge of how leadership is understood prior to intervention are those most likely to bear fruit.

In practical terms, this means learning from people on the ground so that new programs can leverage existing knowledge, practice and structures with the aim that what is planned aligns with what is already deeply believed and well understood (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002). Sustainability is enhanced when the context is progressively appreciated and forms the ground on which support is built.

An appreciation of the context behind the context is essential to maximise the potential of leadership support in the development field. As an illustration of what this means, this paper explores the customary origins of leadership and the forms it takes in school leadership;

the ways school leaders are embedded in communities; and how school leaders navigate traditional leadership and the Western-inspired institutional context of education.

Although the data for the paper is specific, these matters act as signposts for contexts beyond education. This is because the influence of community-based notions of leadership is strong in the Pacific region regardless of institutional context. Understanding more fully the origins of leadership ideas and day-to-day leadership negotiations offers an opportunity to improve the support offered by development aid so that sustainability is more likely.

This paper addresses the question of how Pacific school leaders in various contexts negotiate their leadership. This involves taking account of how and where they learn about leadership, the significance of being seen to be leaders and active community participants embedded in their local societies, and the forms leadership negotiation can take when seeking educational improvements and dealing with conflicts.

Selwyn College, Solomon Islands.



LEADERSHIP NEGOTIATION – METHODOLOGY

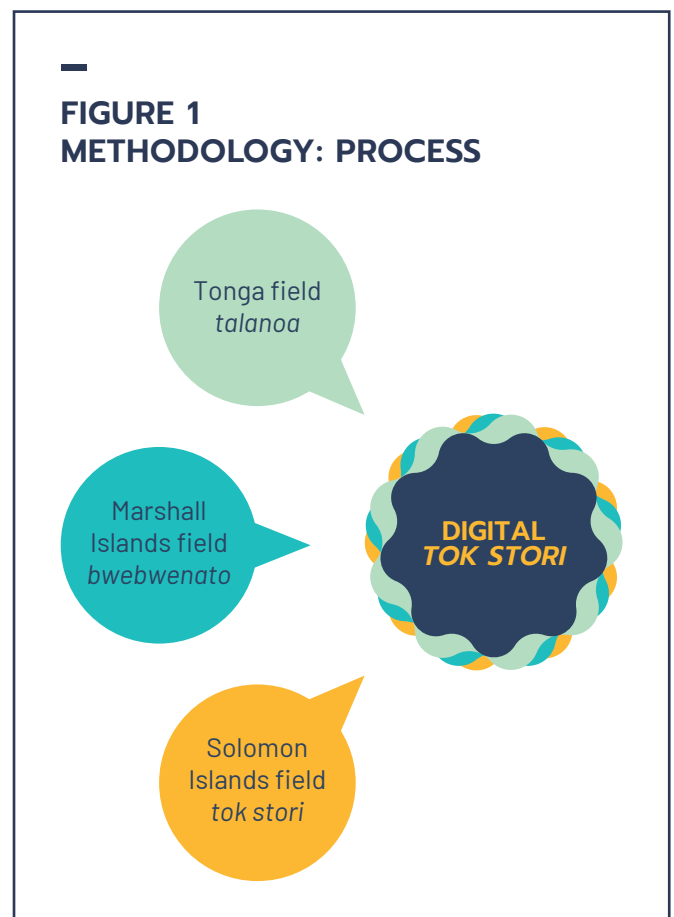
The underlying premise of this paper is that sustainability, although visible in physical ways, is at heart a matter of worldview. Sustainable change in leadership happens when new knowledge is integrated into, and aligned with, existing frames of reference (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002). New thoughts and actions must make sense in the worldview held by leaders for change to develop its own momentum and staying power. Because worldview is involved, leadership is not restricted to theory and action, but also involves ethics, culture and community.

In order to investigate the ways that leaders, in this case school leaders, negotiate leadership ideas and the demands of their calling, strategies are required that foreground the holistic nature of leaders' experiences in context. Pertinent aspects include the origins of leaders' understandings about leadership, the way they enact these in everyday life, and how they maintain relationships with their communities. For this reason, the paper is built on three sets of primary data gathered through Oceania oralities – traditional conversational forms or modes of communication (Kovach, 2010; Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017) that are widely practiced and well understood in context.

An orality-based approach is strengths-based; it honours what people know and are experts in. The employment of oralities in research involves the development of a safe space for dialogue where experiences, emotions, beliefs and speculations can be expressed in integrated ways. *Talanoa* (Fa'avae et al., 2016; Kalavite, 2014; Vaiolleti, 2006) was employed in Tonga; *bwebwenato* (Fisher, 2020; Jim et al., 2021) in Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI); and *tok stori* (Sanga & Reynolds, 2020; Sanga et al., 2018) in Solomon Islands.

Teams of local researchers with educational backgrounds and appropriate linguistic skills based in each location travelled as appropriate to dialogue with school leaders – principals, deputies, supervisors, board members and community leaders interested in education. In each jurisdiction, multiple orality-framed research encounters took place. In Solomon Islands, participant numbers were in the region of 20, while in Tonga and the RMI, participants were around half that number.

The translated primary data from these three place-based investigations was then recast as secondary accounts through storying during a digital *tok stori* (See figure 1). This allowed the researchers to explore the data in a context enhanced by the expertise and wisdom of a wider group of conference attendees. These included educators and researchers from Samoa, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand, to name a few.



As presented in a previous DLP briefing paper (Sanga, Johansson-Fua, et al., 2021a. See side box), *tok stori* is a Melanesian discursive form. It has featured in leadership education (Sanga & Reynolds, 2019; Sanga, Reynolds, et al., 2021), evaluation (Paulsen & Spratt, 2020) and research (de la Torre Parra, 2021; Sanga et al., 2018). More recently, *tok stori* has been investigated for the way it fits the worldview of regular participants (Sanga & Reynolds, 2021), and for its helpfulness in digital contexts (Iromea & Reynolds, 2021; Sanga, Johansson-Fua, et al., 2021b). *Tok stori* involves narrative interactions in a space where hierarchical relationships are minimised, and relational warmth is an expected and valued consequence.

Digital *tok stori* differs from non-digital *tok stori* in the way that space is configured. Instead of sitting close together, participants are spread across the globe. Despite this, a *tok stori* encounter remains relationally centred, based on developing closeness across space and seeking mutual appreciation and warmth (Iromea & Reynolds, 2021). The nuances of silence, turn taking, close listening and adding to the narrative remain observed.

Tok stori involves narrative interactions in a space where hierarchical relationships are minimised, and relational warmth is an expected and valued consequence.

READ MORE



See our previous paper on *tok stori* and Pacific leadership:

[Contextualising leadership: Looking for leadership in the everyday](#)

The digital *tok stori* in question was an occasion where the three research teams (Solomon Islands, Tonga, and RMI) met as an act of mutual support and joint inquiry. *Tok stori* was used for exploratory and clarificatory purposes, probing the experiences of school leaders as they negotiate leadership in their lives.

The aim of the *tok stori* was not to generalise across contexts, but to appreciate the significance of context through intersections of agreement and difference. Narratives from research contributed by various team members to the digital *tok stori* anchor this account. Here, we present stories that discuss the community origins of school leaders' understandings of leadership, the embeddedness of school leaders in communities, and some ways school leaders negotiate between school and community leadership. The stories demonstrate how leadership travels across domains of influence.

DOMAINS OF INFLUENCE

A pertinent aspect of the way people think in many Pacific traditions is structural. This becomes clear by referring to the thinking of the Melanesian mind using the example of the Solomon Islands, a context which may be analogous to, but is not replicated in, Tonga and RMI. Sanga (2009) describes the Melanesian mind, a term in use since at least the early 1900s (Campbell, 1918) as referencing three 'masters'; formalized institutions including education, church, and culture (or *kastom*). 'Each domain is legitimate, demands allegiance, and competes for loyalty with the others' (Sanga & Reynolds, 2019, p. 11). Understanding how various domains operate within the holism of a specific Pacific society is relevant to an area such as school leadership because of the way education is contextually embedded.

EDUCATION

Formal education is by nature an element of the institutional domain. In all three jurisdictions under discussion, ministries, departments and/or other government bodies are charged with the overall organisation of education. Often, external advisors and consultants with little local experience of education offer support to these bodies.

Through the various colonial histories involved, hierarchical arrangements that structure and shape leadership are in place that embody leadership in specific roles and titles. These include Principal, Headteacher,

and so on. Ideas about leadership are invested in this naming, and those involved sometimes receive training to support their managerial function, often in national capitals (Lingam, 2011). Thus, leadership support often takes place away from considerations of remoteness, isolation, and limitations of resource. School leadership training that takes place *in situ*, is structured as contextually orientated mentoring, and is delivered in ways that honours local traditions is rare (Sanga et al., 2020).

CHURCH

In many Pacific nations, Christian churches are also involved in education, although for historical reasons the involvement of denominations varies from place to place. Some Solomon Island schools are under the auspices of Anglican, Catholic, Adventist and South Sea Evangelical Churches. In Tonga, schools include Wesleyan, Church of Tonga, Catholic, Anglican and Mormon interests. In RMI, Catholic, Adventist and United Church of Christ bodies are among those involved.

Thus, many school leaders operate in contexts where church practices influence and shape leadership in direct ways. However, indirect influence is also present. School leaders can be socialised by their own church affiliation, especially in the case of women who may gain leadership experience through this route (Maezama, 2015). They may also be affected by the affiliations, potentially multiple, of the communities in which they are located.

KASTOM (CULTURE)

Of great significance is that practices stemming from village, clan and/or tribal roots socialise school leaders into leadership framed in customary terms. This is termed *kastom* in Solomon Islands. Complexity and diversity exist in customary leadership as it operates across the Pacific. However, because customary thinking affects all areas of life, it is no surprise that school leaders reference *kastom* when navigating ideas of leadership.

One value of inquiry into the influence of community ideas over institutional leadership stems from the significance to donors and governments of leadership education as a way of supporting development. Sanga explains that, for improvement in this area, “[t]he need is for programme designers to appreciate better, the tensions between understanding of roles, rules and knowledge in [the various] domain[s]” (Sanga, 2009, p. 1).

One aim of this paper is to present stories of these tensions to support development professionals in deep contextualisation, so that intervention outcomes are effective and worthwhile to those on the ground. Contextualisation is the key to a good fit between the intent and outcomes of programmes designed to support leadership development.

What follows are moments from stories that illustrate the origins of school leader’s notions of leadership, the depth of the embeddedness of school leaders in communities, and some ways school leaders negotiate between school and community leadership.

Ailuk Atoll, Marshall Islands



COMMUNITY ORIGINS OF SCHOOL LEADERS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF LEADERSHIP

Contributions to the *tok stori* relayed examples of how *kastom* and church impact on school leaders' notions of leadership. Socialisation, the location of leadership in time and space, and the ways metaphors explain influence were all themes that emerged. The stories are variously drawn from Solomon Islands, Tonga and the RMI.

SOCIALISATION OF SCHOOL LEADERS BY THEIR COMMUNITIES

Solomon Islands school leaders recognise a role that demands they *'organise teachers and students and work together with members of the community to implement programmes that will support and develop teaching and learning'*. Contributors to the *tok stori* focussed on the ways that *kastom* leadership informs school leadership. This can involve reciprocal acts, activities that bring people together, and unity:

Learning for my family... giving, caring and sharing, building good relationships with other leaders and people in the community, organising programmes that bring people together to promote peace and harmony, planning and working... to meet expectations of the community...

Paying attention to *kastom* evokes a relational understanding of leadership. This impels school leaders to deliberately act to care for relationships. As an example, one school leader:

mentored her staff... worked to build good relationship with parents... talked with parents for them to send their children to school, and more so, offered to take care of children after classes for busy adults.

A managerial approach to leadership pays attention to systems that support the 'holy grail' of efficiency (Butler, 2014, p. 598). A relational approach to leadership (Hallinger & Truong, 2016) pays attention to social cohesion by managing relationships well. In this case, relational care extends beyond the contractual obligations of the job, for example by recognising the busy-ness of parents and supporting them through this stress. Community cohesion is prioritised in a context where reciprocation is valued and in which the school and community are interlinked aspects of the same collective.

Paying attention to kastom evokes a relational understanding of leadership. This impels school leaders to deliberately act to care for relationships.

Supporting community cohesion does not necessarily mean avoiding potential conflict. After all, the leader in the example above advises parents who are not sending children to school to do so. Instead, support for cohesion involves leadership sacrifice for the betterment of others. Staff, as members of the school community, are gifted time by the school leader through mentoring; school leader's time is given to parents as care for the wider community.

As is clear from the narrative, the focus of leadership in the institutional domain when influenced by *kastom* is external to the leader and bound up in relationships. Leadership is not fixed within institutional boundaries or centred on positional status but extends beyond the school and acts to cement the community in its commitment to education.

For school leaders in Solomon Islands, socialisation into leadership also takes place in the church domain. For example,

[Leaders] rely on what they have been groomed in - what they have learned in terms of important qualities and values... including being honest and fair, delegation of duties, trust and collaboration.... These cultural practices and values are what they brought with them to the vocation. Many rely on Christian principles as well... in terms of leading and managing schools.

One school leader succinctly captures the transfer of leadership values from the church domain to wider life:

My upbringing in the church environment influences me to do things in a more God-fearing way.

A God-fearing person follows a code of values that transcends church boundaries. The fear of God is ubiquitous. As a consequence, shared ideas about conduct and values based on Biblical teaching and exposition can shape conduct in education, including by inspiring leadership ideas (Memua, 2020).

TRANSCENDENCE...

Community ideas of leadership travel with leaders and are not restricted to particular environments or periods of time. This can be seen through a central concept underpinning Tongan leadership, *fatongia*. *Fatongia* 'is about obligation that is entered into freely: it involves the giving of a gift that is enjoyed and reinforces mutual obligations. It is reciprocal and symmetrical and leads to stronger sense of community' (Tofuaipangai & Camilleri, 2016, p. 60). As explained by a member of the Tongan arm of the research, where cultural origins such as *fatongia* are involved, school leadership is:

not necessarily tied to qualifications but is tied to relational aspects and values... tied to commitment to work... deep commitment to your community.

It can also be translated as 'obligation':

'For the receiver, obligation is not about coercion, lack of choice or mandatory behaviour; it is a gift, a pleasure, not a burden...' (Tofuaipangai & Camilleri, 2016, p. 61).

Obligation is a relational matter because it involves a giver, a recipient and a relational state scented by the knowledge of the gift. In the *tok stori*, researchers revealed the way that leadership as *fatongia* transcends the present time and place:

Fatongia is important as part of leadership... there is a sense in which it is inherited... someone is there before you and you are only there temporarily, and somebody is going to come after you. Also... stewardship - you are looking after this in your time. This is linked again to the influence of elders, and mentoring leaders...

When understood as *fatongia*, leadership is framed inter-generationally because school leaders recognise a responsibility to the past of their communities. This raises the importance of their leadership while assuring them that their contribution is valuable.

The idea of stewardship implies that the roles and relationships connected to school leadership are entrusted by the community to school leaders. Trust is an opportunity to contribute to constructing a desired future. Thus, leadership involves legacy as well as inheritance. School leadership informed by these community understandings transcends the present space and time because it takes place in:

a complex, messy, negotiable space linked to the past with our ancestors, the land and the people we have come from... as well as linking to the future, our children.

Thus, school leaders carry a heavy weight concerning their input into the sustainable futures of the communities they serve and with whom they are integrated.

METAPHORS OF PRACTICE

The RMI arm of the research indicated the significance of metaphors to describe flows of influence. This was achieved by unpacking the cultural references of *kajoor wōt wōr* and *wōdde jeppel* which refer to collaboration, explained by a Marshallese contributor to the *tok stori* as ‘*the Marshallese context of community responsibility towards student learning*’. The *tok stori* shows how metaphor is helpful when approaching the influence of the customary on the institutional domain.

We are using this concept as very important when we are dealing with both community leaders and the school leaders. We can think of when we are building a canoe, and house building. Every time that the community is doing

this kind of task, it involves all the people in the community. The whole clan... And this relates to how we are delivering education to the children in the community. And in our school system today, the concept of no child left behind also requires the whole community’s effort in raising and educating a child...

Metaphors of communal customary practice are valuable for understanding the influence of tradition on leadership in the schools of the institutional domain. The metaphors show how traditional Marshallese leadership focusses on the collective.

When resources for shelter and travel are created, people participate in different roles through their own contribution. The skills and knowledge pass across generations to sustain society. Applied to school leadership, these metaphors suggest that leaders must seek inclusive education that is useful and beneficial to the village. School leadership may be a specialised activity, but collective partnership involving community is essential.

Taken together, these stories of socialisation, transcendence and metaphors illustrate the deep influence of ideas from the customary and church domains on school leadership. In general, school leadership influenced by custom and faith is enacted through relationships between people, including those in the community, and seeks collective benefit. Leadership has an outward facing stance that extends beyond management of the here and now. For school leadership, this means that leading is as much a matter of community relationships as the exercise of skills in teaching and learning or management. Consistency in leadership supports the integration of school and community because values travel across domains.

EMBEDDEDNESS AND LEGITIMACY

A common key element in the depth of influence of customary and church domains on the institutional domain is the embeddedness of school leaders in communities. This is an aspect of the integration of schools within communities in Pacific societies. Two examples can be given to provide a nuanced picture of how embeddedness in community shapes the way various school leaders find legitimacy and operationalise their leadership. The examples address the significance of presence and the effect of reciprocally structured relationships.

PRESENCE

The physical presence of school leaders in their wider school community contributes to the significance of *kastom* and church domains in school leadership. On small atolls and in Pacific villages, school leaders reside, work and worship surrounded by the communities they serve. They are always visible and in relationships with all. From the Tongan arm of the research comes this account:

In our context, the life of a school leader is very transparent because there is no division between your personal life and your professional life. You are judged 24/7. What you do after hours, you are still going to be accountable for that as well as what you do inside the classroom. People in the community know what you get up to on Friday night, and they won't see you at church on Sunday, and then they'll see you on a Monday and remind you...

The excerpt above explains how presence in the community acts to maintain coherence between a leader's actions in their institutional role and their leadership in the everyday. A teacher may be a leader in school with specific expertise, and they may have authority in classrooms, but their leadership legitimacy requires appropriately sanctioned behaviour in other community contexts. These include family, church and other spaces.

Because school leadership transcends institutional time and space, the application of ethics in behaviour by school leaders is essential for relational cohesion and to assure community support. That is, the way behaviour seen in the community embodies (or undermines) values can legitimise (or erode) leadership legitimacy in the institutional domain.

However, the way leadership is framed in institutional life does not always reflect the community embeddedness of school leaders. A Tongan *tok stori* contribution problematises institutional practice:

The accountability put on a school leader... is so much more widespread [than school boundaries]... Transparency and accountability...is something we don't often recognise...in our strategic plans or policies. They are part of the social contract and they are part of the understanding, the relationality and the social environment that we live in.

The social contract represented in *fatongia* is ever-present in Tonga, whether or not this is recognised in school documentation or planning. Where the notion is absent, institutional practice can at times work in another direction. A narrow institutional conception of leadership, especially when reinforced by leadership training, may mute the holistic nature of Pacific societies and erode the integration of education and community.

RECIPROCITY

Active relationships may exist between communities with schools that extend community leadership into the institutional domain. Communities can set expectations for schools, and work to integrate school and community. A *tok stori* contribution addressed this area:

Community leaders felt they needed to strengthen collaboration through PTA (Parent/Teacher Association) meetings and training workshop to inform teachers, parents and community leaders on roles and responsibilities - linking child and school, increasing the teaching and learning network behind the classroom, connecting local experts on knowledge and skills that are relevant and meaningful - legends, [knowledge of the] livelihood of man and women, and also history.

This narrative suggests the significance of reciprocity as an influence on school leadership works, operationalised by communication and gifting. It shows that the wider community understands the benefits of community/school integration, and the value to children of traditional knowledge. A '*network behind the classroom*' involves a web of complex relational responsibility through which the community contributes legends, skills and histories to education. Communities can offer leadership in the institutional domain by supporting a place-based curriculum with relational resources.

The presence of school leaders in community and the power of reciprocal relationships between community and school are complementary explanatory features of the influence of community domains on school leadership in the institutional domain. Once again, our findings emphasise cohesive relationships and the communal good.

NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN SCHOOL LEADERS AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

In this section, three moments from the *tok stori* illustrate the kinds of domain-related challenges a school leader may encounter, and how to navigate them. The examples involve negotiating conflicts of understanding and establishing the ownership of resources.

CONFLICTS OF UNDERSTANDING

The first example, from Solomon Islands, shows how expectations and understandings based in one domain can cause issues in another. A school leader experienced problems when landowners expected their children to access free education and had not paid school fees for many years. When a new school leader refused to accept this situation:

he was bashed and threatened because he enforced that every student must settle their school fees. With this conflict of understanding, the school was closed for a week because the principal had to run away to the town for safety.

This shows what can happen when legitimacy for decision making originates in different domains and transcends the present. On the one hand, land ownership creates *kastom* authority; on the other, authority is invested in the school leader by position. The decisions of leaders in the past impinge on leadership in the present. As a consequence, practical and financial issues that require negotiation arrive at the door of the school leader.

The solution described shows how leadership legitimacy from church and *kastom* provide enough clarification for the conflict of understanding to be resolved and continuity of education assured:

[With] the beauty of having the community chief, the tribal chief and the church leaders in the community, the problem was solved, and classes resumed.

In this case, the principal felt safe to return and education could continue while other issues were negotiated. This points to community cohesion as an enabler in the way leadership from *kastom* and church domains are an asset within the institutional domain.

RESOURCES

The way that resource ownership is understood in communities can force school leaders to navigate the boundaries of the institutional domain. For example,

A head stated community would just go into the school and collect water from the school tank. When the tanks are empty the children do not have water.

In many Pacific locations such as this Solomon Island example, tank water is a key resource required for sustainable education. In times of shortage, or as a matter of convenience, community members may take the water. The school leader must decide whether to provide this to the community or protect the interests of education.

Another finite resource is time. Time spent in education is limited, and schools seek to make the most of what is available in order to support the growth of their charges. However, the time that school is open does not mean that that time is 'owned' by the school. When significant community events occur, this becomes obvious. A Solomon Islands *tok stori* reported that in order to avoid conflict with *kastom*, especially in rural communities,

when a person dies, a school must close for many days depending on the cultural practices of the community. For some... the mourning period may last for ten days.

Time is also important to churches. Cohesive relationships with churches require schools to negotiate how time is used when school should be in session but a church event is planned. For example:

church leadership expected the school to be closed [in term time]... for instance on Saint's day, church anniversaries or conferences.

In such circumstances, a school that remained open might not only compromise relationships with church leaders and members – it might also find itself empty.

Being embedded in community may offer routes through complex negotiations with *kastom* and church interests in matters concerning resources such as water, land and time. The research suggests Solomon Island

school leaders have a way of negotiating kastom and culture... and make use of cultural practices that can appease tensions in the running and management of the school.

In sum, these examples of negotiation suggest that leadership and values drawn from *kastom* and church domains are vital for school leaders to promote coherent relationships between school and community. Trade-offs over resources may be needed to maintain a balance between educational continuity and community-school relations, but the values involved need to make sense in community as well as focus on school priorities.

IMPLICATIONS

Information from Solomon Islands, Tonga and RMI offered by researchers to our *tok stori* suggests pathways towards understanding the context behind the context, and in doing so points to answers to our focussing questions.

#1 SCHOOL LEADERS LEARN ABOUT LEADERSHIP FROM ALL AREAS OF THEIR LIFE

First, where do school leaders get their ideas of leadership? The narratives show that community sources of ideas about leadership are present with school leaders. They are therefore not blank slates, but knowledgeable volumes. Their major influence is likely to be customary knowledge, supported by wisdom from church teachings and experiences.

The example of the Melanesian mind from Solomon Islands shows how various aspects of life coexist within Pacific holistic appreciations of the world. Part of this coexistence involves porous boundaries between seemingly divided features of life that enable leadership ideas to travel.

School leaders gain ideas of leadership through socialisation – by watching customary and church leadership in action, learning about the values that underpin it, and practicing in community. Their behaviour is contextual, but the values that drive their choices are well understood. For example, school leaders may bestow gifts such as time wherever a need is clear – regardless of the receiver’s position vis-à-vis the leader’s school. This makes sense where community coherence is both a significant motivator and a measuring stick of leadership.

As a result, effective leadership is intelligible both in and out of school and is likely to draw widespread support by resonating in *kastom* and church contexts.

Leadership, therefore, transcends time and place. Having been socialised into leadership in community, school leaders act as members of community in school. This involves acting as a steward of precious resources, understanding their role in genealogical terms, and valuing opportunities to contribute to community sustainability. Leadership from the past is a gift, and leadership for the future is an obligation in intergenerational time.

Leadership is often expressed through metaphors. Because of their representative and open nature, metaphors support the transfer of leadership from one context to another. Leaders who are educated in community metaphors have access to models of what leadership looks like in traditional community settings such as canoe and house building. These metaphors illustrate values, providing school leaders with a firm basis from which to imagine institutional ways of enacting the customary wisdom and expectations contained therein.

#2 SCHOOL LEADERS' EMBEDDEDNESS IN COMMUNITY IS AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF LEGITIMACY

Second, what is the significance of the way school leaders are embedded in community? School leaders in Pacific contexts are generally deeply embedded in their school community. This may or may not be their community of origin.

In village life and on small atolls, teachers are visible and participate in community activities such as sports, worship and food production. Although their leadership legitimacy is informed by their appointment to a position in the institutional domain, their presence in community means that their legitimacy is also judged according to their community contribution.

A school leader who does not uphold community values will find little support from the community for their school leadership, whereas an exemplary member of the community who is also a school leader is likely to garner cooperation from the leaders and members of groups with whom they relate.

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A school leader who does not uphold community values will find little support from the community for their school leadership.

An important aspect of life that also contributes to leadership legitimacy in many Pacific cultures is reciprocity. For instance, in Solomon Islands leaders are part of *wantok* networks (Fito'o, 2019) – relational webs that involve mutual responsibility and obligation.

Under ideal conditions, schools and communities are in reciprocal relationships, each contributing expertise to the education of the new generation. Reciprocity links to legitimacy because as members of a community, school leaders and others are expected to support the common good. Community leaders may lend weight to events such as building projects. School leaders can return this by using their organisational skills for community good in wider non-school contexts.

Reciprocity is not only about giving, but also involves being willing to accept gifts, including gifts of knowledge and wisdom. School and community leaders who value reciprocity embody relational leadership because they deliberately create opportunities for mutual support towards a common goal. This can include events such as PTA meetings, where coming together is as significant as the tangible result. However, any separation of school and community is a symptom of the breakdown of this value, requiring leaders from all domains to seek solutions.

#3 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP REQUIRES CONTINUAL NEGOTIATION WITH OTHER LEADERS AND AUTHORITIES

Third, what kinds of leadership negotiation are required of school leaders? School leaders lead in the institutional domain, but this kind of leadership is in continual negotiation with leadership and authority from other domains.

A central tenet of customary authority involves land ownership and guardianship. Because schools are built on land, they are by nature at an intersection of the customary and institutional domains. Problems can arise as a result, with consequences to the sustainability of education and threats to the wellbeing of school leaders. In the example given, solutions were found through the auspices of *kastom* and church leaders.

School leadership may also have to negotiate resources. Such situations can rub uneasily against the way school leaders are embedded in community. Is water from a roof tank a school or community resource? If a school leader encourages a village to drink from the school tank, what happens to education when it runs dry? Is the situation to be approached in the same way in times of plenty and periods of drought? Beyond water and thirst lie questions of leadership, and beyond decisions in the present are questions of leader legitimacy and of support for education stretching into the future. Such negotiations are complex and demanding.

At the heart of all three questions is relationality, the state of being related. Pacific school leaders learn about leadership in connected environments that value community above the individual (Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017). These are contexts that are soaked in time-tested ideas and longstanding practices that condition the understandings of leaders regardless of their domain of practice (Curran, 2018).

School leaders remain part of community, whether it be their own, their school's, or both. Consequently, their relations outside of school affect their legitimacy inside, reflecting the interconnectedness of all life (Steffen & Rezmovits, 2019). Leadership legitimacy, therefore, is a matter of consistent evidence of values, tasks and leadership complexity (Reiche et al., 2017). Finally, when negotiating leadership in matters such as land and water, school leaders can actually be negotiating the relationships between people and between leadership vested in different domains. This level of connectivity is an aspect of a holistic appreciation of life.

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenge of this paper for those who seek to do good through development work is to pursue effectiveness by taking steps to learn about the context behind the context. This involves finding ways to identify knowledgeable people, embracing methodologies that facilitate their stories being told, and honouring what is learned in the design phase of any intervention rather than as an add-on or adjunct. This takes time and may challenge aspects of the way things are generally done (Sanga et al., 2020; Willetts et al., 2014). However, as this research shows, any leadership context is far from a blank slate, and sustainable change is more likely to take place when existing and introduced ideas are aligned in ways that make sense on the ground. The price when this is not true is likely to be change that does not last because stronger forces diminish its relevance.

TAKE AN INFORMED APPROACH TO THE CONTEXT BEHIND THE CONTEXT

Those who seek to develop leadership capacity may want to consider the values and practices that are customary and well understood at the village level, even if intervention is intended to benefit activities in the institutional domain. This is because leadership ideas travel across domain boundaries, and *kastom*, a domain which has longstanding influence and involves everyone in a society, is likely to dominate any negotiation between leadership ideas. This is particularly true because when people leave the office, school or other post, they step back into the familiar world of *kastom*, as do their clients,

be they children, parents or others. Similar observations apply to church leadership, which itself is generally tightly woven with customary thinking.

RECOGNISE COMPLEXITY AS AN ELEMENT IN CONTEXT

Development practitioners may want to consider the fact that leadership in the institutional domain must continually take account of relationships with community. The examples of access to water, claims on time and completing ideas about the ownership of land and money show how day-to-day life for leaders is punctuated by complexity because they are embedded in holistic societies to whom neat divisions between domain borders make little sense.

After all, grassroots people in developing countries exist in the same space and time as each other, and live surrounded by the same histories and desires for sustainability - whatever positional role they occupy. For this reason, water does and does not belong to a school, time is and is not measured in contractual terms, and land does and does not equate in monetary terms to school fees. What matters is the state of relationships between (school) leaders and other members of their collective.

VALUE SOCIAL COHESION AND THE COLLECTIVE GOOD

A related recommendation is to value the collective good. The collective good can be seen in social cohesion. This means recognising that values such as reciprocity, and the obligations-as-gifts that underpin concepts such as *fatongia*, are valuable pointers when trying to appreciate leadership in context. Well-exercised customary leadership benefits the collective to the extent that successful negotiation between leadership notions across domains must also offer shared benefits. For this reason, development professionals may wish to interrogate who will benefit and how this will be apparent when seeking to understand how their work will honour the context behind the context.

Leadership as an obligation needs to be supported at the values level, as well as being exercised at the management or professional level. In the Pacific contexts we have presented, the former guides the latter. Without a deep and enduring but ever-apparent consideration of locally held values, interventions that seek to portray themselves as universally helpful may actually be an introduction of irrelevancies as a form of paternalism, unwelcome in the present world.

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Without a deep and enduring but ever-apparent consideration of locally held values, interventions that seek to portray themselves as universally helpful may actually be an introduction of irrelevancies as a form of paternalism, unwelcome in the present world.

CONSIDER USING DIALOGIC FORMS TO EXPLORE DEEPLY HELD BELIEFS

Development practitioners may want to employ methodologies, such as *tok stori*, that provide opportunities to collate material to inform contextualisation at deep levels. This topic is explored directly elsewhere (Sanga, Johansson-Fua, et al., 2021a). The information presented in this article shows how the orality relevant to each location has been capable of gleaning everyday stories of leadership and leadership negotiations; and how *tok stori* as a mode of sharing has made this information available to be ordered and investigated in instructive ways. The power of this approach is to feature what matters to people as experts in their own lives and context, revealing the context behind the context in a way that interviews, surveys and other forms of investigation more familiar in professional circles may not.

UNDERSTAND LEADERSHIP AS A VALUES-DRIVEN, SACRIFICIAL ORIENTATION TO RELATIONSHIPS

A key aspect of this paper has been the relationship between leadership negotiation and legitimacy. Hudson and McLoughlin (2019) suggest that leadership legitimacy is supported by:

- Position - in this case, school leadership as a principal, supervisor, board member and so on;
- In whose interests they will act - in this case, for the common good;
- The identity match between the leader and community - a matter embedded in adherence to *kastom* and church norms;
- The characteristics a leader displays - here represented by matters such as *fatongia* and active, visible, supporting participation in community activities.

The legitimacy of positional leadership is achieved through a negotiation that involves leadership as service recognisable to community members and solidified through relationships that have their centre away from education.

As a consequence, a final overarching recommendation to the development community is to understand leadership as a values driven, sacrificial orientation to relationships. From this perspective, supporting leadership development means spending time understanding what matters in the way people relate to each other in their communities - both when exercising their positional roles and when supporting the leadership of others.

It also means recognising that what can be seen as leadership behaviour is a visible portrayal of complex ideas and responsibilities with deep, long, and continuing roots. From these roots grows the significance of social cohesion - the promotion of the common good - through actions that ensure community sustainability. The education of development professionals through long term dialogue is one route to their enhanced appreciation of the context behind the context - a matter essential for the delivery of the kinds of service both donors and recipients will value.

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IMAGES

p.1 Courtesy of the research team – Selwyn College, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands.

p.5 Courtesy of the research team – Selwyn College, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands.

p.9 Courtesy of Danny Jim – Ailuk Atoll, Marshall Islands.



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