

Principles of Sustainable Leadership: The Case of School Leaders in the Fiji Islands

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***Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to present the findings of a study on the principles of sustainable leadership practices of school leaders in the Pacific region – namely, the Fiji Islands. A survey questionnaire was designed consisting of open-ended and closed questions to elicit the views of teachers on the principles of sustainable leadership in relation to their respective schools. The findings indicated that most principles of sustainable leadership were present, yet at a relatively low level. Despite this having been a small-scale study, it calls for more attention on the application of all the principles of sustainable practices for the effective leadership and management of schools in Fiji.*

Introduction

The contemporary myriad of demands of work in educational organisations requires that considerable attention be paid to the leadership imperative, especially sustainable leadership, for continuous success of the school now and in the future. Even though the presence of sustainable leadership may not guarantee success, its absence could certainly lead to failure in all efforts to improve the school (Fullan, Cuttress & Kilcher 2005). Ongoing capacity-building among other members of the professional learning community both within and outside the educational organisation will enable a continuous positive contribution towards school improvement and, in turn, towards raising the quality of educational provision. An abundance of literature illustrates the impact of leadership on all aspects of educational organisation, underlining the vital importance of the need for concerted effort directed towards supporting the principles of sustainable leadership in all educational jurisdictions. Nowhere is this truer than in developing contexts such as those in the small island states of the Pacific. From this perspective – that is, the importance of the principles of sustainable leadership in present schools and in their future – it is vital to explore the degree to which present school settings are in fact employing such principles.

In the Pacific Island countries, the issue of educational leadership has been a perennial concern though the issue has been addressed only superficially (Bacchus 2000; Tavola 2000; Malasa 2007; Aleta 2010; Lingam 2010). In recent times, educational leadership literature has emphasised the important role school leaders play in school effectiveness and improvement efforts. It is only through effective leadership that all operations and functions of the school

can be realised, optimised and sustained. As Dinham (2005) commented, effective leaders can contribute towards achieving outstanding results for the school, such as vastly improved children's learning outcomes. Conversely, impoverished leaders can adversely affect the school organisation and, in turn, break the promise of a better future for the children. This is the case in many rural schools in Fiji where school leaders lack motivation and drive and as a result schools perform at a low level (Bacchus 2000; Tavola 2000).

School leadership has long been perceived to be important not only for children's academic achievement, but also for the successful functioning of many other aspects of the school organisation (Fullan 2001). It appears that the way school leaders go about their day-to-day work could be a contributing factor in success or failure in all aspects of the school. One of the contemporary leadership practices to be adopted at the school level is the idea of *sustainable* leadership for the purpose of successfully sustaining improvements to all facets of the school organisation (Fullan, Cuttress & Kilcher 2005). For instance, acquiring new knowledge and skills is vital for the continuation of successful sustainable leadership practices, which in turn would enhance school effectiveness and improvement even in times of crisis. In so doing, a distributive perspective of leadership, for example, would be a way forward in providing exposure and building experience of others in the professional learning community in order to continue to take the school forward. This will require some shift in the modes of leadership to make things possible. In fact all these boil down to school leaders' application and promotion of principles of sustainable leadership in a range of ways. In this regard, the seven principles of sustainable leadership as advanced by Hargreaves and Fink (2004) are worthy of consideration.

Principles of Sustainable Leadership: The Hargreaves and Fink Model

Hargreaves and Fink (2004: 8) define sustainable leadership in the following way:

Sustainable leadership matters, spreads and lasts. It is a shared responsibility, that does not unduly deplete human or financial resources, and that cares for and avoids exerting negative damage on the surrounding educational and community environment. Sustainable leadership has an activist engagement with the forces that affect it, and builds an educational environment of organizational diversity that promotes cross-fertilization of good ideas and successful practices in communities of shared learning and development.

The definition is comprehensive as it covers a broad range of issues concerning leadership in schools. From the definition one can deduce that sustainable leadership constitutes a broad view of leadership. It is much more than the managerial style of administration or the maintenance type of practices of just keeping a school running which has outlived its relevance in contemporary times (Mitchell & Tucker 1992; Schratz 2003). Such a narrow view of leadership does not help in terms of effectively responding to the contemporary demands of work and at the same time achieving a progressive outlook for the school. The definition illustrates that school leaders are expected to wear many hats, and not just be an administrator or manager in the school. This calls for a paradigm shift in leadership to meet the demands of the changing times whilst actively contributing towards qualitative growth in education.

The shift as recommended in educational literature is from working in the system (management) to working on the system (leadership) (Senge 1990; Brewer 2001; Schratz 2003). Thus, for the long-term benefit of all with a vested interest in education, practising school leaders need to adopt sustainable leadership practices that will ensure continuous improvement of the different areas of the school. Duignan and Bezzina (2006) caution against the application of those leadership practices that were developed in past centuries but are regarded by some as still appropriate for the contemporary era. A glaring example of this is the autocratic style of leadership adopted in most Fiji schools, which should have been long outgrown (Tavola 2000). After all, times have changed, and school organisations have grown and at the same time have become more complex. It is, therefore, no longer practical or useful to lead and manage schools in contemporary times using leadership practices developed a long time ago (Cannon 2005). This would be like Peddiwell's (1939) famous story of the sabre tooth curriculum. The message of the story is that practices such as those of the leadership, no less than curriculum, should evolve with the changing times. This calls for a better preparation of school leaders (Clark & Clark 1996; Tavola 2000).

On the basis of the definition of sustainable leadership, Hargreaves and Fink (2004) go further, to derive the seven principles of sustainable leadership.

Sustainable Leadership Creates and Preserves Sustaining Learning

This principle refers to the provision to all children of learning that matters – learning that prepares them for life. Broadly, this means developing children in all dimensions: intellectually, spiritually, socially and emotionally. This principle suggests that the key responsibility for school leaders is to sustain the quality learning for the long-term benefit of the children (Stoll, Fink & Earl 2002). Here, holistic development of the children should be the primary responsibility of the school. School leaders should be concerned with a high quality of learning and teaching rather than teaching narrowly to test or examination requirements (Starratt 2004). This is considered as part of their ethic of responsibility to see that suitable conditions are created for authentic learning to take place, which can then make an everlasting impact on the children's lives (Duignan & Bezzina 2006).

Sustainable Leadership Secures Success Over Time

The second principle means that, over a period of time, hard-working and committed school leaders will certainly achieve success for their schools. Also, by grooming others in the professional learning community the leader can leave behind a team of dedicated and committed staff to keep the school moving in the right direction. Otherwise, the school is likely to suffer in cases where the incumbent retires or leaves the profession altogether (Hart 1993; Fink & Brayman 2004). The school leader together with the members of the school team should focus on both short-term and long-term objectives and work towards ongoing improvement of the school. This, as suggested in the literature (Hargreaves & Fink 2007), will encourage continuity and not discontinuity in terms of the desire to keep the momentum for further improvement and development of the school.

Sustainable Leadership Sustains the Leadership of Others

This principle of sustainable leadership involves the development of others to take up leadership positions in future. Qualitatively speaking, this is rather more than just grooming

someone for a leadership position. In this regard, an effective leader will encourage others to take up leadership roles and responsibilities. Active participation of staff in the governance functions of the school will give them relevant exposure and experience, which will help them later when they are promoted to leadership positions. The concept of shared leadership plays an important part here. It is to be applied and practised by the school leaders to ensure that the successors continue to move the school forward (Spillane, Halverson & Drummond 2001). In this way, members of the professional learning community will come to appreciate that they all share and have a say in school leadership. Harris (2002) and Starratt (2004) argue strongly the need for school leaders to share leadership responsibilities with other staff in the school. Through shared leadership, staff will become highly motivated and more committed to school improvement and change, raising the chances for school success (Crowther, Hann & Andrews 2000). After all, in reality it is impossible, and probably undesirable, for the principal or head teacher to lead and manage everything in the school without seeking the assistance of other staff (Fullan 2001).

Sustainable Leadership Addresses Issues of Social Justice

This principle of leadership covers issues relating to social justice on all counts. Under it, leaders need to exercise responsibility for social justice to all in the wider environment. For example, all children, irrespective of their colour, race, religion or economic background, must be given equal opportunities to attend school. Other examples of socially just practice for school leaders would include not restricting enrolment in one's own school only to high-achieving students or not seeking to entice the best-qualified teachers from neighbouring schools to join its staff. Such leadership actions would be likely to have an adverse impact on the surrounding environment including the clientele and other institutions (Berreth & Berman 1997). It is critical for school leaders to be ethically conscious of their actions and behaviours (Starratt 1991). In fact, the leader is to do things for the common good of everyone. In educational enterprise, supporting and working collaboratively with other schools in whatever way possible is considered a good gesture (Hargreaves & Fink 2007). That the school leader should be working in the best interests of all stakeholders in the wider school community forms part of this principle of sustainable leadership (Baker & Foote 2003).

Sustainable Leadership Develops Rather Than Depletes Human and Material Resources

The allocation and development of resources rather than their exploitation is the defining feature of this principle of sustainable leadership. School leaders are expected to be effective in their management of both human and material resources. Leaders need to know how to make best use of the resources during difficult times, to avoid exploitation, and at the same time find better ways and means to develop the human and material resources for the benefit of the school (Byrne 1994). In so far as human resource is concerned, school leaders should encourage staff to undertake professional development activities. This will help them to acquire new knowledge and skills with the hope that their application will raise staff performance and productivity at work for the overall benefit of the school and the community served by the school (Poplin 1992). With regard to material resources, school leaders are to look for ways to replenish and acquire suitable resources to enhance and at the same time sustain all activities of the school.

Sustainable Leadership Develops Environmental Diversity and Capacity

This principle involves treasuring all forms of diversity and varying abilities that exist in the environment, and at the same time facilitating ongoing improvement in all spheres in and beyond the school (Capra 1997). The task of the school leader will be to assist in whatever way possible to realise people's full potential. Building on people's strengths can help infuse new ideas, and these in turn can have a positive impact not only on the school but also the entire school community. The concept of cross-fertilisation of ideas is encouraged as it can contribute to improvement in all aspects of the school organisation (Louise & Kruse 1995). After all, education is everyone's business.

Sustainable Leadership Undertakes Activist Engagement with the Environment

Under this principle, school leaders are to be vigilant of outside forces and take a strong stand on issues that emerge in the environment, particularly ones that may not be helpful to the school (Oakes, Quartz & Lipton 2000). Here, to translate the principle into practice, the school leader needs to be proactive. By actively engaging in the environment the school leader will have some sense of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats present in the environment, and helped by this will act appropriately for the benefit for the school and the entire education system.

The foregoing review of literature illustrates that sustainable leadership is more than just administering or managing a school day by day. Interestingly, the seven principles of leadership operate interactively and it is difficult to compartmentalise them. For these reasons, it is vital to explore and determine the extent to which the seven principles of sustainable leadership practices as advanced by Hargreaves and Fink (2004) are applied in schools in the Fiji context.

Sustainable Leadership in Fiji Schools: A Preliminary Study

Purpose of the Research

The remainder of the paper discusses a small piece of research exploring the perceptions of a group of teachers on the seven principles of sustainable leadership as advanced by Hargreaves and Fink (2004). Specifically, it explores teachers' reflections on the seven principles of sustainable leadership and the extent to which they are apparent in their respective schools. The central research question under examination was: what are your reflections on the seven principles of sustainable leadership in relation to your school context?

Rationale

The literature demonstrates that although some small-scale studies had been conducted on certain aspects of educational leadership in the Fiji context, none so far had addressed the area of sustainable leadership. This study would, therefore, contribute valuable information and insights about the extent of the principles of sustainable leadership practices in Fiji schools.

Specifically, the findings of such a study would help various stakeholders, for example, to re-examine their stand on sustainable leadership issues and practices presently adopted. Also,

the outcome of this study could be used to institute as well as improve leadership training and development programmes mounted either in teacher education institutions or by the employer. The Ministry of Education as the principal stakeholder responsible for the education sector would benefit from this study, as the outcome would better inform their practice – that is, in terms of organising suitable in-service training programmes in future for the benefit of school leaders and, in turn, children’s futures. Even though this is a small-scale study, it has both local and international significance and, as such, the hope is that the findings will propel further investigations in various dimensions of educational leadership within and beyond Fiji, especially in the small island states of the Pacific.

Study Context

Fiji became a crown colony of Britain in 1874, remaining so for nearly a century before it achieved independence in 1970. Although against the measuring stick of the industrialised world Fiji may be assessed dismissively as one of the small nations in the Pacific and economically not a very rich country, within the island region of the south west Pacific it is among the larger and more developed ones, in land mass and population second only to Papua New Guinea. Fiji compares quite favourably with those small nations in the Pacific region in all aspects including education. The multiracial population includes in the mix two major ethnic groups, Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, as well as several other smaller ones. Despite the disruption attendant on four coups since the early 1990s, the country is fairly stable. The government embarked on the 21st century armed with the report presented by a commission instituted to assess the present and chart a path for the future of the country’s education system. The multi-authored report, *Learning Together: Directions for Education in Fiji Islands: Report of the Fiji Islands Education Commission/Panel 2000*, now used as a guide for future developments in education, highlights educational leadership as one of the areas needing urgent attention.

Research Method

A questionnaire survey was the chosen instrument for the collection of data. The two-part survey determined teachers’ reflections about each of the seven principles of sustainable leadership in relation to their respective schools. The survey sample comprised participants, all of them practising teachers, studying a postgraduate-level course on educational administration. As it encouraged participants to express their views freely, this questionnaire was considered an effective means of gathering data from the sample (Gay 1992).

The questionnaire consisted of two items. First, the respondents were asked to rate each of the listed seven principles of sustainable leadership on a five-point Likert scale ranging from one, as the lowest agreement, to five, the strongest agreement, in terms of how well it was reflected in their respective schools. This helped identify which principles were given adequate (or least) attention and at the same time determine the extent of recognition of the principle in the school. The second item opened the opportunity for participants to express their views on each principle of sustainable leadership on the basis of the rating they gave.

The researcher introduced the questionnaire by explaining its purpose and how the results could assist policy-makers and those who aspire to become school leaders. The researcher personally distributed and collected the completed questionnaires from the teachers, and the handling of the information was such that participants’ confidentiality and anonymity were

protected, as they were assured would be the case. Since the questionnaire was administered to all the teachers taking the course, the return rate of the completed questionnaires was 33 (100 per cent).

All participants in the study had already completed some courses at the postgraduate level and this course on leadership was another one in which they were enrolled. Most of them (80 per cent) had been teaching for more than 15 years and were fairly well versed in Fiji's education system. The sample included 13 females and 20 males. Two sets of data were collected. Analysis of the quantitative data set employed the common statistical mean (Mehrens & Lehmann 1991). The responses in the qualitative data set were grouped according to each principle of sustainable leadership. Suitable quotations are presented from the open-ended question responses, as 'some statements carry a rich density of meaning in a few words' (Ruddock 1993:19).

Findings

The analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data are presented separately.

Quantitative Data

The teachers were asked to rate each principle of sustainable leadership on a five-point scale (1= lowest agreement to 5= strongest agreement); that is, the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each principle as it applied to their school context. Table 1 provides the summary of the results for the quantitative data.

Table 1: Ratings for the principles of sustainable leadership (N = 33)

Principles of sustainable leadership	Mean (on 5-point scale)	Standard deviation
Sustainable leadership creates and preserves sustaining learning.	2.6	0.34
Sustainable leadership secures success over time.	2.7	0.45
Sustainable leadership sustains the leadership of others.	2.9	0.36
Sustainable leadership addresses issues of social justice.	2.6	0.55
Sustainable leadership develops rather than depletes human and material resources	3.0	0.47
Sustainable leadership develops environmental diversity and capacity.	2.5	0.42
Sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment.	2.3	0.38

Qualitative Data

Presented here, with only a brief immediate generalisation, are some of the typical responses both positive and negative relating to each one of the principles. The discussion section that follows elaborates further.

Sustainable leadership creates and preserves sustaining learning

Many times trial tests are done to prepare students for the main purpose of passing exams and this may not be sustaining as weaker students are often left out. Thus teaching a child how to read or how to tell the time is more meaningful and useful for future use.

Every Monday morning the [Head teacher] talked about Fiji Eighth Year Examination targets. He sets targets and incentives for students: \$20 for 100 per cent in any subject and \$100 for 100 per cent in the total mark.

My school concentrates on quantity of passes.

My school promotes and encourages children to take part in various activities throughout the year. The academic subjects is one side of the coin as the school takes keen interest in sports; namely, soccer, rugby, netball, volleyball, golf and athletics. Students take part in various art competitions, the school is part of the Nadi Green Schools, the school offers computer lessons for students from the pre-school to class eight and the school participates in quizzes and oratory. Recently the school has also formed clubs such as arts clubs, musical club, Red Cross Club, Scouts and Girl-Guides so that the different interests of the students could be harnessed and promoted.

Overall, most (60 per cent) of the participants felt that their school did not rate well in its application of this principle. Some of the comments were explicitly critical of the leader's overemphasis on narrow academic results and too little concern with other dimensions a more holistic approach should address. One implication is that the offer of the carrot needs to be made frequently – in other words, that short-term benefits need repeated emphasis because they are not in themselves sustaining.

Sustainable leadership secures success over time

This is not happening in Fiji ... many leaders have suddenly retired and successors are not prepared for leadership positions.

My school had six leaders in ten years ... our current leader is the best compared to the previous ones ... unfortunately he was retired at the end of last year after two years at this school.

There was a big chaos after the compulsory retirement age in April 2009. The successor of the retired head teacher knew very little about school administration and she panicked a lot ... In less than two years of her leadership, we have seen the school standard, staff relationship, students' behaviour and performance deteriorating.

After a very experienced principal retired in 2009 the vice principal was promoted to head of the school. With the new reform driven climate like budget preparation, standards monitoring, OHS policies the new principal found it difficult to cope ... the results of the school dropped drastically.

Despite awarding a mean rating a little above the halfway mark, most of the participants (65 per cent) commented in ways that indicated that, on reflection, they did not find that their school performed well in its evaluation against this principle. Comments often underlined a

disturbing lack of continuity and an over-dependence on the accumulated experience of particular individuals, both factors that militate against longer-term sustainability.

Sustainable leadership sustains the leadership of others

Gave opportunity to upgrade our qualifications, attend workshops and conduct professional development activities in the school.

Gave me opportunities to act in his position many times.

I would say that in my school it is very hard to see this ... our leader holds on to all responsibilities and it always creates a lot of problems and confusion for the school.

The school head with the help of the assistant head teacher and the executive teachers take up all the responsibilities and make all major decisions. The administrative team, as they call themselves, make all the major decisions before the commencement of the staff meetings. In addition, there are hardly any staff development programmes and the school head or his assistants and a few of the head's favourites attend workshops while other staff members are neglected.

As far as this principle is concerned, a majority of participants (69 per cent) was willing to award a positive rating and at a mean of 2.9, it was the second highest rating given. Feedback in the comments, too, was often positive, although there were some decidedly negative ones as well. It seems that while many school leaders have 'moved with the times' in the direction of more collaborative approaches, perhaps even willingness to mentor and delegate in leadership roles, there remain pockets of resistance to relinquishing or sharing the 'power' of running the school. Consideration of the second principle, too, could well keep this principle in mind.

Sustainable leadership addresses issues of social justice

At present my school is discriminating as it only takes high achievers.

Fijian students from neighbouring schools and villages attend our school since we are offering Fijian Vernacular language, which most schools in our zone do not offer.

The school does not try to share ideas and resources with other neighbouring schools but tries to operate in isolation.

The school promised to provide a special treat to the class collecting the highest amount of money ... the school's administrative team with the help of school management neglected on their part and did not reward the students accordingly, that is, by giving them well deserved lunch.

In Nadi, several schools have cut-off marks for enrolment to increase results while others lobby for best soccer players and give them scholarships to maintain their soccer standards. The other secondary schools get mediocre and below average students, thus are not able to compete both academically and in sports ... [I] hope [the] zoning system will improve this. We should try to help the whole community and not to take best students and teachers.

The school leader is always dealing with one sector of the community and that is [the one] the school management comes from. Sponsors, well-wishers are used and disposed as if their durability has expired.

For a country that values highly the virtues of 'caring and sharing', responses on the principle of addressing social justice issues were most disappointing. Not only was the mean barely more than the midpoint, but 50 per cent of the participants returned negative feedback. While handing out some bouquets, participants were often most pointed in comments about their school's failure to have much regard for social justice.

Sustainable leadership develops rather than depletes human and material resources

My school leader recognised our potential and encouraged us to upgrade our qualifications.

In my school the head organises staff development programmes ... we actively participate.

At my school we are allowed to attend any workshop or seminar organised by the Ministry of Education.

The headship is doing very little ... not all teachers get a chance to attend workshops and there is hardly any staff development programme conducted at the school.

On the question of the stewardship of human and material resources, school leadership performance was rated much more positively. With the highest mean rating (3.0) and the highest percentage of positive respondents (70 per cent) this area of leadership resonates well for school leaders and their staff. Perhaps, on the grain-of-salt or -yeast principle, one approach to improving overall movement towards sustainable leadership would be to build on and improve this area, where performance is apparently already doing better, and then to move on to increasing the effort put into improving performance on the other principles. In so far as it is true that nothing succeeds like success, then finding the points where success or its beginnings are already apparent is urgent.

Sustainable leadership develops environmental diversity and capacity

Teachers and students are free to try out various ways and means to learn and teach in school. Teachers are encouraged to go to different classes to take different lessons. The students are also exposed to different mediums of learning such as through researching in the library, through computers, field trips, group work and from various speakers who are invited to the school to speak on various issues.

At times my school organises special programmes for the people with the help of service organisations.

We hardly use the ideas of other people ... community.

Overall, 60 per cent of the participants indicated a positive reflection on their school's performance with respect to this principle though the mean remained obdurately midstream. Comments indicate that many schools do seek actively to involve members of the community beyond the school and to widen the repertoire of teaching and learning styles. Schools and their leaders who have moved in this direction should be commended and encouraged; those who have not yet made this breakthrough should also be encouraged. Schools should be in and of the immediate community, not rarefied isolates.

Sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment

Most of the time my head of the school is confined to the school. He hardly goes out in the community. We even do not know most of the parents.

My school leader does not worry about ... he is 8am to 4pm person. I think the head should do more in this area.

We lack network with the community ... this is sad.

In my ten years of teaching, this was the first year when we had two organised community visits to the neighbouring villages and settlements, where we addressed the parents on issues relating to the school and the welfare of the children. The head teacher and the staff all went to these two gatherings and the response from the parents was overwhelming ... The head teacher has a good relationship with the community.

The school head tries to keep in touch with all stakeholders and in turn these stakeholders have many times helped the school. A very good example was when the school's land lease was near expiry. Due to the good relationship with the land owning unit, the school was granted a sixty year lease for a very less amount of money.

The final principle relates closely to the preceding one. Although selected comments suggest that some participants felt very pleased with how their school rated, it has to be pointed out that the mean rating was below the midpoint and 60 per cent of the teachers provided negative comments, so there is no room for complacency. Comments also indicate, though, that there is awareness, perhaps increasing awareness, among school leaders, teachers and communities that relationships between schools and their communities can and should be close and good, for the mutual benefit of all. That education should be seen as a mutually reinforcing collaboration among all stakeholders should be inculcated and nurtured among all stakeholders. Strong, committed, sustainable school leadership is critical to the development of this.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to garner from the teachers insights into the principles of sustainable leadership as practised in their respective school settings. In general the two sets of data indicate the presence of the seven principles of sustainable leadership in all schools. However, there is a clear necessity for more emphasis on all the principles of sustainable leadership, because they are not rated highly. Most of the mean scores obtained are not significantly above the mean score of 2.5 (Table 1). Added to the mean, the standard deviation (Table 1) for each principle of sustainable leadership shows that there were no considerable variations in the ratings. With regard to the qualitative data, the responses to some of the principles were skewed to the left and also to the right. This illustrates that some principles were not practised vigorously in the schools. What follows is a discussion based on each principle of sustainable leadership.

The principle that *sustainable leadership creates and preserves sustaining learning* has a rating of 2.6, but 60 per cent of the participants' comments were negative. This suggests that school leaders need to focus more on the holistic development of a child. In sustaining learning, school leaders can play an important part in emphasising a well-rounded education which is meaningful, everlasting and at the same time beneficial to the children as they prepare

themselves for later life and work, a value that is often expressed in the literature (Stoll, Fink & Earl 2002; Duignan & Bezzina 2006). However, the results from the study illustrate that Fiji school leaders tend to place more attention on narrow goals such as preparing children to pass examinations. Of course success in achieving this academic goal is necessary, but passing the examination should not be the sole emphasis, lest children miss out preparation for other vital areas of life. The analysis of the data in this study indicates school leaders' greater concern with short-term gains – that is, their almost exclusive focus on the students' academic achievement (Starratt 2004). This may change in future as the Ministry of Education proceeds with efforts to phase out external examinations and phase in continuous assessment, which could encourage holistic development of the child.

Likewise, the principle that *sustainable leadership secures success over time* did not receive a high rating (2.7). In terms of the teachers' comments, 65 per cent were negative. The government's sudden reduction in the retirement age policy from 60 to 55 in April 2009 was brutal, especially in the area of school leadership. This could be a contributing factor in the sad state of affairs in the area of leadership in some of the schools. At that point in time the Ministry of Education had no suitable option but to promote senior teachers from the ranks to head schools. Here both the employer and the then existing school leaders appear to have done little planning in terms of developing successors for the long-term benefit of the school (Hart 1993; Fink & Brayman 2004). They have been concerned more with the achievement of short-term goals without realising the need for long-term planning.

The principle *sustainable leadership sustains the leadership of others* received the second-highest rating of 2.9, and with 69 per cent of favourable comments. From the rating one can deduce that, in most schools, leaders still continue to control most of the things from the centre without sharing much of their responsibilities with other colleagues. One reason for the persistence of this leadership style could be that the hierarchical structures are in place and firmly entrenched; as a consequence there is always power over the staff (Bacchus 2000; Tavola 2000). This implies that those leaders are not really concerned about sustaining leadership of others. The need to recognise and to unleash the potential of others in the professional learning community is crucial for sustaining school improvement (Spillane, Halverson & Drummond 2001). Because of the current reforms in education, the work of school leaders is becoming ever more demanding. Without seeking support from other colleagues from both within and outside the school, it is to all intents and purposes impossible for them to work in all areas effectively (Schratz 2003). Opportunities for help are in abundance at the school level but it seems school leaders are not making optimal use of the opportunities and potentials available.

On the principle of *sustainable leadership addresses issues of social justice*, the rating (2.6) is not very pleasing. Similarly, only 50 per cent of the comments were positive. The feedback shows that some schools continue to cater for high achievers and tend to close the door for the low achievers, despite children's right to education. This is not a good practice as it contravenes issues of social justice (Hargreaves & Fink 2007). The introduction of school zoning may force schools to enrol students living nearby in the school neighbourhood, without any regard to their marks or socioeconomic standing. Another interesting feature of Fiji's education system is that the majority of schools are owned by non-government organisations and, as such, schools may not consider it wise to share resources of all types with other schools.

When compared with the other principles of sustainable leadership, the principle that *sustainable leadership develops rather than depletes human and material resources* received the most

favourable of the ratings (3.0). Likewise, 70 per cent of the comments were positive. School material resources appear to be well kept as the schools' management may be keeping a constant check on these. In relation to human resources, especially teaching staff, it is pleasing to note that they are encouraged to upgrade their qualifications and attend other in-service programmes. Opportunities afforded for the up-skilling of teachers would ultimately provide the benefit of a higher quality of education to the children (Byrne 1994). Thus more opportunities for staff development through various means would be a way forward towards providing a better quality of education for the children.

On the principle that *sustainable leadership develops environmental diversity and capacity*, the mean rating was 2.5 with 60 per cent of the comments being positive. This shows that not much was done in terms of creating a favourable platform where people with different capabilities can grow and develop. By taking this approach, the school would have benefited from their input in the long run. It is always wise for the school leader to consider the differences that exist and work towards strengthening them for the good of the school. It appears that school leaders were concerned more with their traditional role of school administrator (Tavola 2000).

Likewise, the principle that *sustainable leadership undertakes activist engagement with the environment* was not rated at all favourably as being prominent in school practice. It received a just-under-the-middle rating of only 2.3 with a 60 per cent negative comment rate. Perhaps the current political climate inhibits school leaders from engaging actively with the environment or neighbourhood, encouraging them instead to concentrate on their work in the immediate internal environment – that is, in the school. The literature, however, suggests that school leaders have much to gain from engaging themselves professionally in the wider environment beyond the school fence (Oakes, Quartz & Lipton 2000).

Overall, the responses obtained from the teachers through the closed and the open-ended items were lightly weighted towards a favourable picture about the pursuit of principles of sustainable leadership at the school level. This perhaps may be regarded as a hopeful starting point. However, more could be achieved if leaders were encouraged to be more aware of the principles of sustainable leadership and their positive impact on the entire school community. The education authorities, by placing more emphasis on the principles of sustainable leadership for sustaining all operations of the school, could materially assist in bringing about positive changes in the mind-sets of school leaders, as the evidence suggests that most school leaders are more inclined to working in the system rather than on the system (Senge 1990; Tavola 2000; Brewer 2001; Schratz 2003).

Conclusion

School leaders have to keep their minds open and recognise the principles of sustainable leadership for the purpose of sustaining school improvement. The principles of sustainable leadership should form part of school leaders' day-to-day professional work to ensure optimal benefit to the school organisation and, in turn, to all stakeholders who have an interest in education. The small study reported here illustrates the need for extra effort on the part of school leaders to ensure effective implementation of sustainable leadership practices in the education system for the long-term benefit of the school, the community served by the school and, in turn, the nation. Most of the principles of sustainable leadership as suggested by Hargreaves and Fink (2004) were present but at a relatively low level, and school leaders could have done better if they had vigorously pursued and demonstrated sustainable leadership

practices for the overall good of the school. For example, the need to provide ample leadership opportunities to staff for the purpose of grooming them is vital for successful continuity. Leadership succession on the basis of the seven principles is professionally sound for the overall success of the school now and in the future.

It can be said on the basis of the data collected that the current school leaders could have done more in the area of sustainable leadership by effectively applying the principles that have been suggested. It is the responsibility of existing school leaders to be aware of the long-term benefits and implement the principles of sustainable leadership to enable future leaders to acquire and develop relevant skills to provide the best possible service not only to the children but also to the school community as a whole. Capacity-building of teachers in different areas of the school organisation can help them to acquire useful knowledge and skills to lead effectively and manage the school organisation in future in ways that contribute to school improvement. At the school level, the principles of sustainable leadership practices can be effectively translated into action for the benefit of all in the professional learning community. Conversely, leadership practices that are not aligned with the seven principles of sustainable leadership will certainly lead to a downward spiral of the school, with an adverse impact on all the members of the professional learning community and, in particular, the children.

As succinctly stated by Hargreaves & Fink (2004:10), 'If change is to matter, spread and last, sustainable leadership must also be a fundamental priority of the systems in which leaders do their work.' For this to happen successfully, the employer, in Fiji's case the Ministry of Education, should put in place appropriate mechanisms to encourage leadership practices consonant with the principles of sustainable leadership at all levels of education. To achieve desired results in this critical area requires both ongoing awareness and better training programmes for future school leaders. Through the effective application of the seven principles of sustainable leadership by the school leaders, more can be accomplished in all areas of the school for the benefit of all stakeholders and more so for the nation's children.

Even though this was a small-scale study with a small number of respondents, there is still sufficient consistency in the responses to warrant further and focused research in the area of sustainable leadership. Such research could ensure sustainability in all areas of schooling not only in Fiji schools but also in the schools of other small island states of the Pacific. A study on sustainable leadership should not only be confined to the school level, but also conducted at other levels of education such as tertiary-level institutions for the benefit of all people.

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