

**Improving leadership practice through ‘listening’:
The perspective of Cook Island leaders in
Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools**

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A thesis submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Educational Leadership

2023

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my treasured grandmother, Tukura Kamana, who was the greatest leader I have ever known and an exceptional listener. Her legacy of wisdom and compassion continues to inspire me.



Acknowledgements

A'aere, marie, e aku potiki, kia kite koe nga 'inapotea

Go quietly, my children so that you may see many moonlights

The Cook Island proverb mentioned above recognises the significance of moving slowly and cautiously during a journey to lead a long life. Despite this research journey taking longer than anticipated, this process has taught me the valuable lesson of patience and persistence. I am grateful for and humbled by this experience.

First and foremost, I acknowledge our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Through Him, all things are made possible.

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr Alison Smith. I am so grateful for your support, patience and encouragement. Your constructive feedback and your insights are greatly appreciated.

Thank you to the Cook Island leaders in the academic space, especially Jean Mitaera, Aue te Ava and Teremoana Hodges who took the time to communicate with me about various aspects of this research. Your work continues to inspire many.

To the research participants, thank you for your time, insights and reflections. This study would not have been possible without you. I have learned so much from our time together and am grateful to you all.

I am thankful for my family and friends' unwavering support and motivation. Your constant words of encouragement were a source of inspiration. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to AJ, my coach, for gracefully holding me accountable.

Finally, to my amazing husband, you never doubted the significance of this work, continually encouraging, guiding, motivating and supporting me. I am truly grateful to you always.

Abstract

This thesis concerns a qualitative investigation into the experiences and perspectives of Cook Island leaders in primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand regarding improving their leadership practice through 'listening'. The study draws on the literature on indigenous ways of leading, Pasifika leadership values, educational leadership, building high-trust relationships, culturally-sustaining leadership, leader well-being, and the listening leader.

This research used a qualitative narrative inquiry approach with three participants. Data were gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews. The main findings suggest that understanding one's identity and values is crucial in shaping a leader's actions and behaviours. Furthermore, listening, questioning and paraphrasing for understanding are critical practical skills that help leaders make their people feel valued. Regular reflection also proves necessary to ensure alignment between core identity and values with daily actions and behaviours.

The findings of this study have practical implications for the development of leadership programmes that are culturally responsive and promote effective leadership practices in diverse educational contexts. The study contributes to the understanding of Pasifika leadership, explicitly focusing on Cook Island leaders, and provides insights relevant to all leaders working within education in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools.

Attestation of authorship

I declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Naketa Ikihele (24 May 2023)

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Chapter One: Introduction

Turou! Turou! Turou!
Oro mai! Oro mai! Oro mai!

Introduction

This research examined the impact ‘listening’ has had on improving the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools. This chapter describes the background and context of the research, contextualising the study with reference to the history of the Cook Islands and the migration of Cook Islanders to Aotearoa New Zealand, where the term ‘Pasifika’ originated. The chapter then discusses listening as a leadership skill. The purpose of this research is also discussed with an account of my personal and professional motivations for investigating this particular topic. This chapter proceeds to present the research aims and questions, as well as an overview of the research design. It concludes with a succinct summary of the subsequent chapters in this thesis.

Background and context

Effective listening is an essential communication skill often overlooked because leaders tend to focus more on speaking and expressing their own ideas rather than actively listening to others (Shrivastava, 2014). However, effective listening is crucial for sustaining relationships, maintaining trust and understanding different perspectives. Educational leaders manage and inspire many stakeholders, including students, parents, whanau, teachers, the wider community and external agencies. Effective listening skills are important for education leaders to navigate complex relationships and build strong partnerships successfully. Indigenous cultures have long understood the importance of deep listening without interrupting or imposing views on others. This study aims to provide a voice for Cook Islanders and examine the intersection between Cook Island leaders’ lived experiences, leadership practice, listening skills and their application in modern-day educational settings.

The Cook Islands migration to Aotearoa New Zealand

The Cook Islands is situated to the northeast of Aotearoa New Zealand. Fifteen islands constitute the Cook Islands and they are distributed throughout the region and divided into two groups: the Southern Cook Islands and the Northern Cook Islands. Perhaps the most well-known island, and the home of the capital city of Avarua, is Rarotonga where the largest population of residents live. Other islands include Aitutaki, Mitiaro, Atiu, Mangaia, Palmerston, Manuae (uninhabited), Takutea (uninhabited), Mauke, Penrhyn, Rakahanga, Manihiki, Pukapuka, Nassau and Suvarrow.

The Cook Islands is an independent nation that operates under a free association agreement with New Zealand. Under this arrangement, the Cook Islands can govern itself and enact its own laws. However, New Zealand handles external affairs and defence matters in consultation with the Cook Islands Government. Cook Islanders are also entitled to New Zealand citizenship by default, safeguarded under the constitution. The languages spoken in the Cook Islands are Te Reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani and English, with many of the islands having different dialects.

Today about 80,000 Cook Islanders live in Aotearoa and another 22,000 live in Australia. This is significantly more than the 18,000 estimated to live in the Cook Islands. It is a well-known fact that Cook Islanders have been migrating to Aotearoa New Zealand in considerable numbers since the early years of World War II (Hooper, 1961). During World War II, labour shortages in Aotearoa New Zealand prompted domestic labour importation from its colonial dependency on the Cook Islands (Anderson, 2015). Women worked in factories or as domestic staff for wealthy European families, and many married men from Aotearoa New Zealand (Walrond, 2015). In the 1950s, the migration to Aotearoa New Zealand was initially comprised of Cook Islanders who were young and single, but this soon included family groups. The migration process was made more accessible by establishing the Rarotonga International Airport in the 1970s. There was a significant increase in Cook Islanders going to New Zealand for greater job opportunities and a perceived lifestyle. Today the migration story continues; the economy of the Cook Islands is based mainly on tourism (80% of the country's revenue), with minor exports comprising tropical and citrus fruit. Manufacturing activities are limited to fruit processing, clothing and handicrafts. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping the world greatly impacted the Cook Island economy. In addition, the low tourism on the island caused a decrease in local jobs and the population dwindled significantly during this time, with young Cook Islanders looking for work opportunities abroad (mainly in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia). The waves of migration, past and present, continue to influence the Pacific story, and now more than 60% of the Pacific population are born in Aotearoa (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2021). While Pacific peoples are minorities in terms of world population, they are considered to belong to one of the most 'desirable' regions of the world (Baba et al., 2004).

The Cook Islands Māori are the indigenous Polynesian people of the Cook Islands, even though there are currently more Cook Islands Māori residing in Aotearoa New Zealand than in their homeland. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the term 'Pasifika' is used as an administrative category to describe Pacific Island migrants. This includes people from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Rotuman, Samoa, Tokelau, Tuvalu and Tonga (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2021). 'Pasifika' refers to the diverse people from the Pacific region who now reside in Aotearoa, but maintain family and cultural ties to Pacific Island nations (Ministry of Education, 2018). Burnett (2012) clarifies this further in the following way – 'Pacific' relates to the Pacific region, whereas 'Pasifika' pertains to Pacific peoples living in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Pasifika peoples should

not be viewed as a homogenous group . Unfortunately, the term Pacific Islander promotes a misconception of a homogenous migrant community (Mara et al., 1994). Wendt-Samu (2006) notes that each of these groups has its own distinct social structures, values, perspectives, attitudes and histories, setting them apart. Pasifika peoples do not operate in absolute consensus; there is distinct richness and beauty within each Pacific island (enua), village ('ōire) and family (kōpū). Pasifika peoples make up the fourth-largest major ethnic group in Aotearoa New Zealand, following European, Māori and Asian ethnic groups (Pasifika Proud, 2016). The challenge with the term 'Pasifika' often assumes a Tongan or Samoan perspective, these being the dominant Pasifika cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand. Thus unintentionally silencing the voices of the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Rotuman, Tokelau and Tuvalu peoples.

The Pasifika population in Aotearoa New Zealand is experiencing significant growth. Despite their desire to migrate to this country for better work and education opportunities, many Pasifika peoples continue to face marginalisation within the education system, leading to disparities and inequities similar to their Māori counterparts (Education Review Office, 2012; Oliver, 2012; Surtees et al., 2021). Furthermore, despite the significant population of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand, the representation of Pasifika teachers in the education system remains low, with only 4% of teachers identifying as Pasifika in 2020 (New Zealand Government, 2021b), compared to 10% of students in schools of Pasifika descent (New Zealand Government, 2021a). Pasifika peoples are said to be the fastest-growing ethnic group in the country (Averill & Rimoni, 2019), with one in five New Zealand learners projected to be of Pasifika heritage by 2050.

In today's diverse and rapidly changing world, adopting culturally-sustaining leadership practices and skills is more critical than ever for the education system. As the Pasifika population in Aotearoa New Zealand continues to grow, educational leaders must have the knowledge, skills and awareness to fully support diverse learners, staff and diverse communities. Leadership will involve recognising and valuing the cultural identities, experiences and perspectives of leaders, learners, staff and communities. The skillset required of leaders today and tomorrow is changing; the aim of this study is to explore the impact listening has on improving the leadership practices of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools.

Listening as a leadership skill

Listening has been described as an essential communication skill (Knight, 2015; Spataro & Bloch, 2018). Listening is a skill that requires attentiveness and engagement. Listening is considered a holistic experience rather than a series of discrete skills (Lipetz et al., 2020). The listening process is divided into three categories (sensing, processing and responding) drawn from the active-empathetic listening scale (Drollinger et al., 2006). The importance of listening with presence is emphasised in indigenous cultures. For example, elders in Māori culture possess the

ability to listen deeply and with wisdom. They refrain from interrupting or imposing their views on others and instead seek common ground among diverse perspectives (Spiller et al., 2015). Furthermore, Mead (2016) adds that in the context of the hapū chief's role, listening to the opinions of others is a crucial step before making collective decisions. In summary, effective listening is a refined skill that necessitates the listener's focus and involvement. In conclusion, it can be deduced that effective leaders keenly observe, listen, absorb and interpret both verbal and non-verbal messages to understand what is said and what is not said (Wolvin, 2012).

Listening is a critical leadership skill in educational settings, as it helps leaders understand the needs and concerns of students, teachers and other stakeholders. It is helpful in identifying problems and building solutions, fostering an inclusive culture, and modelling effective communication skills. Additionally, this research focuses on the perspectives of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools and how listening impacts their leadership practice. The literature on listening as a leadership skill suggests that it is an underrated but crucial skill that leaders should possess (Kluger et al., 2018). This research further explores the listening process, including the skills required of a listening leader, and how it impacts leadership.

Research purpose

This research aims to investigate the impact of listening on the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. While practical communication skills are crucial for leadership, previous research has primarily focused on speaking skills, somewhat neglecting the significance of listening as a leadership skill. Thus, this study aims to address the knowledge gap by examining how listening improves the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders. In addition, this research aims to explore how lived experiences influence the values of these leaders and which listening skills are essential for effective leadership. By having a Cook Islander engage in Cook Island research, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the significance of listening in the leadership practices of Cook Island leaders. Ultimately, this research seeks to bridge the gap in knowledge by exploring the role of listening in the leadership practices of Cook Island leaders in primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand.

My personal and professional reasons for undertaking this research are based on my extensive experience in education. I have been involved in education since 1996 and have embraced a range of leadership positions during this time. As a leader, I am comfortable speaking in front of groups, giving advice and sharing my ideas. I have learned over the years that effective communication is about exchanging ideas, thoughts and opinions. Communication is a reciprocal process, a 'to and fro', a dance. Listening, really listening, creates the exchange aspect of communication; receiving and understanding the other person's message as intended is the responsibility of both parties in the communication dance. I started my leadership and executive

coaching training in 2016 and quickly learned that of all the skills I needed to acquire to be an effective coach, an effective leader, a better person, wife and mother – listening was the skill I needed to improve on the most.

Significance of the study

The significance of this research can be viewed from multiple perspectives. First, this research aims to investigate the impact of listening on the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools. Given that the majority of Cook Islanders currently live in Aotearoa New Zealand, the findings of this study could contribute to the body of knowledge from Cook Islanders about Cook Islanders for Cook Islanders.

Secondly, the study's objectives aim to explore how lived experience influences how Cook Island leaders value listening and identify the listening skills essential for effective leadership. This aspect of the study contributes to the knowledge of culturally-responsive leadership, which encourages the incorporation of culturally-specific practices into leadership approaches.

Thirdly, the research's focus on listening skills has broader implications for leadership and practices beyond the Cook Island community. Practical communication skills, including listening, are vital for leaders in all contexts. The study's findings could contribute to the development of best practices in leadership professional learning programmes. This study's aims have practical and theoretical implications for leaders in the education sector and contribute to advancing our understanding of effective leadership.

Research aim and questions

This research examines the impact ‘listening’ has on improving the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools.

The following research questions underpinned the research:

1. In what ways does listening improve the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools?
2. In what ways has lived experience influenced the way Cook Island leaders value listening?
3. Which listening skills do Cook Island leaders believe are important for effective leadership?

Overview of the research design

It is important to explain the research design to provide the context for this study, including the research ontology, epistemology and paradigm. Ontology explores beliefs about the nature of reality; this study is situated in interpretivism, which assumes that realities are multiple and socially constructed. Furthermore, an indigenous epistemology was employed to highlight indigenous ways of thinking and knowing as critical ways for retaining the culture and reconstructing and revaluing indigenous conceptions of knowledge. As such, this research is embedded within a Pacific research paradigm that centres the importance of cultural, social, spiritual, emotional and linguistic realities. The Tivaevae framework (Maua-Hodges, 2001) also represents Cook Island's epistemological and ontological worldviews using the processes used to create a tivaevae as a metaphor for research design. However, for this study, the Tivaevae research framework was selected as the methodological framework.

Participants for this research were selected based on the following criteria: they self-identified as Cook Island descendants and identified as formal leaders in an Aotearoa New Zealand primary school, e.g. Deputy Principal, Team Leader, Principal, Tumuaki or Tumuaki tuarua. They also indicated their interest and gave their consent to participate in this research. Data were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews using narrative inquiry and the Turanga framework (Mitaera, 2019), a model developed in the social development sector. The orama (vision) of the framework is the optimum ora'anga mou (well-being) of the kopu tangata (people). The framework is comprised of three elements: (1) Akono'anga Māori, Cook Islands culture; (2) No teia tuatau, of this time; and (3) Tā'anga'anga'ia, put to practice. The Turanga framework process aligns with this research's overall aim – to listen to the stories of Cook Island leaders in New Zealand primary schools to better understand their listening perspectives and their impact on their leadership practice. For the purpose of this research, a thematic model of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used. The primary focus was to look/hear/listen to all of the narratives shared by the participants and generate key themes.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organised into six chapters as follows:

Chapter One serves to introduce the research study, providing a brief background and context for the research and outlining its overarching purpose. The chapter goes on to detail the study's significance, research aims and questions, and research design overview.

Chapter Two features a literature review that surveys existing literature and research related to the research area. The review identified three key themes: (i) Pasifika leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand; (ii) Educational leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand; and (iii) The listening leader.

Chapter Three provides a rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology and the semi-structured interview as the data collection method is explained. The chapter also covers the data analysis procedures used, considerations of validity, reliability and ethical concerns.

Chapter Four showcases the research findings from three tuatua (stories) from each participant in the study. The chapter identifies the findings generated from the data collection.

Chapter Five presents a discussion of findings based on the identified themes. A visual representation is used to show the relationship between the research question, the findings and the literature. In this section the 'Ei Katu listening and leadership model is also shared.

Chapter Six completes the thesis with a summary of the overall findings of the research study. Additionally, the chapter examines the study's strengths and limitations. The final section of the chapter comprises recommendations for both leadership and listening practice, as well as exploring potential avenues for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature review

Introduction

This chapter examines the literature reviewed in relation to the overarching focus of this thesis – Improving leadership practice through ‘listening’: The perspective of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools. Three main themes emerged from the literature: (i) Pasifika leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand; (ii) Educational leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand; and (iii) The listening leader. These three themes were chosen because of their significance to the research aim. The themes and topics traversed in this chapter are shown in Figure 2.1: *Literature review organisation*.

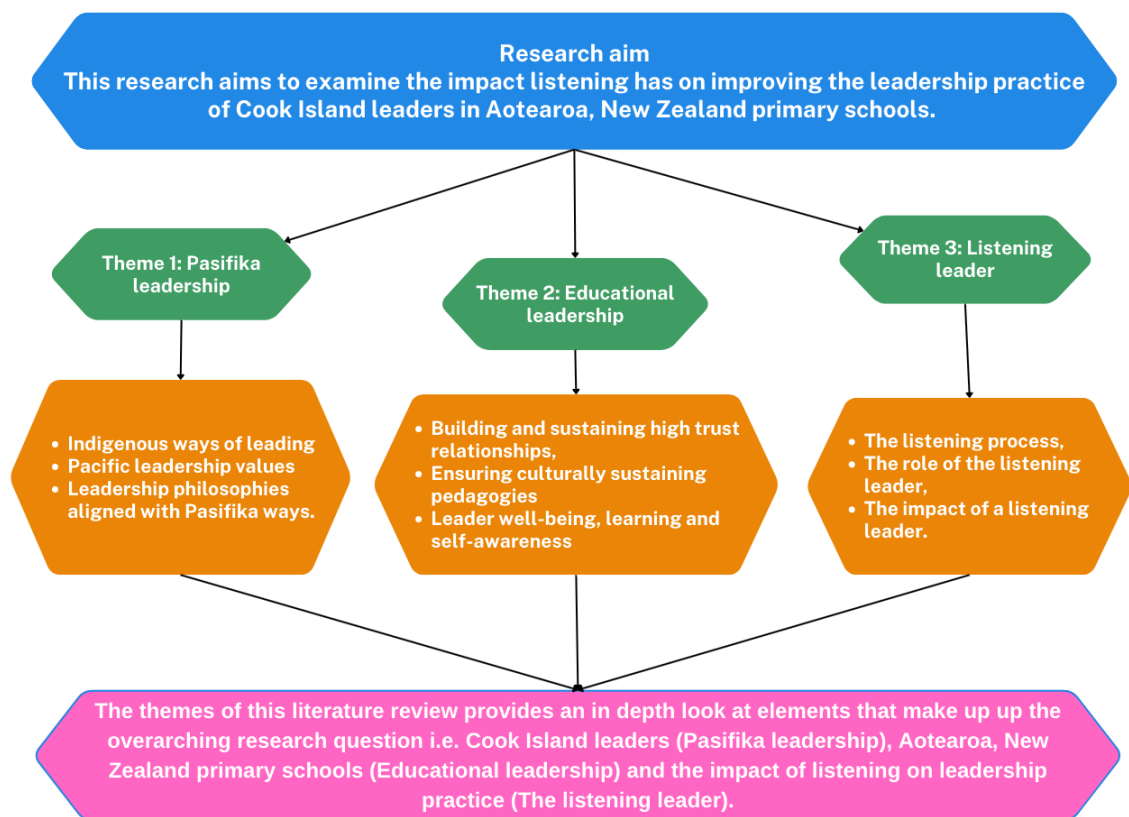


Figure 2.1: *Literature review organisation*

The first theme identified in this literature review is Pasifika leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand. Although this research study focuses on the perspectives of Cook Island leaders, there is limited literature focusing specifically on this. Therefore, the broader literature about Pasifika leadership and indigenous leadership has been called on for this review to contextualise the role of Cook Island leaders in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system. This section of the literature review initially draws attention to indigenous ways of leading, which draw on ancestral traditions and practices passed down through generations. Leadership values in Pacific nations are diverse,

but some common values will be discussed in this review. Finally, this section will discuss Pasifika leadership models that draw on significant cultural artefacts important to Pacific peoples.

The second section of this literature review will focus on educational leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand. Leadership in education presents unique challenges because it involves leading and managing a complex organisation with multiple stakeholders, including students, parents, whānau, teachers, staff and the wider community. Leaders must also navigate the ever-changing landscape of education policy, curriculum development and teaching practices. Traditionally, educational leadership was seen as the responsibility of one person, usually the principal. However, there has been a shift towards the belief that everyone can be a leader and that leadership is a collective effort. The areas discussed in this section are focused on effective leadership practices, including building and sustaining high-trust relationships, ensuring culturally-sustaining pedagogies, and leaders attending to their learning, well-being and self-awareness.

The final theme of this literature review centres on the concept of a ‘listening leader’. Communication is considered a highly praised skill among leaders, encompassing both the ability to speak clearly and persuasively, as well as to listen attentively. Despite the acknowledged importance of effective communication in leadership, the crucial role of listening is often overlooked. Listening is not typically seen as a necessary leadership skill. Listening does not receive as much attention in discussions of leadership as other skills such as speaking, decision-making and visioning. This literature review section investigates three key areas: the listening process, the functions of a listening leader, and the impact of a listening leader.

Pasifika leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand

To understand the listening practices of Cook Island leaders, it is first important to understand indigenous leaders’ leadership practices, values and philosophies within which the activity of listening is located. Despite the number of Pasifika leaders in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, the study of Pasifika leadership remains an under-researched area (Matapo, 2017). One of the reasons for this is the lack of an agreed definition and understanding about what constitutes this leadership. However, despite this challenge, three key areas within this theme address this challenge: (i) indigenous ways of leading; (ii) Pacific leadership values; and (iii) leadership philosophies aligned with Pasifika ways.

Indigenous ways of leading

This section explores indigenous ways of leading, highlighting indigenous and Pacific communities' unique and inherent approaches. Indigenous ways of leading are deeply embedded in the fabric of ancestral traditions and practices (tikanga), passed down through countless

generations, and remain an integral part of indigenous and Pacific communities' cultural identity and way of life (Evans & Sinclair, 2016). According to Allen et al. (2022), indigenous and Pacific researchers and practitioners have been actively striving to create a space within institutions that allows for the challenging of colonial hierarchies of knowledge and promotes the recognition and integration of indigenous ways of knowing, being, seeing, doing and feeling. This effort reflects a growing recognition of the importance of honouring and preserving the unique cultural heritage and perspectives of Pacific Island communities and the crucial role that traditional leadership structures have.

In Samoa, the structure of leadership is informed by Fa'a Matai, a collectivist indigenous political ('chiefly') system. A matai is appointed to each family and is responsible for overseeing, protecting and looking after all family members (Manu & Enari, 2021). In the Cook Islands, a similar communal approach is enforced through ariki (high chief), with each ariki a ruler of a Ngati (tribe). The ariki, mata'iapo (head of a sub-tribe), rangatira (leader) and their tribes are traditionally considered the backbone of the nation (Sissons, 1994). In Niue, the head of the magafoa (family), a patu (elder) is appointed to make decisions for the extended family. In more recent times, this has extended to the selection of village representatives through voting. In Tokelau, village-elected faipule (leaders) collectively represent their people (Kalolo, 2007). In all instances, the matai (Samoa), the ariki (Cook Islands), the patu (Niue) and the faipule (Tokelau) are appointed and/or elected to leadership positions where they are encouraged to make decisions for the benefit of the family and their people. Collectivism is an integral aspect of these countries' leadership styles. The Pacific nation that is widely known to operate outside of the collectivist model is Tonga, which has been ruled by a monarch for over 150 years without the people having any say in who leads the country.

Traditionally, the leadership of Pacific nations is firmly rooted in hierarchical systems. However, as Sanga (2005) argues, leadership is ultimately driven by communal purpose. For many in the Pacific nations, a communal purpose includes the fundamentals such as shelter, food, relationships, cultural richness, peace, faith and spirituality. Collectivism is a crucial component of the Pacific leadership style and is deeply rooted in Pacific Island communities' cultural and social values. At its core, collectivism emphasises communal values, relationships, and responsibilities over individual goals and achievements. Pacific Island leaders are expected to prioritise the needs and interests of their community over their own personal ambitions and to work collaboratively with others to achieve common goals. Collectivism is just one of the values important to Pacific nations. While Pasifika leadership values are not fixed or uniform, they reflect the Pacific region's diversity and complexity. The following section will describe other values important to Pacific ways of being and doing.

Pasifika leadership values and models

Pasifika leadership values and models are important for reflecting the unique cultural heritage and way of life for Pasifika communities and provide a framework for leadership deeply rooted in Pacific peoples' collective experience and identity. As Pasifika peoples are not a universal or homogenous group, the values important to different Pacific nations and subgroups within these nations vary. Consequently, there is no global list of Pasifika leadership values that are fundamental to the way of life for Pacific peoples (Anae et al., 2001; Rimoni et al., 2021). While there is no universal list of values important to all Pacific leaders, a number of values are shared across a wide range of Pacific groups. Common values across Pacific groups include humility (Talení et al., 2018); service (Manu & Enari, 2021); respect, especially respect for elders (McLeod, 2007); and reciprocity (Chu, 2009; Maiava-zajkowski, 2021). Further to these, other values such as collaboration (Hattori, 2016); spirituality (Tiatia, 2008); loyalty (Hattori, 2016; Talení et al., 2018); and cultural identity (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2014) are considered to be important for Pacific groups. In contemporary times, leaders have called on these values in sectors such as education, health and social services to ensure that work carried out is culturally responsive (Allen et al., 2022; Hay & Mafile'o, 2022). Pacific values have been used by Pacific peoples to create Pacific models and frameworks designed to address specific challenges and issues faced by Pacific communities, and to make Pacific ways of being, doing and knowing more accessible to non-Pacific people.

Pacific leadership models include, but are not limited to, the Fonofale model (Pulotu-Endemann, 2010), which refers to the significance of the fale (house) in Samoan culture, the Tivaevae model (Maua-Hodges, 2001) which pertains to an embroidered quilt and is important to the Cook Island culture, traditions and ways of being, the Kakala model (Fua, 2014) which relates to the garland of fragrances (flowers, leaves, plants) in Tongan culture, and the Vaka Atafaga model (Kupa, 2009) which refers to the essential use of vaka (canoe) in the Tokelau way of living. These models were developed to incorporate Pacific values and knowledge systems into the analysis and decision-making process. These models can provide a more holistic and culturally-relevant approach to addressing complex leadership issues by integrating Pacific values, knowledge and perspectives. Each of these models draws on significant cultural artefacts and/or metaphors important to the life and lives of Pacific peoples. These models all emphasise what is fundamentally important to the identified Pacific nations. Pacific frameworks are important for Pacific leadership because they provide a culturally-relevant, holistic, communal and sustainable approach to leadership that prioritises the needs and interests of the people, respects cultural values and traditions, and emphasises collaboration and partnership.

Leadership philosophies aligned with Pacific cultures

Leadership philosophies are a set of beliefs, values and principles that guide the behaviour and decision-making of leaders. They provide a framework for understanding the purpose and nature of leadership and offer guidance on how leaders can best influence and inspire their followers. Pasifika leadership behaviours and interactions are informed by Pasifika leadership values. There does not seem to be a consensus on Pasifika leadership philosophies. Although conclusions can be drawn with regard to indigenous and Pasifika ways of being, doing and knowing, values such as service and collectiveness are considered essential for Pacific leaders. This section will review leadership philosophies that seem to align closely with Pasifika values and indigenous and Pasifika ways of being, doing and knowing. These philosophies are ‘servant leadership’ and ‘collective leadership’. Listening is important for servant and collective leadership as it allows leaders to understand the needs and perspectives of their people, leading to more effective and collaborative decision-making.

Servant leadership is a leadership philosophy founded on serving others before oneself. It is a people-focused approach that prioritises the needs and well-being of the group, rather than the interests of the leader (Peyton & Ross, 2021; Rimoni et al., 2021). A servant leader creates a culture of trust, empathy and compassion. For Pacific peoples, service is a fundamental value passed down and taught for generations. The Niuean proverb ‘Tagata ne ai kiva e tau lima. Nakai fai tonuhia ke fai talahauaga’ translates as ‘Those whose hands are not dirty should not have a say in important village matters’. In essence, this means that to earn the right to have their voices heard, aspiring leaders should work in the community and serve their people. This endorses that ‘service’ is a leadership value integral to the Pacific nations and for Pacific peoples. Servant leaders place the needs of other people first, giving to others without expecting anything in return. This is an important distinction – that servant leadership is not just about serving others; it is about serving others while leading. This means that servant leaders do not just satisfy the needs of their followers (Liao et al., 2021) but create a culture of trust (Brewer, 2010). Servant leaders focus on how to help their people in their development, growth and goals rather than outcomes and results (Carter & Baghurst, 2014). However, Liao et al. (2021) warn that ‘one-way’ service can have a depleting impact on servant leaders. They suggest that expressing gratitude in exchange for servant leadership will help replenish leaders.

Collective leadership is a form of leadership where decision-making, problem-solving and responsibility are shared among a group rather than one single leader or a few individuals at the top. Collective leadership is complex, relational and fluid (Contractor et al., 2012; Piggot-Irvine et al., 2021). The interplay between the leader’s role and community members’ collective contributions influenced the leadership dynamic (Empson et al., 2023; Piggot-Irvine et al., 2021). In a collective leadership model, members of the group are empowered to participate actively in the decision-making process and contribute their unique perspectives and expertise to help the

group achieve its goals. This approach emphasises collaboration, communication and consensus-building, to ensure that all members of the group are engaged and invested in the greater good of the people and the group. Collective leadership philosophy seems to align with traditional Pacific practices. Collective leadership practices have a deep history in indigenous communities. For many indigenous communities, collective leadership has been a way of life throughout the millennia (Spiller et al., 2020, p. 516). Traditional Pacific practices such as the creation of tapa (bark cloth found in Tonga, Samoa, Fiji), tivaevae (Cook Island quilt) kakala (garland of flowers) and kahoā hihi (shell necklace) all require collective leadership. At the core of collective leadership, the common goal is for a group of people to work towards a shared objective. Traditional practices like making tapa, tivaevae, kakala and kahoā are often communal activities that involve many people working together. In some Pacific communities, the process of making traditional arts and crafts is seen as a way to strengthen social bonds and promote cooperation and collaboration among group members. These practices demonstrate the principles of collective leadership, highlighting the importance of individual contributions to a collective effort, as each person's skills and knowledge are valued and used to create something that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Servant leadership emphasises service to others, putting others' needs first, and empowering others to achieve their full potential. This approach to leadership is characterised by humility, empathy and a focus on the greater good. In the context of Pasifika leadership, serving others is also a central value, with leaders often taking on roles of service to their community. Collective leadership is founded on collaboration, shared decision-making, and the idea that leadership can emerge from any member of a group at any time. Both servant leadership and collective leadership seemingly align with traditional Pasifika leadership practices in their emphasis on collaboration, service and community-building. These philosophies also focus on the importance of relationships and the idea that leadership is not just about individual achievement, but about working together towards a common goal for the benefit of all. Further research and literature into Pasifika leadership would not only support a deeper understanding of leadership in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, but would support aspiring and emerging Pasifika leaders in their identity within Pasifika leadership. The principles of Pasifika leadership can be applied to various contexts, including educational leadership, to promote collaborative and community-driven approaches that prioritise the well-being and success of all learning community members. The following section will explore educational leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Educational leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand

Educational leadership refers to the process of leading and managing educational institutions and primarily focuses on the teaching and learning of students (Youngs, 2020). Educational leaders traditionally hold a variety of roles, including principals (tumuaki), deputy principals (tumuaki

tuarua), syndicate leaders and team leaders, among others. Their responsibilities may include setting educational goals and objectives, developing and implementing policies and programmes, overseeing budgets and resources, managing staff and personnel, and ensuring students receive high-quality educational experiences (Connolly et al., 2019). Effective educational leadership is essential for creating learning environments that promote student success, foster a positive school culture, and support educators' professional growth and development. This section of the literature review identifies what is meant by 'educational leadership' in Aotearoa New Zealand. Educational leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand, in collaboration with teachers, staff, students, parents, whānau and community, focus on improving the quality of education and equitable learning outcomes of all students (Leithwood et al., 2020).

In New Zealand primary schools, the leadership structure typically consists of a principal (tumuaki) who is the overall leader of the school, and a team of deputy principals or assistant principals (tumuaki tuarua) who support the principal in managing and leading the school. In addition, there may be team leaders who oversee specific subject areas or year levels, and classroom teachers who also play a leadership role in their own classrooms and teams. However, there has been a growing emphasis on leadership in New Zealand schools, which involves sharing leadership responsibilities and decision-making with a wider range of stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, whanau and community members. Wylie and McKinley (2018) describe this in the following way: "Leadership in educational organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand is essentially influencing others to act, think, or feel in ways that advance the values, vision and goals of the organisation, and the learning and flourishing of each of its learners" (p. 3). This leadership approach is considered collaborative and empowering, fostering a shared sense of ownership and responsibility for the school's success.

A plethora of core capabilities within educational leadership is considered important for educational leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, for the purpose of this literature review, three areas will be discussed. These capabilities were drawn from the work of Wylie and McKinley (2018), who identified nine leadership capabilities in total. However, the identified leadership capabilities of building and sustaining high-trust relationships, ensuring culturally-sustaining pedagogies and leaders attending to their own learning, well-being and self-awareness are considered relevant to the overarching theme of this thesis. The practical skills required in developing high-trust relationships and being culturally responsive and sustainable in the education profession through attending to their own learning, well-being and self-awareness are all conducive to improving the practice of Cook Island leaders and creating an inclusive and equitable educational environment. In the following sections, these capabilities will be discussed in more depth.

Building and sustaining high-trust relationships

Trust is considered to be one of the most important factors central to leadership (Rezaei et al., 2012; Townsend & MacBeath, 2011). Building trust and sustaining high-trust relationships are considered key capabilities of effective educational leadership (Wylie & McKinley, 2018). The benefits of trust have a wide-reaching impact on educational institutions, including increased staff retention, increased psychological safety, and increased collaboration, i.e. sharing of practices and learning from others (Karacabey et al., 2022). Trust, however, is a problematic word used to describe a range of emotions and behaviours. Bryk and Schneider (2003) define 'trust' in educational leadership as the "connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance the education and welfare of students" (p .44). This definition aligns with the overarching purpose of educational leadership – to focus on improving the quality of education and the equitable learning outcomes of all students.

There are two trust models that are grounded in research and have influenced the way trust is seen in schools. In the first model Bryk and Schneider (2003) consider the following elements essential for trust: respect, personal regard for others, competence and integrity. In the second model, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) identify benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability and competence as crucial elements to creating and sustaining trust in schools and organisations. What can be learned from both models is that trust is not straightforward but rather complex and fluid. Both trust models are grounded in empirical research and offer a framework for understanding the role of trust in schools. While the specific elements identified in each model differ slightly, they highlight the importance of competence, integrity and personal relationships in building and maintaining trust. In both models, the notion of competence is considered vital for trust. In the case of educational leadership, this translates to the belief that leaders and colleagues are competent leaders. Trust founded on competence engenders confidence that a person (leader) can be depended upon to make decisions, and has extensive knowledge in education and valuable information to share (Abrams et al., 2003). When leaders are seen as incompetent and unable to manage day-to-day operations and/or lead in a way that teachers believe is an effective leadership practice, competence as a trust facet is emphasised.

There seems to be limited literature referring to trust in educational institutions within Aotearoa New Zealand. However, Thornton (2021), in her research that looked at educational leaders' leadership throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, identified five effective leadership practices that will strengthen trusting relationships within schools. Of these practices, the practice most relevant to this thesis was communicating frequently and leading two-way communication providing a forum for feedback. Thornton's (2021) research examining educational leaders' practice throughout the COVID-19 pandemic affirms that trust is built by leaders when people feel listened to and involved. Trust is also crucial in culturally-sustaining leadership because it is essential for building and maintaining positive relationships among community or organisation

members. Culturally-sustaining leaders who demonstrate trustworthiness and integrity are more likely to earn the trust of their followers, which can lead to increased engagement and collaboration.

Culturally-sustaining leadership

Culturally-sustaining leadership is a concept that emerged from the field of education and is rooted in critical race theory and culturally-relevant pedagogy. The idea seeks to shift the focus of educational leadership away from deficit-based approaches that view students and communities' cultural and linguistic backgrounds as obstacles to learning, and towards approaches that recognise and value the diverse cultural and linguistic resources that students and communities bring to the educational institution. Culturally-sustaining leadership aims to create learning environments that affirm and build upon students' cultural identities, knowledge and experiences, while promoting academic success and critical consciousness (Paris, 2012, 2021).

Culturally-sustaining leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand stems from a deep commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi – Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document (Santamaría et al., 2015). Effective leaders in Aotearoa acknowledge the significance of this document and the overarching intention of the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Culturally-sustaining leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand seek to honour the Treaty's principles of partnership, participation and protection by working collaboratively with Māori and other cultural groups to ensure that their perspectives and needs are incorporated into decision-making processes. This approach involves creating spaces for diverse voices to be heard, building relationships based on mutual trust and respect, and working to address the ongoing impacts of colonisation and cultural marginalisation. This means demonstrating a deep commitment to “Māori enjoying and achieving educational success as Māori” (Santamaría et al., 2015; Shiller, 2020), and incorporating Māori values, beliefs and practices into leadership practices and decision-making processes to create more inclusive and culturally-responsive environments. On a wider scale, culturally-sustaining leadership ensures that every person has their own cultural identity, language and values maintained, sustained and revitalised, while simultaneously ensuring competence in the dominant culture.

The recent launch of Aotearoa New Zealand's histories (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2021) and the emphasis on local curriculum (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2019) is a move towards a commitment to culturally-sustaining pedagogies. It is a directive to ensure that Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) is front and centre for Māori students and all students of Aotearoa New Zealand. However, the documents alone will not ensure culturally-sustaining leadership. Leadership practices considered essential for Māori and Pasifika student success are: culturally-responsive pedagogy, inclusion of all learners, ongoing professional development around teaching and learning, student voice, using data to support decisions around teaching and learning, and powerful connections with parents, families and communities (Singh, 2018;

Toumu'a et al., 2014). It is the leader's responsibility to ensure that schools are committed to culturally-sustaining practices. In culturally-sustaining leadership, leaders do not compromise their identity simply because they are an educational leader (Hohepa, 2013). In fact, culturally-sustaining leaders understand that bringing their authentic and whole selves to the leadership role, including their own knowledge, culture and language, is vital in making ethical and moral decisions for all students (Shiller, 2020).

Culturally-sustaining leaders believe it is essential to bring their authentic and whole selves to the leadership role, including their own knowledge, culture and language, to make ethical and moral decisions for all students. This approach recognises that leadership is not a one-size-fits-all approach and that leaders must be responsive to the diverse needs and identities of the students and communities they serve. By bringing their own languages, knowledge, culture, critical thought and behaviours to the leadership role, culturally-sustaining leaders can create more inclusive and culturally-responsive environments for all students and communities (Newcomer & Cowin, 2020). Moreover, by being authentic and bringing their whole selves to the leadership role, culturally-sustaining leaders can build relationships of trust and respect with the communities they serve (Hattori, 2016). Culturally-sustaining leaders recognise the importance of cultural diversity and responsiveness and seek to create inclusive and equitable school environments where all the school community can thrive.

Leader well-being, learning and self-awareness

Educational leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand is focused on improving the quality of education and ensuring equitable outcomes for all students in collaboration with teachers, staff, whānau and the community. Wylie and McKinley (2018) identified nine leadership capabilities intended to provide high-level guidelines for leadership development in Aotearoa New Zealand. Leaders attending to their own learning and well-being was identified as an essential capability. Leaders who ensure that they challenge their own thinking and keep growing their knowledge and who actively attend to their own well-being are more equipped to sustain and maintain their leadership roles and are more likely to reduce stress, feel more confidence and competence, and model healthy behaviours influencing the sustainability of engaged, effective and satisfied leaders.

The role of the leader in schools has become increasingly complex in the 21st century. Wylie (2020) raises the challenge of school leader workload and talks to the complex nature and significant responsibility placed on schools leaders. The recent world-wide pandemic (COVID-19) has put immense pressure on leaders and leadership teams in schools. In the most recent principal occupational health, safety and well-being survey (Riley et al., 2020), almost 70% of New Zealand school leaders were reported to work more than 50 hours per week and 25% work more than 60 hours. The survey summarises that too many leaders are working hours that place

them at increased risk of experiencing adverse psychological and physical health outcomes. A literature review carried out by Kwatubnan and Molaodi (2021) identified leadership styles that were conducive to leader well-being. Ultimately, ensuring the school community felt a sense of belonging and inclusion was important, as well as establishing a collaborative culture. This aligns with the principles of collective leadership (detailed in the previous section). Further to this, Kwatubnan and Molaodi (2021) identified distributed leadership as a key leadership style for leader well-being and effectiveness in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world. Distributed leadership promotes the sharing of power amongst the school community and, that while the leader is an important figure, their ability to ensure ownership and direction of the school is shared by the leadership team and school community will support long-term leader well-being.

Leaders influence outcomes on multiple levels, which is why organisations invest in leader development programmes to improve the critical leadership capabilities of individual leaders (Urrila, 2022). Leaders in a good well-being state tend to be more inclined towards learning. Effective leader learning relies on the leader's self-awareness. Leaders who possess a high level of self-awareness are more likely to be effective in their leadership roles. This idea is supported by various research studies, which have found that self-awareness is a crucial component of effective leadership (Carden et al., 2022; Crook et al., 2021; Urrila, 2022). Leaders who possess self-awareness can assess how their identity and experiences influence their actions and decisions. Leaders recognise that growth and learning are essential components of effective leadership, and practising self-awareness helps guide this growth (London et al., 2023). Self-awareness is closely linked to being a good listening leader. Leaders with high self-awareness are better equipped to listen actively and empathetically to their team members (Hallberg & Santiago, 2020). When leaders are self-aware, they understand their emotions, biases and tendencies. This awareness allows them to manage their reactions and respond to others in an effective and appropriate way. It also helps them to be more attuned to the emotions and needs of their team members, allowing them to listen actively and respond in a supportive and empathetic way. The next section will explore literature related to the listening leader in more depth.

The listening leader

This section explores literature in relation to listening as a leadership skill. Listening as a practice is nestled in the overall field of communication. A considerable body of literature highlights communication as an effective leadership practice (Banwart, 2020; Cunningham et al., 2020; Zentner, 2016). Banwart (2020) confirms that "effective listening as a communicative act is considered central to effective leadership" (p .90). Listening leaders understand that effective communication is a two-way process and that listening is just as important as speaking. A listening leader actively listens to their team members and values their input. Listening leaders are

crucial to building strong teams and fostering effective communication. It is interesting to note further that the communication studies field has historically focused more on the individual 'leader' than the concept of 'leadership' itself. This is not surprising, given that the roots of the field lie in public speaking and oratory (Banwart, 2020). Across a range of disciplines (business, counselling, health, hospitality and tourism), research suggests that listening is an underrated skill required for: the development of strong relationships (Lloyd et al., 2017); leaders who are concerned with the well-being and motivation of their people (Kriz et al., 2021); and the growth of the organisation (Baker et al., 2019). Despite undertaking an extensive search of the current literature related to the significance of listening as a leadership skill, the literature appears to be limited. This, by default, highlights the significance of this research study reported in this thesis as a contribution to the scholarship of listening and the impact this can have on leadership practice. The elements discussed in this section will certainly support the understanding of listening as a leadership practice and will highlight the following areas: the listening process; the role of the listening leader; and the impact of a listening leader.

The listening process

Although listening is viewed by some writers as not needing any specific behaviours (Jones et al., 2019; Lipetz et al., 2020), other writers separate listening into discrete skills (Drollinger et al., 2006; Nemeč et al., 2017). The elements of sensing, processing and responding are outlined below. The listening process is not just hearing what someone says; it involves a complex process of decoding and interpreting the message, paying attention to non-verbal cues, and giving feedback to the speaker. This section aims to highlight the various skills required of the listening leader. The skills fall into three broad categories: sensing, processing and responding are drawn from the active-empathetic listening scale (Drollinger et al., 2006). This is not to say all listening skills listed below sit in the active-empathetic listening scale; rather, the three categories are useful for broadly categorising each skill.

Sensing

Sensing is one of the key elements of effective listening. Sensing in listening refers to the ability to pick up on non-verbal cues, such as tone of voice, facial expressions and body language, as well as the emotional undertones and subtext of what is being communicated. Sensing in listening requires paying attention, not only to the words being spoken, but also to the overall context and the emotions that are being expressed or implied. Sensing occurs when there are strong relationships between the leader and their people and amongst the group in general. Leaders who are present (Burmansah et al., 2020) give their full attention, and are accessible and available to those they are leading, and tend to develop positive relationships with these people (Tate, 2003). Leaders who know their people well learn through listening. When leaders listen to their people they can gain insights into their team members' perspectives, experiences and needs. This, in turn, can help leaders better understand how to support and motivate their people by learning

about peoples' strengths, weaknesses, goals and aspirations. This information can be used to provide targeted feedback, guidance and professional development opportunities, which can help team members grow and thrive in their roles.

Sensing is about being mindful of the level of engagement when particular topics are discussed and to hear the real meaning in the words used. "Effective leaders observe, hear, absorb, and interpret verbal and nonverbal messages in order to 'read between the lines' and to understand" (Tate, 2003, p. 16). Sensing is also about listening for what is not said. Listening to what is not said is an important aspect of effective communication and can be especially relevant in Pacific cultures, where indirect communication styles are often valued. This form of listening involves paying attention to the subtext, implied meanings and underlying emotions that are not explicitly stated in the message being conveyed. It is estimated that 80% of communication comes from facial expressions, gestures and posture (Zenger & Folkman, 2016). In these situations, effective listening requires paying attention to the tone of voice, body language and other non-verbal cues to understand the true meaning behind the message. Pacific cultural practices such as *vā* highlight the importance of what is not being said. *Vā* is a concept used in the Pacific Islands, particularly in Samoa, that refers to the relational space between individuals or groups. *Vā* is considered a dynamic and constantly evolving space that can be characterised by different levels of distance, closeness and power dynamics. Effective communication in Pacific cultures often involves navigating and negotiating the *vā* between individuals or groups in order to establish and maintain social relationships (Fa'avae, 2018). By listening for what is not said, listeners can gain a deeper understanding of the speaker's thoughts, feelings and motivations. They can also avoid misunderstandings and miscommunications that can arise from differences in communication styles. This leads to the next phase of listening, which is processing.

Processing

Sensing involves paying attention to non-verbal cues and emotional undertones in communication, while processing involves analysing and interpreting the information received through listening. Through processing, the listener can make sense of the message being conveyed and respond appropriately. Processing involves several steps including paying attention to the speaker, understanding the message, interpreting its meaning, and evaluating it based on its content and context. To effectively process information, the listener must use their cognitive and analytical skills to identify patterns, draw conclusions and make connections (Kourmousi et al., 2018). All listening is processed through filters – this is based on one's values, experiences and lived experiences. Perhaps a number of underrated skills in the processing phase are the notions of patience (Lloyd et al., 2017), being non-judgemental (Burmansah et al., 2020), and open to criticism (Ames et al., 2012) and feedback (Qian et al., 2019). A listening leader ensures that they are open to multi-perspectives. This is achieved by encouraging all team members to share their ideas. Perspective-taking is the ability to listen to the perspective of the listener and the listened-

to (Bodie, 2011). This helps leaders gain an understanding of the values, attitudes and needs of others (Itzhakov, 2020), ultimately equipping them with the resources required to make informed decisions.

The Pacific cultural practice of talanoa epitomises the intention of processing. Talanoa involves a process of informal and inclusive dialogue or conversation, which emphasises fostering relationships and understanding between participants, rather than simply exchanging information (Matapo & Enari, 2021). Effective processing is an essential aspect of talanoa as it allows the listener to actively analyse, interpret and evaluate the information received through listening, in order to make sense of the message being conveyed. Talanoa is a mode of communication that is integral to the way in which many Pacific peoples share information, learn and relate to each other (Vaiotei, 2011). Talanoa is central to the transfer of knowledge in Pacific cultures, particularly in the conveyance of guidance, storytelling and narration. In the context of talanoa, effective processing also involves creating a safe and inclusive space for participants to share their personal stories, experiences and opinions. This requires the listener to engage in the conversation actively and to respond with empathy and understanding, rather than judgement or criticism, before responding.

Responding

Responding in listening refers to the act of providing feedback or a reaction to the speaker's message. Responding is where the leader indicates to the speaker that the message has been received and interpreted as intended. The quality of a leader's listening can be measured by the nature of his or her response (Brownell, 2008). The most common form of responding is back-channelling, which includes responses such as nodding and generic vocalisations such as 'uh-huh' and 'hmm' (Itzhakov et al., 2018). Questioning is also a form of response. When leaders ask questions of people during a conversation, they feel the leader is really listening to them (Tate, 2003). Furthermore, being invited to continue talking and encouraged to open up, share information and express ideas also allows people to feel like they are being heard (Ames et al., 2012). Responding is confirmation that the speaker has been heard, both subtle and explicit in nature, and it is an acceptance that there is intent in receiving the messages as the speaker wants to be heard. The listening processes of sensing, processing and responding are vital for listening leaders to understand. Leaders are responsible for creating a culture of open communication and engagement in their organisation. Effective listening leaders understand the importance of creating an environment where people feel heard, respected and valued. The application of Pacific cultural practices such as *vā* and talanoa complements the practice of listening leaders. In the next section, the role of the listening leader will be discussed.

The role of the listening leader

Leaders who listen well develop trust, deeper relationships (Qian et al., 2019) and have a greater level of influence over others (Ames et al., 2012; Brownell, 2008). A basic pre-condition for effective listening is to provide full attention to whoever is speaking (Baker et al., 2019). Educational leaders are often inundated with information streaming in through multiple channels – their staff, their colleagues, their community, their Boards of Trustees and government. A significant chunk of their time is spent deciphering and critiquing the information that filters through to them. Tate (2003) suggests that those principals who can filter through and make sense of the information are most effective. A significant portion of a leader's day is spent communicating. On average, people spend between 45% and 70% of their day listening to others (Fedesco, 2015). For leaders, the percentage of time is significantly more.

Understanding the other's message as intended is the ultimate goal of listening. As a leader, the skill in listening is evidenced by grasping the meaning of another's messages and, when appropriate, going beyond these messages to understand more fully the other's intentions and motivations (Burlison, 2011). The role of the leader in the communication process has moved from traditional sender-receiver models to a more relational approach (Brownell, 2008). Listening is an interpersonal act. Effective listening gives leaders insight into others' beliefs, knowledge, motivation and intent. People are more likely to disclose information more readily to leaders who listen well (Ames et al., 2012).

Stillion, Southard and Wolvin (2009) warn that effective listening leadership must balance listening to others with one's own vision. This means that for a leader to be an effective listener, they need to strike a balance between listening to the perspectives, ideas and opinions of others, and also staying true to their own vision and goals. Leaders who only listen to others without having their own ideas and purpose can become indecisive and ineffective. On the other hand, leaders who only focus on their own ideas and purpose without listening to others can come across as uninterested, dismissive or even dictatorial, which can hinder collaboration and creativity. The challenge of listening to the team has implications for the leader's own thoughts, beliefs and strategic direction. Therefore, effective listening leadership requires leaders to actively listen to their people, incorporate their feedback and ideas, and also communicate their own vision and goals clearly, while being open to constructive criticism and feedback.

Leadership must be a collective effort, as one individual cannot have all the capabilities, knowledge and resources to work alone (Gabriell, 2018). In the same vein, leaders who listen effectively can influence organisational processes at the team and organisational level (Brownell, 2008). The role of the listening leader is to create space for all members of the team and organisation to feel heard. When we share information with each other, we can make our work experience better, which can lead to better results in the workplace (Bregenzler et al., 2020).

Listening is a crucial component of effective communication and it plays a key role in enhancing understanding, and building relationships, trust and support within teams that are in search of solutions. When team members feel that they are being listened to, they are more likely to feel valued, respected and engaged.

While it is crucial for leaders to listen, it is also just as important for leaders to understand how to engage team members in listening to each other attentively. Demonstrating listening is particularly important for team leaders' success (Kocoglu et al., 2020). Listening is foundational to building trust and developing a strong team culture. When team members feel their ideas and perspectives are valued and respected, they are more likely to be engaged, committed and productive. Engaging team members in effective listening involves creating an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas and perspectives, and where active listening is expected and modelled by all team members. By actively listening to others, team members can clarify their perspectives, share their concerns and identify common ground, which can lead to more productive discussions and problem-solving (Jonsdottir & Fridriksdottir, 2020). The work of Kluger and Itzchakov (2022) further elaborates on this by identifying that “people who share personal stories enjoy better listening than speakers who share descriptive content” (p. 22). This is supported by Hallberg and Santiago (2020), who suggest that leaders who understand their own and others' stories, reflect critically, and increase their self-awareness, set the stage for powerful, equity-centred workplaces. In many Pacific cultures, storytelling is used to pass down knowledge, history and cultural values from one generation to the next (Robinson & Robinson, 2005). Storytelling is also considered a highly-valued skill in many Pacific cultures, and they are often respected and honoured members of communities (Teaiwa, 2010). In addition to the role of the listening leader, this section explored the specific skills of a listening leader. While there is sufficient literature on communication skills, listening skills in isolation are not as widely reported. The following section will discuss the listening skills required of leaders.

Listening skills required of leaders

In the previous section, the role of the listening leaders was discussed at length. In this section the listening skills required of leaders will be considered. The act of listening is considered a core competency of successful leaders (Banwart, 2020; Johnson & Bechler, 1997). The quality of a leaders' listening strengthens their ability to collect information, act on that information and influence others (Durning et al., 2022). Nichols (1957) made the first attempt to identify specific listening skills. Since then, a number of authors have built on the work of Nichols and furthered the work in the understanding of listening (Bommelje, 2003; Floyd, 2006; Purdy, 2006; Wolvin, 2006). Listening skills fall into three broad categories: being open to hearing the message as intended; understanding the speaker's message as intended; and confirming the message is heard as intended (Itzchakov, 2020).

Being open to hearing the message as intended requires the leader to enter the conversation with an open mind, setting aside biases and assumptions. Babita (2013) warns us that assumptions can be a significant barrier to listening. Understanding biases is crucial for being open to hearing the message as intended and mitigating assumptions. Biases impact how we perceive and interpret messages and, if left unchecked, can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Leaders cannot fully eliminate response bias nor their tendency to respond based on what they think they have heard (Bodie et al., 2020). To understand biases, leaders must reflect on their values, beliefs and experiences that shape their perceptions and interpretations. Leaders can also seek feedback from others to better understand how our biases may impact their communication. Leaders should enter conversations with authenticity, curiosity, empathy and a willingness to learn (Durning et al., 2022). By understanding and addressing biases, leaders can improve their ability to listen and communicate effectively, build trust and respect, and create more inclusive and collaborative environments.

In addition to our assumptions and biases, being open to hearing messages as intended requires acknowledging listening filters. Filters are also influenced by our values, beliefs and expectations (Treasure, 2011). Leaders may filter how information is 'heard' based on who is speaking, the way in which the information is being shared and the environment in which the information is being shared. Examples of listening filters include: physiological filters that filter messages based on sound, volume and pitch (Janusik, 2004); semantic filters that are based on the meanings of words, where listeners tend to ignore or filter out information that does not fit into their own understanding or perspective (Goss, 1982); and cognitive filters which refer to the cognitive demands of processing auditory information, particularly complex or unfamiliar speech. A listening filter that was not mentioned in the literature is that of cultural filters. Cultural listening filters would refer to the background and experiences that shape a person's perception and interpretation of auditory information influenced by their cultural values, beliefs and experiences. By being aware of biases and filters, leaders can consciously attempt to set them aside and approach communication with an open mind, giving the speaker's message a fair hearing and make all attempts to understand the speaker's message as intended.

Understanding the speaker's message as intended is the definition of effective communication. Listening requires leaders to lean into their interpretation or comprehension of messages (Denston, 2021). This can be challenging, when listening to someone speak, the focus is on what is being said and trying to figure out what they mean or intend to communicate (Hamblin et al., 2010). The use of primary and secondary pragmatics challenges the ability to understand the speaker's message as intended. In primary pragmatics, listeners use background knowledge to understand what someone is saying literally. If someone says, "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse", we understand that they are not going to eat a horse, but rather they are very hungry, because we have prior knowledge of this figure of speech. Secondary pragmatics, on the other hand, refers to

the use of contextual information to understand what someone implies in their speech. If someone says, "Do you have any plans tonight?", and they say it in a certain tone of voice or with a particular facial expression, we may infer that they are actually asking us to hang out with them. There are strategies one can use to inform the speaker that the listener has heard the message as intended.

To confirm a message has been heard as intended the leader can reflect back to the speaker what they understand has been shared. This can be done by clarifying, summarising and paraphrasing (Durning et al., 2022; Nemeč et al., 2017). Paraphrasing supports the speaker in feeling heard. The undertone or essence of what is being conveyed is skilfully reflected back by the leader to the speaker (Netolicky, 2016a). The speaker then confirms or further clarifies that the message confirming the message has been heard as intended. Paraphrasing means expressing the meaning of someone else's words using different words. It can often bring greater clarity to the speaker's message. When paraphrasing, the goal is to capture the essential points of what the person has said and rephrase them in a reflective and thoughtful manner. Effective paraphrasing is closely linked to active listening (Barnes et al., 2017). If a person has paraphrased correctly, the speaker generally confirms with a comment, a head nod or agreement confirming that the comment has been heard as intended. Paraphrasing is useful for clarifying content and conveying to the speaker that you have understood what they are saying. It communicates powerful messages that the listener is interested in their perspective, and making an effort to comprehend their point of view.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this literature review has delved into the themes that form the basis of the research question regarding Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools and the impact of listening on their leadership practice. While the review has identified the limited scope of recent and relevant literature on the topic, it has shed light on the importance of further research on the listening leader and contemporary thoughts on Pasifika leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond. The diaspora of Pacific nations people to various parts of the world will continue to influence the identity of emerging Pasifika leaders, making it a crucial area for future research and exploration. Overall, this literature review provides valuable insights into the topic of leadership and listening, and highlights the need for ongoing research in this area to promote effective leadership practices.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This research examined the impact ‘listening’ has on improving the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools. The study examined the ways in which listening can improve leadership practice, the influence of lived experiences on how Cook Island leaders value listening, and the listening skills that Cook Island leaders believe are important for effective leadership. Figure 3.1: *Research design organisation* (below) illustrates the key components of the research process. The research design is situated within the ontology of interpretivism, with an indigenous epistemology and a Pacific research paradigm. The Tivaevae research framework was used as the methodological framework, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews using narrative inquiry and the Turanga framework. Three participants of Cook Island descent in leadership positions at primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand participated in the research and thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

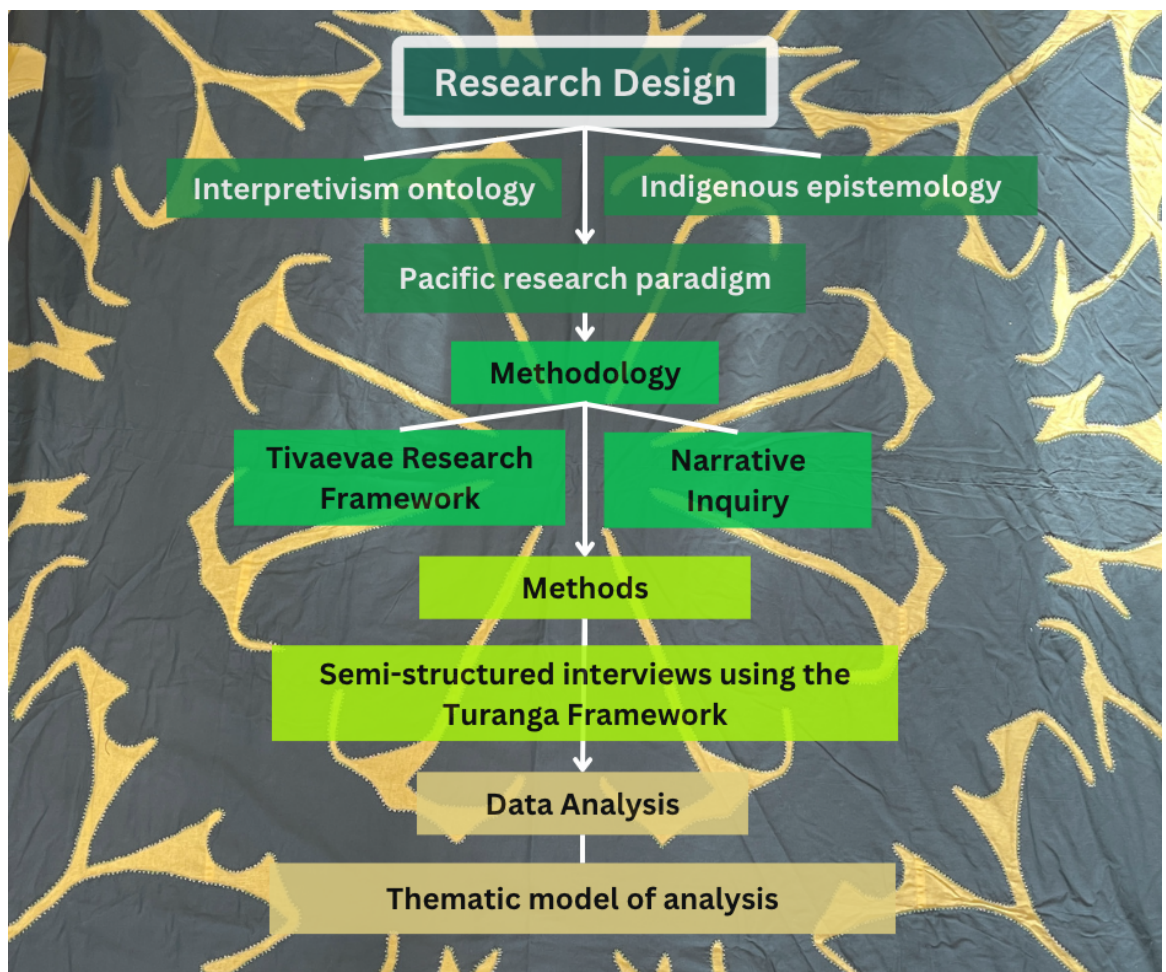


Figure 3.1: *Research design organisation*

My positioning as ‘researcher’

The research engaged with participants of Cook Island descent. I am considered an ‘insider’ researcher, i.e. a researcher who conducts research with populations that they are a member of (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). As an ‘insider’, the researcher shares an identity, language and experiential base with the study participants. To this end, I am of Māori (Ngāpuhi, Te Uri o Hua) and Cook Island (Rarotonga, Takuvaine, Tupapa) descent and I am a first-generation Aotearoa New Zealander on my maternal side. I have been immersed in the cultural teachings of my Cook Island heritage and have visited my homeland of Rarotonga many times. Due to this lived experience, I was confident I had the skills and capability to interact with the research participants as an insider. Despite my extensive experience and immersion in my Cook Island culture I had confidence that my values, beliefs and lived experiences would guide my research process, from engaging with participants to analysing data and presenting findings. Ultimately, the most important aspect of this process was honouring the lived experiences, stories and perspectives of the research participants.

In addition to my cultural identity, I am a teacher with over 25 years of experience in the early childhood, primary and tertiary sectors. I was mindful that my education experience might impact the way I heard participants’ stories, and I may misinterpret the intended meanings behind what participants share because of assumptions I may make about key education concepts. To counter this, I implemented member-checking into the data collection phase to minimise this risk.

The research design

Ontology and epistemology

Ontology is the study of what things exist and how they relate to each other. It is an attempt to take seemingly abstract concepts and establish that they are real. In other words, ontology is a formal description of ideas related to a specific domain, their mutual relations and limitations over them (Stancin et al., 2020). This research was situated within the ontology of interpretivism. Interpretivism assumes that realities are multiple and socially constructed, and that reality is experienced differently by multiple people who interpret their experiences in a variety of ways (Al Riyami, 2015; Mack, 2010). Interpretivism supports researchers in exploring their world by interpreting the understanding of individuals (Thanh et al., 2015). Researchers are encouraged to interact with participants and “understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants” (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 17).

Epistemology, on other hand, is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the study of knowledge and belief. It is concerned with understanding how we come to know what we know,

and how we can distinguish between knowledge and belief. In this research, an indigenous epistemology was employed to highlight indigenous ways of thinking and knowing as critical ways for retaining culture and “reconstructing and revaluing indigenous conceptions of knowledge” (van Meijl, 2019, p. 156). Moreover, Pacific peoples and Cook Islanders are considered indigenous peoples. As noted earlier in this thesis, this study aimed to contribute to Cook Island leadership research, privileging the unique ways of knowing, learning and understanding the world that are characteristic of Cook Island/Pacific and indigenous peoples.

Paradigm

A paradigm in research refers to a framework that guides the assumptions, concepts, values, methods and practices used by researchers to approach their work. Different paradigms can lead to different approaches and can influence the types of questions asked, the methods used, and the way results are interpreted. This research is embedded within a Pacific research paradigm. This is a way of thinking about and conducting research that is grounded in Pacific ways of knowing and being. A Pacific research paradigm also recognises the importance of context and emphasises the need to consider the unique historical, cultural and social factors that shape the experiences of Pacific peoples. While each sub-region of the Pacific has cultural differences, including diversity in language and traditional practices, common beliefs centre on the importance of cultural, social, spiritual, emotional and linguistic realities (Ravulo, 2016). It was hoped that by using indigenous Pacific ‘ways of knowing’ to guide this research, Pacific peoples’ unique challenges and celebrations experienced by them would be identified and taken into account (Burnett, 2012).

Methodology

The Tivaevae research framework developed by Teremoana Maua-Hodges (2020) was selected as the methodological framework for this research. This was created to give voice to Cook Islands people in academic research. Tivaevae (sometimes spelled ‘tivaivai’) is the art of quilting in the Cook Islands, first introduced by missionaries during the early 1800s (Turori, 2013). Since then, Cook Island women primarily have embraced this art form, ensuring that the Tivaevae remains an important and culturally relevant practice. Over time, the Tiveavae research framework has been utilised and modified by numerous individuals and groups (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019; Te Ava & Page, 2018). Unfortunately, Maua-Hodges no longer has a copy of her manuscript. Despite this, my communication with Teremoana Maua-Hodges (personal communication, 20 April 2021) and information gathered from various other academics, supported my use of the Tivaevae framework in this study.

The Tivaevae framework (Maua-Hodges, 2001) is comprised of four sections. The first section, ‘Akapapa’, means ‘to gather’ in Te Reo Kuki Airani – where decisions are made about the design – the colours, fabrics, cotton and details of the tivaevae. This is evident in the research process as a metaphor for decision-making in the research design. The second section of the framework is

‘Akaruru’, meaning to ‘keep together’, and is a metaphor for the collection of data. The third section, ‘Pakoti’, translates literally to ‘scissors’ and refers to the process of cutting the shapes and fabrics for the creation of tivaevae. It is not uncommon for tivaevae to be constructed and deconstructed as part of the process. In the research context, ‘pakoti’ is a metaphor for analysing and interpreting data collected by the researcher. Finally, ‘O’ora te tivaevae’ refers to spreading and presenting the tivaevae, usually taking place at significant events.

As part of the ‘Akapapa’ phase of the Tivaevae research methodology, narrative inquiry was chosen as a complementary methodology because it involves collecting and analysing stories or narratives to understand individuals’ or groups’ experiences, beliefs and values. Narratives are powerful forms of giving meaning to experience (Esin, 2011). This intentional choice was based on the research topic and the aim of collecting the stories and narratives of participants’ lived experiences (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007).

Method

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method to gather data in order to construct the narratives. While there are other approaches to constructing narratives, such as observation data or analysis of written texts, semi-structured interviews allowed for a flexible and personalised approach to collecting participants’ stories, allowing the researcher to delve deeper into participants’ experiences, gaining a more detailed understanding of their perspectives. Additionally, semi-structured interviews can use follow-up questions to seek further clarification on particular points after each interview. While semi-structured interviews proved to be a valuable method in my research, conducting the interviews and analysing the data was time-consuming. It was also challenging to compare and aggregate data across all participants as data varied depending on their own personal perspectives.

Data were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews using the Turanga framework (Mitaera, 2019). The Turanga framework was adopted from its use in the social work with the permission of Jean Mitaera (personal communication, 20 November 2020) for this study. The orama (vision) of the Turanga framework is the optimum ora’anga mou (well-being) of the kopu tangata (people). The framework is comprised of three elements: (1) Akono’anga Māori, Cook Islands culture; (2) No teia tuatau, of this time; and (3) Tā’anga’anga’ia, put to practice. The process of the Turanga framework aligned with the overall aim of this research, which was to listen to the stories of Cook Island leaders in New Zealand primary schools to better understand their perspectives of listening and the impact this has on their leadership practice. To better understand the data collection process, Figure 3.2: *Data collection process* illustrates the relationship between the Turanga framework and the semi-structured interview process.

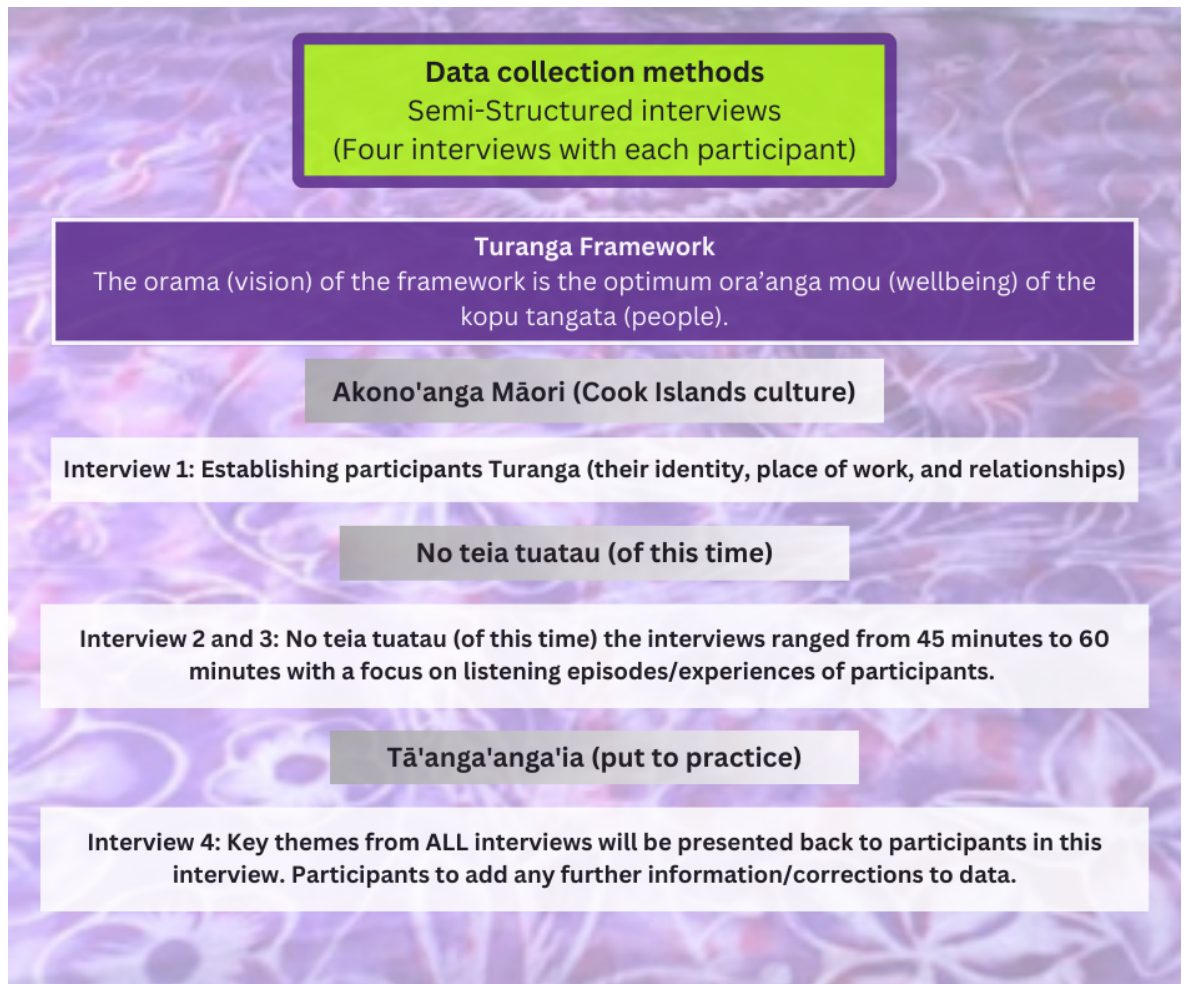


Figure 3.2: Data collection process

The first step of the Turanga framework is ‘Akono’anga Māori’, Cook Islands culture. This step of the data collection embraced these elements and used them as a touchstone in interviews with each participant. There were four interviews conducted over the duration of this study. Participants were given an overview of the research project and were offered the opportunity to withdraw from the study at this stage. Participants were then invited to identify people they perceived to be good listeners, to critically examine their own understanding of leadership and listening, and to discuss how this might influence their leadership practice. The research questions for all interviews can be seen in [Appendix A](#).

The second and third interviews embraced the second element of the Turanga framework – No teia tuatau (of this time). The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 60 minutes, with a focus on komakoma marie (let the conversation be unhurried, be in the now) and kia maru to korua komakoma’anga (let the conversations be calm and measured). There was at least a one to two week gap between the second and third interview. The data collected was a transcript of the previous interview, and time was given between each interview for participants to ponder and reflect on their listening practice. The purpose of these interviews was to invoke reflection from the participants about a specific listening episode and to encourage participants to identify their

own listening skills and the influence they perceived these had on their leadership practice. The fourth interview executed the third aspect of the Turanga framework, which is Tā'anga'anga'ia (put to practice). Key themes from all interviews were presented back to participants in this final interview. The purpose of this interview was to surface overall reflections, and the impact that focusing in on listening had on participants' leadership practice. To ensure that there was depth of data collected from participants and that the stories captured were congruent with their intent and perspective, a process was put in place to ensure that participants had the opportunity to add, review, edit and check each interview prior to their next one. Before each interview, transcripts from previous interviews were prepared and key themes were identified and presented to the participants for member checking. Prior to recording each interview, the researcher intentionally checked in with each participant to check they were comfortable and ready before recording started. Each interview was recorded on the Voice Memo app on my password-protected iPhone. Member-checking is a strategy used to review data collected from interviews with participants (Birt et al., 2016; Candela, 2019; Manhas & Oberle, 2015). It is an opportunity for participants to confirm that the summaries reflect their views, feelings and experiences, and for them to clarify themes/key phrases further.

Data analysis

The Tivaevae framework (Maua-Hodges, 2001) identifies the data analysis stage of the research process as 'pakoti', which means to cut. This metaphor refers to how each piece of material is cut and placed during a tivaevae creation process. In accordance with the pakoti phase of this research, a thematic model of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was utilised, where the primary focus was to analyse all of the narratives shared by the participants and generate a list of themes. This process allowed me to immerse myself in the data, pick up on missed nuances, and actively generate themes. Direct quotes from the interviews were shared with participants, and clarification was sought to avoid imposing my own values, beliefs or thoughts. While noting emerging themes during the transcription process, I was careful to look at all of the data upon completion of all interviews. Codes were generated for each interview, across all interviews of each participant, and across all interviews from all participants. As each participant had a unique story, perspective and viewpoint to share, the decision was made to keep participants' narratives separate with their own generated themes.

Participant selection

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria that were relevant to the research aim and questions. The goal was to find three Cook Island leaders in primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand who could provide valuable insights into listening as a leadership skill. To ensure that there was an opportunity given to Cook Island leaders across the country to participate in the research (not just in my local geographical area), an advertisement

(see [Appendix B](#)) inviting participants to engage in the research was placed on a New Zealand school leaders' Facebook group. This ensured a large and diverse pool of potential participants from different geographic locations, ages, genders and backgrounds. To ensure the privacy of potential participants, comments and sharing functions were disabled, and participants were encouraged to contact me directly via email. In total, five potential participants expressed their interest in engaging in this research.

Three participants were selected using the following criteria:

- Self-identification as Cook Island descendant;
- Self-identification as a leader in an Aotearoa New Zealand primary school, e.g. Deputy Principal, Team Leader, Principal, Tumuaki, Tumuaki tuarua;
- Indicated their interest in participating in the research process;
- Had no previous family, social or professional connection with myself; and
- Were amongst the first three people to read the *Participant Information Sheet* ([Appendix C](#)) and submit a signed *Participant Consent Form* ([Appendix D](#)).

Ethical considerations

The research conducted in this study followed the ethical guidelines of Auckland University of Technology. Approval for this research study was sought and gained by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK). As a researcher, there is a responsibility to ensure that research is conducted ethically. This includes obtaining informed consent from participants, maintaining confidentiality, ensuring that the research does not cause harm to participants or the community, and having social and cultural sensitivity (including the obligations of the Treaty of Waitangi). The next section will provide an explanation of the aforementioned aspects.

Informed consent

Acquiring informed consent from research participants is paramount as it ensures that participants are aware of the research's essence and the potential risks and benefits that it may entail. Informed consent signifies that participants have consciously agreed to participate in the research after being provided with detailed information about its objectives and procedures (Cohen et al., 2017). While recruiting research participants, I gave several weeks for prospective participants to read through the *Participants Information Sheet* ([Appendix C](#)) and provide informed consent by signing the *Participants Consent Form* ([Appendix D](#)). Participants were encouraged to ask questions and discuss any reservations before the first interview commenced and were made aware of their right to withdraw from the research.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality involves the act of maintaining the privacy of specific information and only disclosing it to individuals who have a valid and necessary reason to access it. Confidentiality is an essential aspect of the researcher and participant relationship. All efforts were made to keep the identity of the research participants private. No information that identified the participants (including their name) was shared, instead, each participant chose a Cook Island flower as a pseudonym in place of their real name. To maintain the confidentiality of data, the researcher transcribed all interviews, and the raw data was stored securely in password-protected electronic files. As the number of Cook Island leaders in formal positions within Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools is small, there was a potential risk that participants may be identifiable, and participants were made aware of this risk during the initial conversations.

Minimisation of harm

Minimisation of harm refers to the steps taken to minimise any potential harm that may arise from research. To minimise harm, steps were taken to identify and reduce potential negative consequences impacting participants' physical, emotional and mental well-being. Participants were not expected to experience risk or discomfort due to cultural, employment, financial or similar pressure. First, informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully informed of the nature of the study, including any potential risks and benefits. To mitigate potential harm, the research was conducted in a safe and comfortable environment and at a time suitable to participants. Ethical guidelines and regulations were strictly followed throughout the research process to ensure that the welfare of participants was protected

Social and cultural sensitivity

Social and cultural sensitivity refers to the awareness and consideration of the social and cultural factors influencing people's beliefs, values and behaviours. To be socially and culturally sensitive, researchers typically need to understand the cultural norms, beliefs and values of the people they work with and strive to be inclusive and respectful of differences. In this study, I am considered 'an insider', having first-hand experience in Cook Island lived experiences and in education. However, due to this background and content knowledge, it was important that I avoided making assumptions based on stereotypes or biases. In the design of this research, further information was required to gain clarity on different models, and so I instigated discussions with Cook Island academics to gain clarity around the Turanga framework (Mitaera, 2019) and the Tivaeave model (Hodges, 2001). In addition to this, Aue te Ava provided resources to help the researcher further understand the Tivaevae framework. The researcher communicated with all three Cook Island academics to seek further clarification and understanding of Cook Island research and Cook Islander obligations (personal communication, 20 April 2021)

Obligations to the Treaty of Waitangi

It is important to consider the Treaty of Waitangi in research conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Treaty acknowledges the rights of Maori as the original inhabitants of Aotearoa New Zealand and establishes principles of partnership, participation and protection. As such, it is considered a living document that shapes how research is conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand, especially involving indigenous knowledge. As a researcher, there is a responsibility to uphold the principles in a respectful and collaborative manner. The ways in which the Treaty of Waitangi in this research were upheld are detailed below.

Partnership – In this research, Te Ara Tika (Hudson et al., 2010) was used as a framework to guide the researcher's behaviours and interactions. Aroha ki te tangata (Love towards the people) was upheld by respecting people and encouraging them to define the research context (e.g. where and when to meet). It is also about maintaining this respect when dealing with research data by ensuring that their korero (words) are kept confidential. He kanohi kitea translates to face to face; for this particular aspect, all attempts were made to ensure this research was conducted face to face. While the opportunity to connect via Zoom was an option, all participants preferred to meet at their workplace or a local café.

Participation – Participants were provided a space to share their narrations and stories of lived experiences. The titiro, whakarongo, kōrero (look, listen and then, later, speak) was executed by understanding people's day-to-day realities, priorities and aspirations. The questions asked by the researcher encouraged participants to discuss their lived experiences and their goals and aspirations in listening and leading. This relates to the next ethical aspect, kua e takahia te mana o te tangata (do not trample on the mana dignity of people). People are the experts on their own lives, including their challenges, needs and aspirations. Participants were encouraged to share the challenges they faced with listening and leadership in a safe and confidential manner and their lived experiences were validated and appreciated.

Protection – This research process was conducted in a respectful manner, and the stories and narrations of the participants were acknowledged and valued. The rights of participants to withdraw from this research were protected. Participants were supported in understanding these rights. Due to the small number of Cook Island leaders in formal positions within Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools, there is a potential risk that participants were identifiable. Participants were made aware of this in initial conversations.

Chapter Four: Presentation of findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings of this research study. This research aimed to examine the impact listening has on improving the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools.

The research questions were:

- In what ways does listening improve the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools?
- In what ways has lived experience influenced the way Cook Island leaders value listening?
- Which listening skills do Cook Island leaders believe are important for effective leadership?

The following chapter is structured into three distinct sections capturing the narratives of the research participants – Tiare, Kaute and Tipani. Each narrative explores three recurring areas: identity, leadership practice and experience, and listening as a leadership skill. In the section on identity, the participants' cultural backgrounds and noteworthy aspects of their identity are briefly outlined, with specific reference to their individual island of origin within the Cook Islands. The subsequent section on leadership practice and experience delves into the participants' length of time in education and their personal perspectives on leadership. Additionally, the section on listening as a leadership skill offers an in-depth analysis of the participants' views on this aspect of leadership. This study illuminates key areas specific to each participant's narrative, which are examined and shared in the consequent sections. These topics vary across the narratives and are crucial for understanding participants' experiences and perspectives.

Tiare's tuatua (story)

Identity

Tiare is a Cook Island woman of Aitutaki and Mauke descent. Her parents were born in the Cook Islands, and she is first-generation Aotearoa New Zealand born. She is a mother of two boys, also born in Aotearoa New Zealand. Tiare is incredibly proud of her Aotearoa New Zealand 'identity' and her Cook Island heritage, as reflected in the extract below:

So I'm first generation New Zealand, and I'm very proud of my New Zealand identity. But the backbone of me is my heritage. I'm very proud of being Kiwi, and I'm also very proud of my roots and where I come from. [Tiare]

Tiare grew up in the Cook Island church, where her father was a foundation leader and active member. She attributes many of her core values to this aspect of her background. Tiare also

attributes her oral abilities to her Cook Island heritage, confirming that “Cook Islanders are very oral people anyway”. She commented that her father was an excellent speaker, and her mother is an exceptional listener. Her extended family also influences her empathy for others. Many of her family are in the health and caring sectors as doctors and nurses. Tiare believes that being surrounded by compassionate, caring people who demonstrate empathy has influenced her leadership identity.

Tiare was invited after all three interviews to reflect on her own listening practice. She signalled ‘identity’ as an area that was important to her – her identity as a Cook Islander, a mother, a ‘Kiwi’ and a teacher. She shared that the work she does in understanding her own identity helps her clarify the reasons that she reacts, responds and thinks the way she does. This is reflected in the extract below:

It’s important to know yourself and know how ‘in tune’ you are or not ‘in tune’ ... and knowing yourself is also about knowing what triggers you. [Tiare]

Further to this, Tiare commented that the ways in which she understood her core values and sharing these with others were important she took time to understand the reasons or stories underpinning these. These values are fairness, humility and calmness. She explained the importance of articulating these to others in the following way:

You know when you’re living the way you’re living, you don’t necessarily articulate your uniqueness, you have to articulate your values to everyone ... I would hope that [the team] would describe me as fair, as a fair listener. I would hate to think that I’m intimidating because ... that’s not whom I want to be ... being calm without judgement ... withholding what you really want to say to move the conversation forward. [Tiare]

Leadership practice and experience

Tiare is in a senior leadership position in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland). She has been teaching for 18 years and has had various leadership positions throughout her career. She believes her experience in different schools and working within different leadership structures influences her leadership style today and has led to her particular focus on teacher well-being. She has grown in her understanding of what teacher well-being is (and is not) and has come to realise doing ‘everything’ for teachers is not the best way to empower them, as noted below:

I do know that sometimes, some things that I did early on in my leadership ... it wasn’t really helping them (the teachers). [Tiare]

In this instance, Tiare referred to taking on and solving teachers’ challenges without supporting them to solve their own challenges. She is concerned to intentionally support teachers in a way that helps them reach their potential now and into the future.

Tiare offered insights into why she leads the way she does, acknowledging that her values are a useful ‘compass’ in all of her decisions, behaviours and interactions. She considers her leadership

style as synonymous with servant leadership. Further to this, Tiare believes that understanding one's own views and those of others is essential for trust and collaboration:

Leadership is ... understanding your own perspective, but it's also understanding the wider perspective, like you can't just make decisions in leadership based on yourself, especially in a collaborative space. [Tiare]

Tiare was clear on the values that guide her leadership practice and conscious that her leadership style is to serve others and she liked to lead by example in her practice.

Listening as a leadership skill

Tiare's family background and experiences appear to have equipped her with the skills required to be a competent listener and she reported that she feels confident in speaking and listening. Tiare acknowledged her Cook Island ancestry for her ability to speak in front of others and hear what they were saying, noting that Polynesian cultures are typically oral. This viewpoint was reiterated when Tiare was invited to talk about a person in her life who she viewed as a good listener. She shared that her mother was her listening role model who demonstrates patience and intuition:

My mom was the one that was always listening and observing in the background ... she slowly takes the time to listen and helps clarify by saying "So what you're telling me is" ... she's very intuitive. I guess ... because listening can be intuitive. [Tiare]

Tiare was invited to reflect on two listening episodes – times when she had an opportunity to listen to others in her leadership role. I also encouraged her to share her own perceptions of her listening skills and reflect on the impact she believed listening had on her own leadership practice. She further goes on to comment on the impact reflecting on her listening episodes made her more aware of her own perspectives, providing the foundation for accepting others perspectives:

I do feel like our discussions have really made me reflect about different conversations that I've had, and it's also made me very aware when I'm listening ... maybe a deeper level of what I can be doing to listen a little bit better in my leadership practice. [Tiare]

Tiare provided insightful commentary and reflection and identified potential areas for development. In doing this, Tiare's reflections on her listening episodes focused on three main practices: listening to emotions, listening for clarity, and listening for multiple perspectives.

These are discussed further in the following sections.

Listening for emotions

Tiare described a team meeting where she could feel that staff were tired, stressed and on edge. She commented that she could sense the stress and emotions:

They are tired, and everybody's tired; everybody's feeling it right now. [Tiare]

Tiare was referring to a time of year typically filled with extracurricular events in the school.

Generally, in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools, she identified as high-pressure times for

schools when there are competing commitments such as assessments, report writing and whānau engagement events. Given the time of the year, she sensed that teachers were tired and stressed. Tiare described how she listened in with more focused attention in a team meeting as she described that when people are tired, high in emotions and have a lot going on, it is hard to 'be present' and 'in the moment' and to listen to what is being shared:

That's when I started listening properly, because they were talking about feelings ... and I wanted to make sure I was listening to their feelings and emotions. [Tiare]

Tiare commented on how important she felt it was to create a culture of listening, noting that issues can only be resolved if they are discussed. She commented on the importance of creating an environment where teachers feel heard and, consequently, an environment where leaders and the team are willing to hear them, and described this in the following way:

If you have any elephants, just come through and just talk about it. So we can talanoa (conversation) about it and marinate things and then go away feeling heard. [Tiare]

Tiare's ability to sense the influence emotions have on her teachers seems to be linked to her own reflection on the impact of emotions and how these impact her personally. She describes this below:

If I am not 100% myself, like if I am not feeling physically well. If there's something going on emotionally, then that affects my ability to listen without judgement ... it has made me realise why other people don't listen, especially if they're emotionally charged. Because if they've got other things on their plate ... it's gonna be harder for them to be present and in the moment. [Tiare]

Listening for clarity

Tiare had trialled a number of ways to seek clarity in her listening episodes. In her experience, seeking clarity helped her feel understood. She described listening for clarity helped her understand the messages being shared by others. The skills Tiare identified as supporting her in understanding what others were saying were paraphrasing and pausing, and explained her process for paraphrasing and pausing in the following way:

It's just as important to clarify when you're listening ... I stayed quiet, then paraphrased 'So what you're saying is ...' and then waited for them to clarify, then I needed to shut up and just listen. [Tiare]

Tiare also commented on refraining from interjecting into the conversation too soon so she could listen for assumptions or deeply-held beliefs. When listening to a group of teachers discuss their challenges, she noted that they recalled past experiences and the stress levels involved in particular events. Tiare was keen to seek clarity from her people so that she could help them identify the sources of frustration experienced by different staff members. It was apparent that, for Tiara, it was important to be clear and to continually clarify as she was listening. She was adamant that seeking clarity meant going to the original source of information.

We always tell people, if there is something bothering them about a person, or if there's something they need clarifying, to go to the source ... Listening to clarify also means listening for the whole picture instead of honing in on a single event. [Tiare]

There are a number of skills Tiare described that supported her listening skills. To Tiare it was important to exercise patience when listening to others so that she was clear on what her people were trying to say and allow time for them to clarify. Tiare used the following strategies to support her listening skills:

I think I'm someone who doesn't jump the gun, I'm practising when not to talk ... using silence, patience and waiting as listening skills. [Tiare]

Listening to multiple perspectives

Tiare identified listening to multiple perspectives as an important aspect of her listening practice, as listening for other perspectives helped her understand what people were expressing and the perspectives they were coming from, as explained below:

Listening is, listening in its fullness and with no judgement and then trying to figure out the different perspectives that come with it ... there are so many different perspectives when you work in a school, even from one person ... she [the teacher] can be talking from her past teaching life, she could be talking from her family life ... Vision is also important when you're listening, being able to see the bigger picture, to listen for the clues. [Tiare]

In the same vein as seeking multiple perspectives, Tiare shared her experiences in cross-cultural communication. The management team recently underwent personality tests that gave information about the various aspects of everyone's personality. Identifying the different personality traits of herself and the leadership team helped Tiare affirm the importance of maintaining and sustaining relationships with others. She shares her reflections below:

Everyone comes from different spaces, there's different values, beliefs, perspectives. It's just about understanding ... when I really listen I could see where they're coming from. [Tiare]

Kaute's tuatua (story)

Identity

Kaute demonstrated pride in her Cook Island heritage. She is of Mangaian, Atiutakian, Rarotongan and Aituan descent (four of the 15 islands that comprise the Cook Islands). Kaute is second-generation Aotearoa New Zealand born. Both of Kaute's parents were also born in Aotearoa New Zealand. The migration of Kaute's grandparents from the Cook Islands to Aotearoa New Zealand formulates part of her identity story. She credits her grandparents for having a hand in raising her and her brother alongside her young parents. Kaute is married to a Cook Island man from Rakahanga and Manihiki. Kaute is a proud mother to two boys. She also

grew up in the church and continues to see this as part of her identity. Kaute exudes pride in her culture, family, school and community.

Leadership practice and experience

Kaute started as a beginning teacher in the school she currently works in and is a senior leadership team member. With a lengthy service record in the community, and as a long term-resident, Kaute has established [missing words]

Kaute was invited to reflect on her leadership journey. She, without hesitation, credited much of her learning about leadership to others, as shared in the extract below.

My leadership is one of appreciation for the many beautiful people who have served alongside me and gratefulness for them ... I've never been ambitious for leadership, and probably never will ... someone else will have to encourage me in order for me to pursue [leadership] because I'm, yeah, that hasn't ever been an ambition of mine. [Kaute]

It seemed that service was a core value for Kaute that rippled throughout every conversation we had. She shows up as a leader who is committed to serving her people. She attributes this to her cultural background, her church community, her cultural community, her school community and her family.

The service thing came up very loud, So I likened the influence of the contributing, that that longing to contribute, often to your people of home. As part of our cultural identity, which I believe has influenced my listening and leadership. Yeah, probably the key was probably is also the service, the returning, or giving back. [Kaute]

Kaute honed in on her leadership by offering the metaphor of leadership layers, adding listening as another layer to her leadership capabilities. Further to this, Kaute commented on the number of teachers who came to her for conversations. She wondered whether people wanted to talk to her because she validates their practice and feelings, whether she always made time for them or for other reasons. However, she reached the conclusion that her people kept returning because they thought she was a good listener.

The listening tool is just as valuable as the ability to present or the ability, the ability to question or the ability to, present yourself professionally, you know, all those leadership layers ... it feels like it's validating myself that I am a listening leader, if I wasn't listening obviously they just wouldn't come back. [Kaute]

Kaute also shared her appreciation in being able to reflect on her listening and leadership practice as a way of improving her skills and how she might support emerging leaders.

Thanks for helping me to reflect on not just for myself, but how I might better model for the seven that I'm currently invested in growing. [Kaute]

Listening as a leadership skill

Kaute identified a number of people in her life who demonstrated good listening. A common attribute across the people Kaute identified as good listeners was that they were grounded in positive and trusting relationships. Kaute considered her husband, her grandmother and colleagues at work (all of whom she has/had a strong trusting relationship with) as effective listeners. The particular skills that she attributed to effective listening are validation, care and encouragement, which she describes below:

I put it simply down to ... someone who shows respect that there is an element of validation ... very positive rapport and the importance of connectedness and relationships, definitely encourages stronger communication ... I can be encouraging of what they're trying to say ... And I think it builds very strong confidence if you can get the listening part right. [Kaute]

From the series of interviews with Kaute three key areas were identified – listening to empower the other, listening with your body and listening to validate.

Listening to empower the other

Throughout the course of the interviews Kaute took it upon herself to refine her listening skills and push into areas that were not so comfortable for her. Reflecting on one particular listening episode, Kaute described the way she reframed her role as a listening leader, making a conscious decision to refrain from co-constructing next steps for her colleague (something she would typically do), and deciding to hear the teacher out. As a result, the conversation continued over three separate occasions throughout the day. Kaute describes the impact listening was having on her colleague.

She [the teacher] was trying to run off so many ideas simultaneously, I wasn't quite sure which ones I needed to listen to first ... rather than quickly co-construct the next step, I kind of left it alone and let her talk. Had I co-constructed the next step with her straightaway and not just allowed her to identify some of the benefits and her possible next steps, she might not have owned the success ... I thought it was a positive conversation because she's come back and is still running with her ideas. Several days later, the teacher commented "I really enjoyed you taking an interest in what I'm trying to launch" ... I enjoyed that conversation. [Kaute]

Empowering others in a group context can be challenging. Kaute commented on the shift in dynamics when listening in groups. Kaute described a large group meeting that she facilitated. She was intentional about ensuring that everyone had a chance to speak and that she was hearing everyone as they intended. By assuming a listening mindset she could make connections across the group. Rather than taking on the responsibility of doing most of the talking, Kaute really listened, taking her time to make connections with common themes. Kaute describes paraphrasing

for the group as a skill commonly used by team coaches, a skill that she is naturally using but does not yet know the technical name for, as she details in her description below:

So that I could practice the listening ... I tried to make sure that after everyone had spoken. I would repeat a key theme or idea, or thread ... and picking up on different themes and threads that I may not have picked up on ... I could pick up on some alignment and could acknowledge that back to the group. [Kaute]

Listening with your body

Kaute experimented with an element of listening that she was unfamiliar with – listening with your body. When listening with her body, she assumed body language that she hoped would lean towards better listening and show others that she genuinely listened to them.

I was trying to be conscious of actually listening to what was already put forward. I did try ... eye contact, keep my mouth closed, face each speaker and try to show positive body posture. [Kaute]

Kaute challenged herself to explore listening as a leadership skill and, by sharing her reflections and role-modelling listening with her colleagues, she noted that others in her leadership team were also raising their awareness of listening. In doing this Kaute also raised her own awareness in how others listen:

Something that intrigued me with the noticing of the body language and the engagement of the person ... I could see when they were completely invested in an idea that you could see the whole body involved in their speaking. And when it wasn't, you could see them sit back and relax in the chair. [Kaute]

An insight Kaute gleaned through reflecting on her listening was the power of silence and stillness. Kaute tried to use silence to encourage more dialogue in conversations. Kaute was very honest about the challenges she faced with stillness and silence, noting that silence was like an empty void she has to fill. Kaute refers to her experience with Cook Islanders (especially women), and shares her reflections below:

We [Cook Island women] don't do the quiet spaces. Everything's in motion. And when it's void of a conversation, we think we have to plug it ... So the silence thing has been golden for me. I'm trying to tell myself to be comfortable in the silence ... to be attentive because that's when you start noticing more. [Kaute]

Listening to validate

Kaute identified validation and contribution as key attributes of her listening. She commented that when teachers felt validated for their ideas and in their practice, they tended to have more robust conversations and were generally more forthcoming in sharing their thoughts.

I like to acknowledge what someone else has put forward. Each time I get them to, you know, kind of rephrase or get them to describe that for me, there's like a little extra, something that is added. [Kaute]

Kaute was incredibly insightful about her listening practice and her progress in this area. Kaute took the opportunity to try various ways of validation with her teachers, using questioning to probe for clarity. She invited deep reflection from her teachers through rephrasing and asking questions, as shared below:

And so I've been trying to practice listening first. And then ask them to rephrase using questions like "Oh can you clarify? Can you just summarize that part for me? ... And so how do you think it's going? And why do you think this is happening?". [Kaute]

Kaute emphasised her newfound patience for listening. She appreciated the opportunity to reflect on her listening every two weeks (the time taken between each interview). She reflected on her new focus on listening and her fine-tuning of understanding messages shared.

I'm not quite sure if we're always registering all of the message spoken messages that you're supposed to hear but I'm hearing more clarity, trying to look for elements to improve [in listening] then I'm celebrating the successes. [Kaute]

Kaute was invited to talk about the key areas of listening that have influenced her leadership practices. She shared the advantages of her cultural background and the impact this has had on her leadership practice. In sharing her experience with cultural practices such as a 'kapapa'anga (genealogy), tivaevae (quilt making), kaikai (cooking/eating) and pure (prayer), Kaute believed these activities entailed a significant amount of collaboration and attentive listening.

Tipani's tuatua (story)

Identity

Tipani was born in Aotearoa New Zealand and is of Cook island descent. In addition to her Cook Island heritage, Tipani has lineage to Asian and Central European peoples. She describes herself as a 'bit of a fruit salad', but has always identified as being a Cook Islander with ties to Rakahanga and Manihiki (two of the 15 islands that make up the Cook Islands). Tipani has fond memories of spending time as a youngster with her father's sister, who was very strong in her Rakahanga identity. Although Tipani was born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand, she spent a considerable portion of her youth within the Cook Island congregation at the church, which played a crucial role in shaping and cementing her Cook Islander identity. Tipani and her husband, and their three children, live in the same community that she currently works in. Tipani has lived in this area for many years and has a fondness and commitment to the community. Tipani has been in education for 12 years (some of her teaching years were spent overseas). She is part of the leadership team at her current school.

Leadership practice and experience

Tipani talked about the many roles she has in her current school. She referred to herself as a “jack of all trades”. She wears several hats in her leadership role including full-time teacher, senior leadership role, engagement with whanau (families) and co-ordinator, including other extra-curricular events. The following excerpt emphasises that Tipani has a substantial amount of responsibility in her present role.

There's just a lot of things happening in our school ... I've had to wear many hats. Um I do a lot of work with our community. You know with our families and all that. [Tipani]

Tipani has a deeply-held belief that trust is fundamental to relationships. Trust was something Tipani establishes over time with people. Tipani shared the metaphor of layers to represent the way in which she establishes and maintains relationships with her people. She explains in the extract below:

Each time you talk with them, you're unveiling different layers, and you're unpacking who they are as a person. If they don't trust you ... you don't have their relationship, and every time you enter into a conversation you understand more layers of the person ... if we don't listen, we're not going to unpack their values, their beliefs and their worldviews, you know what I mean. [Tipani]

Tipani shared her deep commitment to her school community. Tipani's pathway into education came from a burning desire to see change in education. She left her previous well-established career to pivot into teaching. Tipani expressed that advocacy and social justice are core values of hers, and understands this influences her behaviours and actions as a teacher and leader.

Listening as a leadership skill

Tipani was invited to reflect on great listeners in her life and the attributes they possessed that made them great listeners. She acknowledged two close family members who demonstrated incredible listening skills. Tipani commented on the feelings that surfaced when she felt truly listened to by these people, highlighting that deep trust and unconditional support were in place for both relationships. She explains below:

She knows me inside and out, she knows my flaws ... she'll listen without judgement. [Tipani]

Tipani shared her own limitations in listening and attributed this to her wanting to help and offer solutions to her teachers and the children she teaches.

I know you're not supposed to go in and kind of give them the answers but you just want to go in and just help and find solutions and, you know, listening, it means just sitting back and just doing that, just sitting back. I realise now, you've got to just let them get it all out. And then you've just gotta wait and let them kind of like pose those questions. Let them kind of say “Okay, I do need the help”. [Tipani]

Tipani was encouraged to share the listening skills she demonstrated over two to four weeks, and reflect on the impact listening had (if any) on her leadership practice. From the reflections three

key areas were identified – listening so people feel heard, listening intently, and listening for values and beliefs.

Listening so people feel heard

Tipani talked about a challenging relationship she experienced in her team. Tipani believes that relationships are key to leadership. In her attempts to work on this relationship Tipani invited the team to share how they might collectively work on relationships with, for example, staff lunches and events outside of school hours. Tipani started to intentionally tune into what her colleague was saying, to get a sense of what was important to her. Tipani's first hunch was that cross-cultural communication and a lack of shared understanding was a factor in the breakdown of this particular relationship. Throughout a series of conversations, recurring themes emerged as Tipani identified that time and well-being held significant importance to her colleague which led her to make subtle changes in her practice. She explains in the extract below:

You know I started cutting back on meeting times and being more intentional with team agendas ... and I think because I made those, you know, small, subtle changes she's like, ... sweet, I'm on board ... to be honest, to be able to do that [listening], it takes a lot of skill. Um I think it's just, you know, I try and say that I am a listener, I do try and listen. But sometimes as a leader, honestly, or I think maybe ... it could be just in my nature. Where I jump in. [Tipani]

Tipani identified an area of discomfort and contention for her colleague and made slight changes to attend to this. Tipani also allowed herself to see a different side to her colleague and notice the positive impact she was having on the team. The impact of this shift had a ripple effect on the positive conversations within the team and in Tipani's relationship with her colleague. Tipani attributed the change in her relationship with her colleague to listening so her colleague felt heard, which she believed may have led to her colleague feeling valued.

Listening intently

Tipani was very open about her shortcomings when it came to listening. She was mindful that as she has lots of different responsibilities she can forget to stop and listen to others. Over the several weeks of being invited to share how her listening was going, Tipani shared her insights about listening intently. She explains this insight below:

When I look back on my leadership, I'm thinking, you know, do I really hear what my teachers are saying, and do I hear what they really need? Or am I interpreting their needs? And because I tend to go 100 miles an hour ... because of all the things I've got to do, you know the responsibilities and all that. [Tipani]

Listening intently for Tipani means slowing down, being present and really listening to what people are saying. Slowing down and not having to respond or contribute to the conversation was a significant shift in practice for Tipani. In her words:

I've learned to like I said, slow down, listening in for different cues ... I'm still learning to kind of, like, just zip it and not say anything. [Tipani]

In Tipani's attempts to slow down and listen, Tipani refined her strategy of listening in team conversations, and challenged herself to really hear what was important to people. Listening intently for Tipani also means making connections across a number of conversations. In her reflections, Tipani identified a common challenge in listening – silence. Acknowledging that it sometimes feels unnatural to pause, wait and introduce silence into conversations. Tipani further reflected that differing personalities can impact on whether or not silence is embraced.

If I wasn't listening intently, I don't know if I would have picked it up. Leaders who do listen, you're listening in for those particular words and those cues that your people are sharing. Sometimes people always feel the need to speak ... when you've got strong personalities in your team as well, it makes it harder to just sit back watch and listen. [Tipani]

In her reflections, Tipani confirmed that listening intently made a difference to her leadership practice. She sensed a positive shift in her relationships with her colleagues and the calibre of dialogue and collaboration in team meetings increased significantly.

By slowing down and just listening more intently, I've managed to catch a lot of all the other bits and pieces ... and that, that's making a difference to the dialogue right so the dialogue and the collaboration so you're seeing other people pitching in. [Tipani]

Listening for values and beliefs

Tipani made several reflections across interviews about the importance of listening in for people's values and beliefs. Tipani reflected on how her own values and beliefs can get in the way of hearing what was important to others. She shares her thoughts in the extract below:

I think leaders listen for cues that talk about people's values and beliefs in their cultures ... it's, you know, we've got to take the time out to kind of see their worldview and understand the beliefs, because that's where their dialogue comes in a way they unpack who they are as individuals. It's having a non-bias um outlook on the information that you gather. It's parking ... your own values ... and your own beliefs. [Tipani]

For Tipani, when listening for values and beliefs, she believed she got an insight into the heart of the person and the way they see the world. This all impacts the way people act and the choices they make. She shares her thoughts below:

You actually get to the heart of the person. And I believe that you act and you do things because it is your values and your place to shape the way you see the world in how you interpret that. [Tipani]

Summary

In this study, data was collected from four semi-structured interviews with each participant. It was decided early in the analysis that data would be presented in three separate narratives to keep

the integrity of each participant’s story. The interviews were transcribed, and read through numerous times to understand the content and identify possible themes. Important phrases and concepts in the data were then grouped into broader categories within each narrative (see Table 4.1: *Overarching themes for each participant*), capturing the essence of the important concepts for each participant. What is interesting about the data in Table 4.1 is that for these participants their identity, their leadership practice and experience were foundational to forming their leadership approach. The more surprising connection is that listening in this context seemed to be in service to others. Interestingly, listening seemed to be attributed to a range of skills that supported others in being heard and valued.

	Tiare	Kaute	Tipani
Themes	Identity		
	Leadership practice and experience		
	Listening for emotions	Listening to empower the other	Listening so people feel heard
	Listening for clarity	Listening with your body	Listening intently
	Listening to multiple perspectives	Listening to validate	Listening for values and beliefs

Table 4.1: Overarching themes for each participant

The first research question, “In what ways does listening improve the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools?”, aligned with the initial finding. Overall, these results indicate that participants appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their listening and leadership practice. Consequently, ongoing reflection was also found to be necessary for ensuring that leaders' core identity and values aligned with their listening and leadership behaviours. A recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense amongst interviewees that one's identity, values and beliefs formed their approach to listening to others’ and leadership. The research question, “In what ways has lived experience influenced the way Cook Island leaders value listening?”, relates to this finding in that participants’ Cook Island identity and their lived experiences influenced their values and beliefs. Further analysis of the data suggests that there is an association that listening is a practical skill that supported leaders in helping their people feel valued. Other skills such as pausing/silence, questioning and paraphrasing were also seen as skills that supported participants in their leadership practice. This final finding relates to research question three, “Which listening skills do Cook Island leaders believe are important for effective leadership?”

Conclusion

This research examined the impact ‘listening’ has on improving the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools. The findings from this research will be presented using a new model developed from the learnings of this study. The next chapter, therefore, moves on to discuss these findings in further depth.

Finding 1: Regular reflection on listening (and other skills) supported these Cook Island leaders’ leadership practice.

Finding 2: These Cook Island leaders’ identity, values and beliefs are fundamental to their leadership approach and impact the way they listen to others.

Finding 3: Listening (and other skills) are practical skills that supported these leaders in helping their people feel valued.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

This research aimed to explore how listening can enhance the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools and the influence of lived experience on their perception of listening. It also aimed to identify the listening skills that Cook Island leaders consider essential for effective leadership.

The following research questions underpinned the research:

1. In what ways does listening improve the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools?
2. In what ways has lived experience influenced the way Cook Island leaders value listening?
3. Which listening skills do Cook Island leaders believe are important for effective leadership?

Figure 5.1: *Discussion of findings* shows a visual representation of how the findings, the research question(s) and literature align, and ultimately how the findings lead to the creation of the conceptual model – the ‘Ei Katu listening and leadership model.



Figure 5.1: *Discussion of findings*

The tuatua (stories) in this study highlighted the innate values, listening skills and leadership skills participants possessed. It is not clear whether these skills were a result of nature, nurture or both. The 'nature argument' asserts that individuals inherit their traits and characteristics from their biological parents, determining their personality and behaviours. In contrast, the 'nurture argument' suggests that environmental influences such as upbringing, socialisation, education and culture play a more significant role in shaping human development and behaviour. Nonetheless, participants in this study without any formal teaching or instruction seemed to possess the soft skills required for building, maintaining and sustaining relationships. As reflected in the previous chapter, the research generated three main findings regarding the impact of listening on the leadership practice of these Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools. First, regular reflection on listening and other skills helped improve their leadership practice. Secondly, the cultural identity, values and beliefs of these Cook Island leaders were found to be fundamental to their leadership approach and influenced the way they listened to others. Finally, the study found that listening, along with other practical skills, helped these leaders make their people feel valued, leading to a perceived impact on their leadership effectiveness. These findings suggest that listening may be an essential component of effective leadership and that Cook Island leaders' cultural identity and values noticeably influence their approach to leadership and communication.

This study's first finding emphasises the role that regular reflection on listening (and other skills) supported the participants' leadership practice. Ongoing reflection emerged as a key theme in the study and appeared to help leaders gain a better understanding of their leadership practice. This finding aligns with the research question, "How does listening improve the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools?" Overall, the participants seemed to value the opportunity to reflect on their listening and leadership practice, and ongoing reflection appeared to be necessary for leadership practice, ensuring that their core identity and values aligned with their leadership behaviours.

This study's next finding demonstrated the value participants placed on identity, values and beliefs as fundamental to their leadership approach, and in some way impacted the way they listen to others. Participants drew attention to the importance of their identity in appreciating diverse perspectives, communicating and connecting with others more effectively. The study's research question, "How have Cook Island leaders' lived experiences influenced their appreciation of listening?", is relevant to this finding as the participants' Cook Island identity and experiences seemed to have an impact on their values and beliefs, and the way in which they interacted in the world.

The research established the relevance of listening as a practical skill that helps leaders understand their team members and makes them feel valued and heard. However, the study found

that effective leadership practice requires more than just listening. The findings support the research question, "Which listening skills do Cook Island leaders believe are important for effective leadership?" Therefore, in addition to listening, skills such as pausing, questioning and paraphrasing were identified as essential for effective leadership practice.

‘Ei Katu listening and leadership model

A conceptual model entitled the ‘Ei Katu listening and leadership model was created to demonstrate the relation of the key findings from this research to the overarching aim and research questions (see Figure 5.2). An ‘Ei Katu is a traditional head accessory in the Cook Islands, and is typically created using greenery, leaves and flowers. These garlands are worn by men and women alike, and are a popular choice for festive occasions and events. They hold significant cultural importance to the people in the Cook Islands. The components of the ‘Ei Katu listening and leadership model identify three key elements: identity and values of leaders (headband), listening skills (and others identified) in the study (greenery, leaves and flowers), and the thread (ongoing reflection).

The process of making an ‘Ei Katu starts with measuring the circumference of the head with the headband, leaving a little extra length to adjust and secure the ends. This can be secured using floral tape to create a smooth surface. In this model, the headband is likened to the identity and values of the leader. Flowers, leaves and greenery are cut into small pieces, leaving a few inches of stem on each one. In this model these are likened to the listening and leadership skills acquired by leaders. The first flower, leaf or greenery is attached to the headband by wrapping it around the headband with the thread, The thread in this model is likened to the ongoing reflection of leaders. Another flower or greenery stem is added by placing it next to the first one and wrapping it around the headband with the thread to secure it in place. Flowers and greenery stems are added continually, alternating colours and types as desired. This is similar to the acquisition of listening and leadership skills – a new skill or knowledge is learned, with ongoing reflection of the implementation of these skills, then practices are adjusted accordingly. The thread should be wrapped tightly and securely around each stem, so that the flowers and greenery stay secured. Once the flowers and greenery have been added, the end of the thread is wrapped with floral tape to create a finished look and secure it in place. Much like learning, the ‘Ei Katu listening and leadership model suggests that there is no end to the acquisition and reflection of skills and practice. Each element of the ‘Ei Katu listening and leadership model will be discussed below as they relate to the overall findings.

'Ei Katu
Listening and Leadership Model



Figure 5.2: 'Ei Katu leadership and listening model

Ongoing reflection on leadership, listening (and other skills)

E kai venevene te tuatua a te monomono korero

Delicious food is the word of the teacher. Correct teaching is given by the wise men

The thread that binds and secures the flowers, greenery and leaves on an 'Ei Katu is likened to the process of ongoing reflection. This finding suggests that ongoing reflection supported participants in this study in gaining a better understanding of their identity as a Cook Island leader, their listening skills and their leadership approach. This finding is consistent with the research question, "How does listening enhance the leadership practices of Cook Island leaders in primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand?" The current study found that it was not necessarily listening that enhanced leadership practices of the participants, rather the reflection on listening (and other skills) that supported leaders in fine-tuning their practice. The participants in this study shared

their reflections on their listening and leadership practices, and ongoing reflection was deemed necessary to ensure that their core identity and values are aligned with their leadership behaviours. The following sections will provide a brief discussion of this finding.

The participants in this study shared their appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on their listening and leadership experiences. The interviews appeared to help leaders gain a deeper understanding of their own values, beliefs and biases, and identify areas where they might to improve and make changes in their leadership approach. As shared by a participant, *“I do feel like our discussions have really made me reflect about different conversations that I've had, and it's also made me very aware when I'm listening ... maybe a deeper level of what I can be doing to listen a little bit better in my leadership practice”*. As mentioned in the literature review, leaders can improve their communication, build trust, and create inclusive environments by reflecting on their biases and seeking feedback, approaching conversations with authenticity, curiosity, empathy and a willingness to learn (Durning et al., 2022). The participants in this study were given the time and space throughout interviews to share why they thought they reacted in different ways, which seemed to be an important step in their growth and self-awareness.

Reflecting on experiences appeared to help participants continuously learn about their own practice, but they reflect how emerging leaders can be helped with their leadership practice. Wylie and McKinley (2018) identified attending to one's learning as essential for sustaining and maintaining leadership roles, modelling healthy behaviours, and promoting engaged, effective and satisfied leaders. One participant supported this sentiment and shared the impact of reflecting on her practice, *“Thanks for helping me to reflect on not just for myself, but how I might better model for the seven that I'm currently invested in growing”*. Reflection also allowed individuals to develop greater self-awareness and empathy. By reflecting on their own experiences and emotions, leaders and listeners were able to better understand the experiences and emotions of others. This, in turn, allowed them to communicate more effectively, build stronger relationships, and create a more inclusive and supportive environment. Furthermore, through reflection, participants were able to gain a better understanding of how their actions and decisions impacted others consequently helping them build stronger relationships with their team members.

Identity, values and beliefs impact leadership

Kia pukuru o vaevae, kia mokora o kaki.

May your legs stand firm and upright like the breadfruit tree and your neck stand tall like the duck moving and seeking opportunities.

The 'Ei Katu model considers the headband as the foundation to the 'Ei Katu. The constant component that does not move much like identity and core values. However, the headband can be adjusted to different sizes. For many of the participants in this study, their teacher identity grew into leader identity and their vaine (woman) identity grew into mother identity. The well-known Cook Islands proverb above is a reminder that holding on to the strong foundation of your identity, culture and language allows you to stand tall with pride. It could be established that the relevance of identity, values and beliefs, and the perception of authenticity in leadership practice, impacts how leaders interact with and listened to others. The study's research question, "How have Cook Island leaders' lived experiences influenced their appreciation of listening?", is relevant to the finding "Cook Island leaders identity, values and beliefs are fundamental to their leadership approach and impact the way they listen to others". This section will discuss Cook Island leaders' identity, values and beliefs in relation to leaders' leadership approach and the way they listen to others. For the participants in this study, their Akono'anga Māori (Cook Island culture), their Cook Island heritage, and their unique island heritage were evidently important to their identity. Seven of the 25 islands that make up the Cook Islands were represented among the three participants – Rakahanga, Manihiki, Mangaia, Aitutaki, Rarotonga, Mauke and Aitu. Participants in this study deemed their Cook Island heritage, their unique island heritage and their varying roles as part of their identity.

Identity is a multifaceted concept that refers to the characteristics, traits, beliefs, values and experiences that define an individual. Participants in this study were encouraged to share their thoughts on the factors that influenced how they perceived themselves, their understanding of their place in society and the influence this had on their interactions with others. Participants shared their appreciation for being invited to reflect their cultural identity and how this influences their perceptions and behaviours, especially in leading diverse teams. The idea of identity was not new to participants, and they were more than confident in sharing who they were and where they were from. The opportunity to reflect on their identity and the direct connection between their leadership practice did, however, appear to be a new train of thought for participants. Hattori (2016) suggests that is essential for culturally-sustaining leaders to bring their authentic and whole selves to the leadership role, including their own knowledge, culture and language. In addition to this, there is the suggestion that leaders who have a strong sense of identity are more likely to be confident in their leadership abilities and decisions, which allows them to accept the differing views of their teams. For the participants in this study, the strength of their cultural identity seemed to impact on the way that they listened to others. Participants reported that they were more open to listening to others and hearing their perspectives due to their confidence in their own cultural identity. As shared by this participant, "*Leadership is ... understanding your own perspective, but it's also understanding the wider perspective, like you can't just make decisions in leadership based on yourself, especially in a collaborative space*". This quote gives

us a valuable insight into to complexity of identity and aligns with the principles of collective leadership.

In a collective leadership model, decision-making is a collaborative process where all perspectives, ideas and concerns were valued and taken into consideration. To effectively lead, a collective effort is required since no individual could possess all the capabilities, knowledge and resources to work alone (Gabriell, 2018). Participants in this study seemed to assume that collaboration and collective leadership were important for leadership. Effective listening involved being fully present in the conversation, actively engaging with all of the members, and seeking to understand all perspectives. It also involved setting aside personal biases and assumptions to appreciate the speaker's point of view fully. In a collective leadership model, effective listening was essential for building trust, creating a sense of shared purpose, and promoting cooperation and collaboration among team members. When each member felt heard and understood, they were more likely to feel invested in the decision-making process and committed to the outcomes. Effective listening in a collective leadership model also required leaders to be open to feedback and willing to learn from the perspectives of others. In order for collective leadership to be effective, it was important for each member of the group to have a strong sense of identity and to understand how their individual strengths and experiences contributed to the collective whole.

Understanding one's identity can help individuals become more self-aware and develop a deeper understanding of how they relate to others. Identity is more concerned with who we are, while self-awareness is focused on how we think, feel and behave. Developing a strong sense of identity can help us cultivate self-awareness, as it provides a framework for understanding our beliefs and values. At the same time, developing self-awareness can help us refine our identity and better understand our place in the world. The participants in this study demonstrated a keen sense of self-awareness which ultimately comes from being strong in your identity. As one participant reports, "*It's important to know yourself and know how 'in tune' you are or not 'in tune' ... and knowing yourself is also about knowing what triggers you*". London et al. (2023) suggest that leaders who possess self-awareness can assess how their identity and experiences influence their actions and decisions because leaders with high self-awareness are better equipped to listen actively and empathetically to their team members. Leaders who are secure in who they are, are less likely to feel threatened or defensive when listening to others. They are more open to new ideas and perspectives, engage in conversation and consider different viewpoints actively. In conclusion, it seems that understanding identity and developing self-awareness supported participants' leadership practices, and this seemed to be true for values too.

Values seemed to play a significant role in the leadership practice of participants. Listening and reflection played a significant role in the participants' understanding of their own values and the values of others. Awareness of their own values seemed to support and guide decision-making

and action-taking that aligned with their beliefs. We also are more open to tuning into the values and beliefs of others. One participant referred to these as layers, “*Each time you talk with them, you're unveiling different layers, and you're unpacking who they are as a person. If they don't trust you ... you don't have their relationship, and every time you enter into a conversation you understand more layers of the person ... if we don't listen, we're not going to unpack their values, their beliefs and their worldviews, you know what I mean*”. By understanding our own values and reflecting on how they show up in our leadership practice, individuals can lead authentically, and align with their beliefs with integrity. This study revealed that service, humility and respect were important to all participants. These values have been passed down through generations and are fundamentally important to Pacific peoples.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, service is a people-focused value that prioritises the group’s needs and well-being rather than the leader interests (Peyton & Ross, 2021; Rimoni et al., 2021). Service is an essential component of effective listening as it involves placing the needs and concerns of others before oneself. When individuals approach listening with a service mindset, they are motivated to listen attentively and with empathy, seeking to understand the other person's perspective and needs. When leaders listen with a service-oriented mindset, they can promote a culture of collaboration and inclusivity and demonstrate a commitment to the well-being and success of their team. Humility is also important in listening because it involves recognising that one does not have all the answers. It means being open to learning from others and being willing to admit when you are wrong or when you don't know something. Being open to hearing the message as intended requires the leader to enter the conversation with an open mind, setting aside biases and assumptions (Babita, 2013). This value can support listening by encouraging leaders to approach conversations with a willingness to learn from others' perspectives and experiences. By practising humility, leaders can create a space where others feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas, which can lead to more productive and inclusive discussions. Similarly, respect involves treating others with dignity and acknowledging their worth. When leaders listen to someone, they are showing them respect by giving them their full attention and acknowledging their value. Leaders who demonstrate respect, listen to others with an open mind and show interest in their ideas, even if they disagree, [missing words]. This can help build trust and strengthen relationships, which can lead to more effective teamwork and collaboration.

Listening and other skills

Pene 2:2 Kia ariu mai koe i to taringa ki te pakari, e kia kimi marie to ngakau i te kite ra

Proverbs 2:2 Listen closely to wisdom and direct your heart to understanding

On the question of, “Which listening skills do Cook Island leaders believe are important for effective leadership?”, the result of this study suggests that listening supported leaders in their leadership practice. Before this research, participants reported that they had not considered listening as a discrete skill that could influence their leadership. This aligns with research that suggests that listening is an underrated skill required for the development of strong relationships (Lloyd et al., 2017). However, it appears that listening in isolation does not lead to transformed leadership practices. The ‘Ei Katu listening and leadership model refers to the greenery, leaves and flowers of the ‘Ei katu as listening and others skills. The skills that participants mentioned in addition to listening that supported their leadership practice were pausing, questioning and paraphrasing complemented with ongoing reflection. In the ‘Ei Katu process, a range of flowers, greenery and leaves are required to complete the ‘Ei katu. This skills acquired are added to the band of identity and values and complement leadership practice.

Participants reported that they were familiar with the assumption that leadership is about giving instructions and taking action, and that leaders need to be strong communicators focusing on what is spoken. Furthermore that listening was somewhat undervalued because it is often seen as a passive and secondary skill, while speaking is seen as the primary and active skill in communication. However, effective listening is a crucial leadership skill that enables leaders to understand their team members, identify problems and develop effective solutions. The findings from this research suggest that listening actively and empathetically, using questioning for inquiry and paraphrasing for clarification, are practical skills that support leaders in helping their team members feel valued.

Active listening is a critical communication skill that requires the listening leader to concentrate on the speaker's verbal and non-verbal cues to comprehend their message fully. “Active listening surpasses passive listening or simple hearing to establish a deeper connection between speaker and listener, as the listener gives the speaker full attention via inquiry, reflection, respect, and empathy to validate and empower the other person” (Spataro & Bloch, 2018, p. 168). Active listening is often an effective communication technique commonly used in education. However, the skill is often misinterpreted and or undervalued. A common misunderstanding is that active listening means simply nodding, smiling, or making occasional comments to show that you are paying attention. While these behaviours can be helpful, they do not necessarily indicate that a person is truly engaged in the conversation or understands the speaker's message. Understanding the speaker’s message is the purpose of active listening. Additionally, empathetic listening goes beyond understanding the message to understand and feeling the speaker's emotions and perspective. Empathetic feedback acknowledges and validates the speaker's emotions and experiences, expresses empathy and support, and encourages further discussion. Empathetic listening is particularly important in emotionally charged situations, where the listener must listen attentively and respond with sensitivity and support. The skills identified in this research as

supporting leaders in making their people feel valued and contributing to effective leadership can be called active-empathetic listening.

Active-empathetic listening focuses on the role of empathy in active listening, a term first coined by Drollinger et al. (2006) and later adapted by Bodie (2011). Active-empathetic listening is a communication technique where the leader not only hears the words being spoken, but also makes an effort to understand the speaker's perspective, feelings and emotions. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, active-empathetic listening as a procedure includes three stages: the first stage (a) sensing, refers to attending to all of the information expressed by the speaker, giving the speaker full attention and withholding judgement. This is described by one research participant, *"That's when I started listening properly, because they were talking about feelings ... and I wanted to make sure I was listening to their feelings and emotions"*. The second section (b) processing, consists of synthesising information, which can be very challenging when you have lots of other things going on in your head. A participant explains this challenge with her comment, *"I'm thinking, you know, do I really hear what my teachers are saying, and do I hear what they really need? And because I tend to go 100 miles an hour"*. Finally (c) responding, signifies the use of verbal and non-verbal means to indicate attention, including asking questions to inquire and paraphrasing to clarify understanding. An example of this was shared by a participant, *"And so I've been trying to practice listening first. And then asking them to rephrase using questions like 'Oh can you clarify? Can you just summarise that part for me?' ... And 'so how do you think it's going? And why do you think this is happening?'"* Participants did not know the stages of active-empathetic listening, however, much of their contributions align closely with the stages of active-empathetic listening. One surprising factor that was found to be significantly associated with listening were the importance of other skills such as pausing listening, questioning and paraphrasing. While this study did not set out to discuss or report on these skills individually, they do align with the notion of 'responding' in the listening process and seem to be intricately interlinked with listening as a leadership practice.

Questioning as a leadership skill refers to the ability of a leader to ask thoughtful and insightful questions that can help clarify issues and gather information. Questioning as a leader can be a powerful tool for understanding the needs, concerns and perspectives of the team. The literature has shown that questioning and responding are important aspects of effective communication, as they make the speaker feel heard and acknowledged, and demonstrate the listener's intent to receive their messages (Ames et al., 2012; Tate, 2003). Effective questioning skills can also help leaders build trust and rapport with your team members, by demonstrating their interest in their opinions and ideas. Similarly, paraphrasing supports team members in feeling heard. Participants in this study paraphrased when talking to individuals and within groups, *"I get them to, you know, kind of rephrase or get me to describe that for me, there's like a little extra"* and *"I would repeat a key theme or idea ... I could pick up on some alignment and could acknowledge that back to the*

group". As mentioned earlier in the literature review, reflecting back what has been shared through clarifying, summarising and paraphrasing, and capturing the essence of the message through active listening, can confirm that a message has been heard as intended by the leader, and can bring greater clarity to the speaker's message (Durning et al., 2022; Nemec et al., 2017; Netolicky, 2016b). The final skill of pausing was not mentioned in the literature, however, it was raised as a skill that supported participants in their listening. Pausing was used by participants to encourage more dialogue in conversations, for participants to notice more, and to ensure that the messages shared were being understood and consequently, allowing them to respond with a thoughtful response. This is explained by participants in the following excerpts, "*I'm trying to tell myself to be comfortable in the silence ... to be attentive because that's when you start noticing more*" and "*by slowing down and just listening more intently, I've managed to catch a lot of all the other bits and pieces*". It can therefore be assumed that the listening skills participants in this research believed are important for effective leadership finding are active-empathetic listening, questioning, paraphrasing and pausing. However, it can be argued that these skills alone will not lead to effective leadership, in fact, it was the process of reflecting on these skills and practice that led to these insights.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the three significant findings that emerged from the data in relation to the literature presented in this thesis. This discussion section discussed – Finding 1: Regular reflection on listening (and other skills) supported Cook Island leaders' leadership practice; Finding 2: The significance of identity, values and beliefs in forming leaders and their approach to listening to others; and Finding 3: Listening is a practical skill that supported leaders in helping their people feel valued. The next chapter of this thesis will provide an overview of the research study, drawing overall conclusions from the study using a conceptual model – 'Ei Katu listening and leadership model. Furthermore, the strengths and limitations of the study will be carefully reviewed, and recommendations for future listening and leadership will be proposed.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the 'Ei Katu listening and leadership model (Figure 6.1) was created to conceptualise the findings of this research. The findings were discussed with reference to the literature reviewed, the research questions and the overall aim of this research. This concluding chapter will provide an overview of the research study, a summary of the research findings, draw overall conclusions, evaluate any limitations of the study, and make recommendations for further research.



Figure 6.1: 'Ei Katu listening and leadership model

An overview of the research study

This research examined the impact ‘listening’ has on improving the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools.

The following research questions underpinned the research:

1. In what ways does listening improve the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools?
2. In what ways has lived experience influenced the way Cook Island leaders value listening?
3. Which listening skills do Cook Island leaders believe are important for effective leadership?

The thesis was organised into six chapters, each with a specific purpose in contributing to the overall research study. Chapter One provided an introduction to the research, laying the ground work for the rest of the thesis. The chapter offered a brief background and context for the study, highlighted the purpose of the study, and outlined the research aims and questions.

Chapter Two presented a literature review that critically examined existing literature and research in the study area. The review identified three main themes that emerged from the literature: Pasifika leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand, educational leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the listening leader. This chapter served to provide a foundation for the rest of the thesis by synthesising existing research and identifying gaps in the literature that the research aimed to address.

Chapter Three outlined the research methodology and data collection process. The chapter explained the rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology and the data collection method of the semi-structured interview. Additionally, the chapter discussed the data analysis procedures used, aspects of validity, reliability and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four presented the research findings generated from the data collection process. The chapter identified three main findings related to leadership practice and listening skills among Cook Island leaders. The findings highlighted the importance of regular reflection on listening skills, the fundamental role of identity, values and beliefs in leadership practice, and the practical skills that supported leaders in helping their people feel valued.

Chapter Five discussed the implications of the research findings and offered recommendations for leadership and listening practice. The chapter used the ‘Ei Katu listening and leadership model

(Figure 6.1) as a conceptual framework to integrate the findings with the existing literature and research questions.

This final chapter integrates all of the chapters together providing a synthesis of the thesis. This concluding chapter will provide an overview of the research study, a summary of the research findings, draw overall conclusions, evaluate any limitations of the study and make recommendations for further research.

Summary of the research findings

This summary of findings section presents a condensed overview of the key research findings of the present study. The first finding indicates that regular reflection on listening and leadership, along with other skills, supported Cook Island leaders' leadership practice. This finding suggests that leaders who engage in continuous learning and development of listening (and other skills) can enhance their overall leadership practice.

The second finding emphasises the fundamental role of Cook Island leaders' identity, values and beliefs in their leadership approach and how they listen to others. This finding highlights the importance of self-awareness and understanding of personal biases in effective leadership.

The third finding underscores that listening, along with other practical skills, supported leaders in helping their people feel valued. This finding suggests that leaders who actively listen to their team can create a supportive and inclusive team environment. Overall, the research findings suggest that listening is a critical skill that supports effective leadership, and regular reflection and continuous development of listening (and other skills) can enhance leadership practice. The new model developed from the study 'Ei Katu listening and leadership model (Figure 6.1) provides a framework for understanding the impact of listening on leadership practice in the context of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools.

Conclusions

Conclusion One

Regular reflection on listening and leadership, as well as other skills, can improve the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools. Therefore, it is important for leaders to engage in continuous learning and development of their listening and other skills.

Conclusion Two

The identity, values and beliefs of Cook Island leaders play a fundamental role in their leadership approach and how they listen to others. Therefore, self-awareness and understanding of personal biases are crucial for effective leadership.

Conclusion Three

Listening, along with other practical skills, can help leaders make their team members feel valued. Therefore, leaders who actively listen to their team members can create a supportive and inclusive team environment.

Conclusions Four

Listening is a critical skill that supports effective leadership. Therefore, leaders should develop their listening skills continuously and reflect regularly on their listening and leadership practices.

Conclusion Five

The 'Ei Katu listening and leadership model (Figure 6.1) provides a framework for understanding the impact of listening on leadership practice in the context of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools. This model can be useful for leaders in other contexts as well.

Strengths of the study

The researcher's Cook Island identity and experience in educational leadership carries considerable weight in the study. This cultural and contextual knowledge provides an understanding of the context valuable in conducting research with the participants, which allows for the identification of culturally-specific factors affecting the research outcomes. Additionally, the researcher's cultural identity and experience may have contributed to building trust and rapport with the participants, which is essential for collecting accurate and reliable data. Furthermore, the researcher's cultural identity and experience provide a voice for Cook Island leaders, enhancing the representation of the Cook Island perspective in the research. Overall, the researcher's cultural identity and experience are significant strengths in this study and can contribute to the validity, and ethical conduct of the research.

The second strength of this study (the researcher's decision to conduct multiple interviews with participants over a several months) was valuable in this research. This approach has several advantages, including increased depth of data, improved validity and increased participant engagement. By conducting multiple interviews, I can explore the participants' experiences, perspectives, and attitudes towards the research topic in greater depth, leading to a richer understanding of listening as a leadership skill. Additionally, multiple interviews with the same participants allowed the researcher along with participants to confirm or dispute initial findings,

improving the validity of the research. Moreover, conducting multiple interviews can increase participant engagement and commitment to the study, leading to more accurate and detailed responses, as well as a deeper understanding on their part of the research topic.

Limitations of the study

The limitation of this study is the small number of participants. This limitation is significant because it affects the transferability of the study's findings. A small sample size reduces the statistical power of the study, which means that the findings may not accurately represent the larger population of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools. Furthermore, a small sample size limits the diversity of perspectives and experiences that can be included in the study. It is important to note that the small sample size may also affect the reliability and validity of the study's findings. Therefore, caution should be exercised in interpreting the results, and future research with larger and more diverse samples is needed to confirm the findings of this study.

Another limitation of the study was the potential for bias due to the researcher's cultural identity and experience. As much as this can be considered a strength, the researcher's background and personal experiences may have influenced the interpretation of the data. However, the researcher employed strategies to mitigate this limitation. Member-checking was employed by the researcher, which involved inviting the participants to reflect on their data after each interview and on the findings at the conclusion of interviews.

The limitation of this research is that the researcher's level of knowledge and experience in the research process may have had an impact on the quality of the research findings. As a novice researcher, the researcher had limitations in terms of their understanding of research methodology, data collection and analysis techniques. These limitations may have impacted the accuracy and reliability of the findings. However, it is important to note that the researcher took steps to mitigate these limitations, such as seeking guidance and support from her supervisor continually throughout the process. Overall, while the researcher's level of knowledge and experience may have been a limitation, it also highlights the importance of continuous learning and development in research.

Recommendations

Increasing the sample size in future studies would be a valuable research recommendation. The current study had a small sample size of Cook Island leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools. While the findings provided important insights into the role of listening in leadership practice for this particular group, the results cannot be generalisable to other contexts or populations. Therefore, increasing the sample size in future studies would allow for a more

diverse range of perspectives and experiences to be represented in the research, enhancing the external validity of the findings. Overall, increasing the sample size would improve the robustness of the research findings and enhance their applicability to a wider range of settings and populations.

Based on the findings of the research, I would recommend that leaders focus on developing not only their listening skills but also their pausing, questioning and paraphrasing skills. This will help them better understand their team members and make them feel valued and heard, ultimately leading to more effective leadership. Additionally, leaders should be aware that effective leadership practice requires a combination of different skills and not just one. Therefore, it is important to prioritise skill development in multiple areas to become a well-rounded leader.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Research interview questions

The first interview

(1) Akono'anga Māori, Cook Islands culture;

The purpose of the first interview is to gather demographic information about each participant and to establish their turanga (their place of work/relationships). Participants will get an overview of the research project and be offered the opportunity to withdraw from the study at this stage. Key themes from this interview will be presented back to the participants in the next interview.

- Can you tell me about yourself?
- Can you tell me about your context and your leadership role?
- Can you tell me your understanding of listening?
- Who in your life is/has been a good listener?
- What are the skills this person has that demonstrates good listening?
- How do you think listening influences leadership practice?
- Do you have any further comments?

The second/third interview

(2) No teia tuatau, of this time (i) komakoma marie, let our conversation be unhurried, be in the now; and (ii) kia maru to korua komakoma'anga, let your conversations be calm and measured. This interview will have few questions and encourages the Primary Researcher to listen while participants share narratives of their experiences. There will be a 1-week gap between each interview.

- Can you tell me about a listening episode (an interchange with a colleague) you experienced in the last week?
- What were the listening skills you demonstrated?
- How do you think listening influences your leadership practice?

The fourth interview

(3) Tā'anga'anga'ia, put to practice

Key themes from ALL interviews will be presented back to participants in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to surface what actual impact reflecting on listening has had on participants' leadership practice.

- As you reflect on our past 3 interviews, how do you think listening influences your leadership practice?

- Which listening skills do you believe are important for effective leadership?
Any other comments/reflections?

Appendix B: Advertisement text and image

Are you a leader in a New Zealand Primary School?

Are you of Cook Island descent?

Would you like the opportunity to reflect on your leadership practice?

YES? Please read on...

Kia orana tatou katoatoa

My name is Naketa Ikihele and I am a student researcher at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) and currently working towards a Master of Educational Leadership. I am about to embark on a research project that looks at “Improving leadership practice through ‘listening’: The perspective of Cook Island leaders in New Zealand primary schools”.

What will this research involve?

Your time - four interviews that will take approximately 1 hour each.

What are the benefits?

You will have the opportunity to reflect on your listening and leadership practice through the lens of your cultural identity. You will also receive a summary of findings at the completion of the project.

Please note: I am unable to include participants who are related to me, personal friends or have been a close professional colleague.

For further information please email naketa@kiamahira.co.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26th May 2021 on which the final approval was granted AUTEK Reference number 21/122.



AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

RESEARCH STUDY

Improving leadership practice through
'listening': The perspective of Cook Island
leaders in New Zealand primary schools.

Are you of
Cook Island
descent?

Are you a
leader in a
primary
school?

Would you like the
opportunity to
reflect on your
leadership practice?

Do you have
approximately
4 hours to
spare?

YES? Please read on...

Kia orana tatou katoatoa

My name is Naketa Ikihele and I am a student researcher at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) and currently working towards a Master of Educational Leadership. I am about to embark on a research project that looks at "Improving leadership practice through 'listening': The perspective of Cook Island leaders in New Zealand primary schools".

What will this research involve?

Four interviews that will take between 30 minutes to 1 hour each.

What are the benefits?

You will have the opportunity to reflect on your listening and leadership practice through the lens of your cultural identity. You will also receive a summary of findings at the completion of the project. For further information please email naketa@kiamahira.co.nz

Please note: I am unable to include participants who are related to me, personal friends or have been a close professional colleague.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26th May 2021 on which the final approval was granted AUTEK Reference number **21/122**

Appendix C: Participant information sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced

22nd April 2021

Project Title

Improving leadership practice through ‘listening’: The perspective of Cook Island leaders in New Zealand primary schools.

An invitation

Kia orana, Kia ora, Fakalofa lahi atu. My name is Naketa Ikihele. I am a student at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) studying towards a Master of Educational Leadership. I am inviting you to participate in a research project that I am leading entitled Improving leadership practice through ‘listening’: The perspective of Cook Island leaders in New Zealand primary schools.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research aims to examine the impact listening has on improving the leadership practice of Cook Island leaders in New Zealand primary schools. The research uncovers the ways in which lived experience influences the way Cook Island leaders value listening and unpacks the listening skills Cook Island leaders believe are important for effective leadership.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

I am inviting you to be part of my research because you responded to my post in NZ School Leaders (Primary) Facebook page. You have been selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

You have self-identified as a Cook Island descendant

You have self-identified as a leader in a New Zealand Primary School e.g. Deputy Principal, Team Leader, Principal, Tumuaki, Tumuaki tuarua

You have emailed me directly, indicating your interest in the research.

Please note: I am unable to include participants who are related to me, are personal friends or are/have been a close professional colleagues.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice), and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You can email the researcher at naketa@kiamahira.co.nz to indicate your interest. If you are selected to participate in the research, I will ask you to sign a Consent Form at our first interview. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

In our first meeting, you will be invited to ask any questions clarifying the scope of this research. You will be asked to confirm your participation in this research project by signing the consent form. If you agree to participate, you will be invited to participate in four interviews (approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour each) at your school or private space at an AUT campus.

Each interview will be guided by the following:

Describe your leadership role/context

What do you understand about listening?

How does this influence your leadership?

Can you discuss a listening episode you experienced?

Reflecting on listening as a leadership skill

What are the discomforts and risks, and how will they be alleviated?

It is expected there will be very little risk to you, and the topics under discussion are unlikely to prove personally intrusive. You may find taking part in the research enjoyable and an opportunity to reflect on your leadership and listening practice.

There is also a possibility that due to the size of the Cook Island education leadership community in New Zealand primary schools, you may be identifiable. It is possible others may be aware you participated in the research.

You can withdraw from this research at any stage up until data collection has been completed. You will have the opportunity to review key ideas/themes from your previous interview before our next interview commences and have your comments changed or removed. The Primary Researcher will exercise a duty of care to participants by not including material that may create a risk for the participant.

What are the benefits?

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research, but it may help improve the quality of research conducted in an area with which you are associated. You will have the opportunity to reflect on your listening and leadership in a confidential space and discuss matters pertinent to your practice and Cook Island leadership. Since the findings of this research will be assessed for a Master of Educational Leadership, your involvement also contributes to my postgraduate qualification.

How will my privacy be protected?

Any information that may identify you (including your name) will be kept confidential. An appropriate pseudonym will be used in place of your real name, and limited information will be shared about your context in the final report. There is a small chance that participants may be known to each other because of the relatively small number of Cook Island people that hold leadership positions in New Zealand primary schools. However, all efforts will be made to keep participants' identities private. In addition to this, the researcher and supervisor will transcribe all interviews. Raw data will be stored securely in password-protected electronic files or locked filing cabinets for five years after completion of the project, when it will be destroyed.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The cost associated with participation is your time. You can expect that your involvement will take no more than 4 hours in total.

Preliminary questions/korero – 30 minutes

Interview 1 – 60 minutes | Interview 2 & 3 – 45 minutes | Interview 4 – 60 minutes

Total 4 hours maximum

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Please consider this request, and if you are interested in participating, please contact me within two weeks of receiving this information sheet. If I have not heard from you by then, I may follow up on my invitation a second time.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

If you would like to receive a summary of the research findings, please indicate this on the consent form.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Alison Smith, alison.smith@aut.ac.nz, Phone 09 921 9999, ext. 7363. Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Carina Meares, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

RESEARCHER CONTACT DETAILS:

Naketa Ikihele, naketa@kiamahira.co.nz

PROJECT SUPERVISOR CONTACT DETAILS:

Dr Alison Smith, alison.smith@aut.ac.nz, Phone: 09 921 9999, ext. 7363

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26th May 2021, on which the final approval was granted AUTEK Reference number 21/122.

Appendix D: Participant consent form

Project title: Improving leadership practice through ‘listening’: The perspective of Cook Island leaders in New Zealand primary schools.

Project Supervisor: Dr Alison Smith

Researcher: Naketa Ikihele

I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 22nd April 2021.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

I understand that if I withdraw from the study, I will be offered the choice between removing any data identifiable as belonging to me or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removing my data may not be possible.

I agree to take part in this research.

I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes No.

Participant’s signature:

Participant’s name:

Participant’s Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26th May 2021, approval was granted AUTEK Reference number 21/122

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form