Leadership Styles of New Ireland High School Administrators: A Papua New Guinea Study

ALFRED TIVINARLIK
Divine Word University

CAROLYN L. WANAT
The University of Iowa

This yearlong ethnographic study of principals' leadership in Papua New Guinea high schools describes influences of imposing a bureaucratic school organization on principals' decision making in a communal society. Communal values of kinship relationships, wantok system, and "big men" leadership challenged principals' responsibility to uphold bureaucratic principles. Developing countries that impose Western infrastructures on traditional cultural systems may learn from the mismatch of structural processes and communal values that may distance communities from their schools. [Papua New Guinea schools, principals' leadership, communal values, school reform, bureaucracy]

Papua New Guinea began implementing an educational reform program in 1994 to improve the quality of education for its people. Papua New Guinea's efforts are complicated because the nation is made up of separate groups of people whose cultures are very diverse and distinctively different. To develop an appropriate educational system for the entire nation requires a sound understanding of the local cultural contexts in which the system will be implemented. Reform initiatives typically emphasize the central role of leadership in delivering an effective educational system. Given Papua New Guinea's linguistic and cultural diversity, it is critical to understand ways that leadership practices are shaped and complicated by diverse local cultural systems and social organization.

In the context of educational reform, this article reports findings from an exploratory ethnographic case study of the leadership styles among high school principals and deputy principals in the New Ireland Province of Papua New Guinea. Specifically this study investigated the ways in which these school administrators integrated influences from their traditional communal value base and the imposed bureaucracy of the national and provincial education departments. The study posed the following questions: While the high schools operate under an imposed bureaucratic structure, do traditional leadership styles carry over into the school organization? If so, what impact do communal values have on leadership styles or practices in a modern school organization?

We begin by outlining the study's theoretical underpinnings and then provide an overview of the cultural and educational systems of Papua New Guinea. Next, we discuss how local communal values of New Ireland societies, specifically kinship relationships, the wantok system, and the big men leadership ideology, impact leadership
styles of high school administrators. Our analysis emphasizes the impact of local cultural values on leadership for educational reform as Papua New Guinea attempts to educate its citizens for an inclusive and productive democratic society.

Theoretical Framework

Educational anthropology and educational leadership literatures provide theoretical perspectives that guide and inform this study. Research in both fields argues that cultural systems determine the values and norms that dictate individual behavior in social contexts. We view bureaucracy as culture, maintaining that characteristics of bureaucracy impose specific values and expectations for behavior, particularly for professional roles and decision making, on individuals in bureaucratic educational organizations. Defining bureaucracy as culture helps explain the problems that high school principals in this study faced as bureaucrats in a traditional society.

Spindler's (1955) and Spindler et al.'s (1990) work on the process of cultural transformation and transmission provides a framework to explain the tensions between the values of the bureaucratic school organization and traditional communities of Papua New Guinea. Spindler (1955) argues that a radical shift in values is at the core of social and cultural change. He further argues that a transformation from traditional to emergent value systems is a disjointed, conflicted process, with both value systems operating simultaneously. As cultural transition is characterized by conflict and, at the extreme, demoralization and disorganization, institutions and individuals hold contradictory views of life. Spindler's (1955) and Spindler et al.'s (1990) explanation of cultural change helps us understand the inherent challenges of imposing the manufactured culture of bureaucracy on a communal society; norms for appropriate behavior of New Ireland high school principals and deputy principals, as dictated by the school organization's structure and rules, operated simultaneously with traditional values and norms that determined expectations—local communities had of high school principals. This conflict explains the disorganization and inequitable treatment of individuals that resulted as high school principals attempted to implement policies mandated by the National and Provincial Education Departments.

Spindler's (1959, 1999) and Spindler and Spindler's (1989, 1994) work on cultural therapy provides a further framework to analyze principals' behaviors as they were pressured simultaneously to fairly implement educational policies and to respond to requests through kinship relationships from their wantok networks. Spindler (1999:466) defines cultural therapy as "a process of bringing one's own culture in its manifold forms to a level of awareness that permits one to perceive it as a potential bias in social interaction and in the acquisition or transmission of skills and knowledge." He goes on to explain that individual actions can be taken as caused by one's culture, not one's personality, as anyone can have "cultural blindness." Spindler and Spindler (1989) add that culture consists of activities linked to results of gaining possessions, recognition, power, status, or satisfaction. In changing or modernizing societies such as Papua New Guinea, appropriate linkages are learned that later become outmoded or perceived but not mastered. Their explanation of an inappropriate fit between obsolete learned linkages and present expectations for behavior places problematic actions of principals in the context of mismatched cultural systems and removes the necessity of judging principals' behaviors in the context of bureaucratic values such as unfairness, inequity, or nepotism.
From the field of educational leadership, we view the process of policy implementation from the perspective of organizational political cultures. An inevitable component of policy implementation, interpretation of policy is modified by pressures of influential stakeholders at national, state, and local levels, among them federal legislators, state department of education officials, local boards of education, and powerful, prestigious local citizens. Lipsky’s (1976) theory of street-level bureaucracy explains wide variation of policy implementation that sometimes results in negative unintended consequences for policies intended to be fair, uniform, and equitable (Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin 2005). Street-level bureaucrats are “those men and women who, in their face-to-face encounters with citizens, ‘represent’ government to the people” (Lipsky 1976:196). Police officers, social workers, teachers, and school principals are examples of street-level bureaucrats. It is important to understand that street-level bureaucrats perform their work in a very complex, politically uncertain work environment as they span boundaries between school organizations and communities (Crowson 2003), bridging and buffering school personnel from relationships with local citizens (Ogawa 1996). In studies of school leaders in the United States, street-level bureaucrats typically place importance on federal and state directives and less importance on school sites with low attention to parent and community concerns (Hannaway 1989). Central office (Berne 1995) and powerful principals (Malen and Ogawa 1988) retain their power even if policies promote site-based management of schools.

Our study conceptualizes the role of street-level bureaucrats in less stable cultural systems. New Ireland high school principals were pressured from their communities to acquiesce to local custom at the expense of policy implementation as intended. New Ireland principals did not have stable political cultures from the National and Provincial Education Departments to support their local policy implementation and, in fact, often had to deal with the problems created by inequitable, unfair policy interpretation at higher levels. They were in untenable positions, unable to implement school policies that had been misconstrued at higher levels and did not embrace local expectations. In the strictest sense, policy decisions forced principals to choose one set of cultural norms over the other.

Viewing the role of Papua New Guinea high school principals through the lenses of cultural transmission, cultural therapy, and street-level bureaucracy provided balance to interpret the role of principals, to the extent possible, from an unbiased vantage point.

Overview of the Papua New Guinea Context

Situated at the northern tip of Australia, Papua New Guinea is an independent country of over 600 islands. The mainland territory occupies the eastern half of the Island of New Guinea; smaller islands include Manus, New Britain, New Ireland, and the North Solomons. One of 20 provinces, New Ireland is three degrees south of the equator in the northern end of the Bismarck Archipelagos. As a main island surrounded by smaller islands, New Ireland is 230 miles long and, on average, 20 miles wide. New Ireland’s estimated population of 87,000 includes 14 dominant groups (Lahui 1997:1).

Papua New Guinea has a history of colonization by several European powers. Europeans visited parts of the country in the 15th century, but land claims did not
begin until the 19th century when the Dutch took control of the western half of the island. Germany colonized the northern portion of the island of New Guinea while the British settled in the southern region of the country of Papua. Papua became a British protectorate in 1884 and in 1905 passed to Australian control as the Territory of Papua. In 1884, Germany took possession of the northern region as Kaiser-Wilhelmsland; the area fell to Australia in World War I and was mandated to that nation in 1920 as the Territory of New Guinea. The two Papua New Guinea territories were administered jointly after 1949 and given self-government on December 1, 1973. On September 16, 1975, Papua New Guinea gained independence from Australia (Johnson 1993; Rannells 1995).

Papua New Guinea has an Indigenous population consisting of more than 1,000 tribes (McLaughlin 1996). Living in almost complete isolation, tribes speak 832 distinctive, mutually unintelligible languages (Grimes 2000). The New Ireland Province alone has 22 languages (Garret 1997). The languages in Papua New Guinea are different not only in the way English, German, Dutch, and French are different but also in the way English, Chinese, Swahili, and Cherokee are different (McLaughlin 1997). The senior author’s language is Tungak. Tok Pisin and Tok Ples—pидgins that arose in the context of the massive labor recruitment programs of colonial regimes—are used for intergroup communication, English education, administration, and commerce.

Cultural Values: Communal Adaptations

Before colonization, the Indigenous peoples of Papua New Guinea were concerned with and consistently pursued the basic needs of life, food, and shelter. They attended to the interests of their own small communities. Within each village, life centered around values of sharing. Sharing entailed interactions in which persons communicated relationships that were “of one kind” and did not engender indebtedness in either of the persons participating (Clay 1977). For instance, a surplus of food or fish always was shared with other families rather than being stored for future consumption. The rationale for much of the moral behavior in traditional Papua New Guinea depended on the overall welfare of the community, a factor that bears significance for the New Ireland population (McLaughlin 1994). Behavioral patterns that were considered morally correct or inappropriate depended on community interests. Personal wealth was held in trust for the family, the clan, and the village instead of keeping it for oneself (Narokobi 1983), making use of land and resources a community affair.

Communal values were and continue to be expressed through the wantok system. Swatridge (1985:127) describes the wantok system as “friendly society, welfare system, and life-assurance all in one.” MacDonald (1984) states that wantok is a metaphor derived from language and applied to the field of human relationships. It has many layers and nuances of meaning. When the word is split into two components, “wan” and “tok” (in English, “one” and “talk”), wan gives the notion of sameness and sharing while tok gives the notion of verbal communication (MacDonald 1984:221). In a limited sense the wantok are people who have a common language, while in a broader sense the wantok are people who understand and support each other. The term wantok thus represents the bond of people with a basic, kinship community, speaking the same tongue, living in the same place, and sharing values
Modernization and mobility in Papua New Guinea brought about by education and professional careers have led people to expand the idea of the wantok system. After moving to urban areas and other parts of the country, people form broader wantok groups to create and extend their "kinship community."

**Governance**

Community governance in New Ireland reflects communal values, particularly sharing for the common good. Of particular importance for this study is the concept of leadership. The structure of leadership varies from community to community in New Ireland, yet many communities are governed by "big men." As official community leaders, big men see that their people are protected, take charge of festivals, and make other important decisions regarding the people. The title of big man must be earned through hard work, fighting ability, and wealth. Traditionally, big men have been widely known and feared for their abilities in magic and sorcery and their feats as warriors (Rogers 1970).

Ironically, in New Ireland, leadership by big men takes place in a matrilineal system (Flaherty 1998; Lahui 1997). New Irelanders trace their descent from a common ancestress through successive generations of women. Women receive the rights of descent and land through the woman's brother. Land, a valuable commodity in New Ireland, is passed on from a mother to her children. Women decide who can plant crops for food or cash. In the last 20 years, women have given their permission to harvest timber in negotiations with a number of overseas logging companies (Flaherty 1998).

Big men leading in a community in which women have the final say in important decisions may seem contradictory. Yet both methods of decision making place importance on sharing. Big men not only possess wealth; they share it for the common good. Women decide who can use the land based on the purpose. Requests to use land for the common good are more readily granted than those for personal gain. Although New Ireland has been colonized and indoctrinated into Western culture to an extent, governance is still based on an understanding of the local cultural context.

**Overview of the Educational System**

The arrival of Europeans led to the introduction of a formal (bureaucratized) education system that differed significantly from New Ireland's economic, social, and political system and values. Before the arrival of Europeans, Papua New Guinea had no formal schooling. An established informal educational system taught children survival and citizenship skills for village life. Early Christian missions introduced religious instruction in 1874.

**Establishment of a Formal Educational System**

Following World War II, Australia actively introduced a formal education system based on universal primary education. After the Department of Education was established in 1946, the education system began to expand. Secondary schooling grew rapidly in the 1960s as the Australian government was pressured to promote independence. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the formal educational system was competitive in that a limited number of students were permitted to attend secondary school, college, or technical schools. Other students returned to their villages. Students
were selected to attend school based on a national examination administered by the Department of Education. This examination was conducted throughout the country at the end of the sixth year of primary education. Only about one-third of the students passed the examination. Results of the examination, combined with individual quotas set for total enrollment in each school based on students who received the highest marks, determined who was permitted to continue attending school.

The competitive system remained basically the same when Papua New Guinea gained independence in 1975. From 1975 until 1999, the year of this study, the number of schools increased; however, the increase was insufficient to accept a growing young population desiring schooling. The system placed emphasis on passing examinations to progress to higher levels, which resulted in low levels of accessibility to higher levels of the educational system. Little attention was given to relevant education for the majority who were pushed out of the system and had to return to their villages without being able to continue their schooling (Ahai and Bopp 1995). This pushing-out of students led to declining academic achievement at a time of rising national and provincial unemployment and increasing educational credentialism, resulting in widespread ambivalence about the value of formal education (Demerath 1999, 2003).

Education reform in Papua New Guinea is an effort to provide students greater access and to improve the quality of education. Although the National Education Board retains control of teacher training, school inspections, and the curriculum, other educational powers have been given to provincial governments. The provincial educational boards set and implement policies about local school sites and internal school affairs. Reform in New Ireland reflects national educational trends. Elementary schools have developed a new curriculum to teach reading and writing in children’s native languages. There are now 44 Tok Ples preschools in the local language, with more expected (Lahui 1997).

Secondary Schools

Papua New Guinea has had secondary schools since 1962 (Education in Asia and Oceania 1980; Guthrie 1984). In 1995 there were five high schools in New Ireland: Utu, Manggai, Mongop, Madina, and Namatanai. These high schools provide a four-year education from grade 7 to 10. At the beginning of the 1996 academic year, however, Namatanai high school was upgraded to an upper secondary school with an enrollment of 64 students to pursue a grade 11 and grade 12 education. Namatanai Secondary School now provides a four-year program commencing at grade 9 and ending with grade 12. The other four high schools send their top students to Namatanai Secondary School to complete grades 11 and 12.

Since gaining independence in 1975, the country has seen a growing number of Indigenous personnel taking up administrative positions at the high school level. The original Indigenous high school administrators modeled their leadership largely on that of their former colonizers. Criticism of colonial leadership styles and practices in operating the schools was nonexistent (Nongkas 2000). Generally, most early Indigenous administrators failed to question if established styles were relevant to their own cultural contexts. Rather, as during the time when there were more expatriate officers in the high schools, their leadership styles and practices were accepted. During the 1999 academic year, however, all five high schools were staffed predominantly by
Papua New Guineans, a majority being New Irelanders. The change in leaders from expatriates to Papua New Guineans poses questions about how present leadership styles articulate with local cultural context in an education system that is highly centralized at the provincial level.

Methods and Setting

This study is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the 1999 academic year in the New Ireland province. Data were collected in all five New Ireland high schools, the provincial Department of Education, and the University of Goroka, a teacher training institution. The research consisted of (1) individual semi-structured interviews with all five principals and six deputy principals of the five New Ireland high schools, the five chairpersons of the high schools' parents and friends associations, the education adviser for the Provincial Education Board (PEB), the high school inspector from the National Education Board, two lecturers at the University of Goroka, and two educational administrators who worked outside of New Ireland; (2) nonparticipant observations of one meeting of headmasters, school board, staff, or student discipline committee and one cultural event in each high school; (3) analysis of school documents, including minutes of board meetings, staff meetings, and student discipline cases; and (4) a personal journal kept by Tivinarlik throughout the fieldwork.

Participants represented the diversity of New Ireland. Most were from New Ireland Province; however, three were from the East New Britain, East Sepik, and Central provinces respectively, and one was from the United States. Of the 22 languages spoken in the Province (Garret 1997), six language groups were represented. Tivinarlik collected all data. He conducted interviews in English with the exception of five interviews with chairpersons of parents and friends groups; these interviews were conducted in Tok Pisin and Tok Ples and later translated. Tivinarlik tape-recorded and wrote field notes for each interview. Interviews were transcribed and entered into Atlasti for data analysis. Data from observations and documents were used to triangulate interview data. Tivinarlik also conducted member checks with each interview participant at the conclusion of his visit to the high schools. The constant comparative method (Strauss and Corbin 1998) was used to analyze the data. Participants are identified by position rather than name, and schools are not identified in the study to maintain confidentiality.

Researcher Roles

Tivinarlik is from the island of New Hanover at the northwestern edge of New Ireland. He has been a student, teacher, and administrator in New Ireland schools and thus had firsthand experience with the blending of customary and modern bureaucratic values during fieldwork. For example, he benefited from the wantok system. The education adviser who was on leave during the study was his relative; he made contacts with participants, easing access and data collection. However, Tivinarlik had to show a special kind of respect for a number of participants, among them his cousin-in-law. New Irelanders are expected to keep a respectable distance and show reverence for a cousin-in-law. He was reluctant to probe into certain issues out of respect. He also found himself being asked to participate in meetings in which...
he was asked to express his opinions because of his previous experience and to help his cousin-sister, a senior teacher in one of the schools and wife of the headmaster, double-check student report cards. His position as a New Ireland native and researcher placed him in the position of big man. As a big man, his position was both privileged and compromised. Participants granted him easy access but followed the New Ireland tradition of telling him what he wanted to hear. He found it necessary to observe events and then question participants about what he had just seen. The combination of observation and questioning created a balance in the research process that helped ensure accuracy.

The second author, Wanat, is a privileged citizen of the United States who has been a student, teacher, and professor of educational leadership in U.S. public schools. She has benefited from the bureaucratic structure that rewards credentials and positive employment experience. Her experience in bureaucratic school organizations balanced and complemented Tivinarlik’s “insider” position. During his data collection, we corresponded by e-mail, a satisfactory method to report progress and ask procedural questions. At the University of Iowa, we spent many hours reviewing and co-analyzing the data. This process allowed us to “make the familiar strange” (Spindler and Spindler 1982) from each of our perspectives. Conversations based on our respective insider/outsider positions allowed us to examine the invisible assumptions underlying both the communal and bureaucratic lenses that frame this study.

Findings

All-encompassing themes delineated tensions of imposing a bureaucratic education system in a society that places community values first. The impersonal bureaucratic structure based on individualism is antithetical to the relational basis on which professional decisions are made in communal societies. Thus our findings focus on cultural values in conflict with bureaucratic school leadership: kinship relationships, the wantok system, and big men leadership.

To establish a context, it is important to define a community in New Ireland, bearing in mind that traditional communities have undergone considerable change since European contact. Traditional communities in New Ireland consist of people living and identifying with a small group such as an extended family or section of a lineage. Small groups have a sense of identity with larger groups such as a clan section, subclan, or clan. People cooperate with and derive support from their own household or small community. For festive occasions, larger work projects, or matters affecting the wider traditional group, people relate to a larger community. Often members of a traditional group are related by kinship ties; such groups also may include people who have been adopted into the community and ascribed a position. Members of traditional communities share a common language. Although New Ireland has seen many changes, the nature of communities for the majority of natives remains the same (Smith 2003).

Kinship Relationships

When asked to discuss the presence and influence of fundamental societal values on leadership practices within the schools, participants talked repeatedly about family. All cultural groups of New Irelanders value family and their sense of belonging
to a family. Family relationships permeate throughout all aspects of life in New Ireland.

All Melanesian societies, including New Ireland, are organized on the basis of kinship, a distinctive feature of tribal societies around the world. Whiteman (1995:103) elaborates that "kinship is a system that prescribes how people living together should interact with one another." Within each cultural group, "there are usually smaller groups of more closely related people whose loyalties to one another are greater and who interact more frequently with one another than they do with other groups" (Whiteman 1995:106).

Picking up on this notion of kinship in tribal societies, the only international participant, an American expatriate who was chairman of the school board of one high school, confirmed the significance of family. He made an interesting observation of relationships in extended families. Astonished at the complexity of family relationships in Papua New Guinea, he commented that when he arrived in the country, he heard students talking about having more than one mother. He was amazed that aunts were referred to as mothers rather than aunts. The strong loyalties among related groups and families have an impact on the day-to-day aspects of life, a child's performance in school, and even the choice of a future career. The chairman claimed that:

people in the day-to-day living in ordinary life feel very much treasured or very much needed to have the support of the family or to be in the good graces. When they are at odds with their clan or their group, it affects their studies in school. It affects their relationships with other people and often you find out because you see these other problems. For example, not relating well with kids in school or getting into fights, you find out that there is friction in the family or this person feels ostracized or not part of that group. Family is very important.

The need for family support found its way into the administration of the high schools. To fulfill their administrative responsibilities, headmasters sought and relied on family support to carry out tasks. While such supports do not necessarily come from family members, they do come from people who are from the same area and speak the same language. These people are called wantoks. A Native participant who was the education adviser of the province had the following reflections:

I do feel that I relate and work well with wantoks. And in my organization, in New Ireland, if I go back, I will try and recruit a lot of wantoks. Although I may go against the thinking of a lot of other New Irelanders, because when I give them a job they know that it's going to be done. I rely on them that it's going to be done. And I have proven it that all the wantoks that are working in the Division of Education, or let alone, the schools, you know, when I give them a job, they know that they have to do it. And they do it. With other people, you may not expect that kind of commitment. But from my wantoks, I find out that they do support me.

Although administrators sought the support of family or wantoks to help in their respective responsibilities, a reverse of this notion of loyalty was discussed in the interviews. The people of the communities or subordinates in organizations sought out relatives or wantoks in higher administrative positions to assist them with difficult situations. It was easier to discuss a problem with an administrator known to the person because there was a common understanding between both parties. The following observations by one official reflect family loyalty in seeking administrative help:
Because of customary affiliation, our people don’t want to deal with anybody else because those people don’t know them and they would turn them away. They would say, “He’s just another of those people who want to come and complain.” But they feel comfortable dealing with somebody they know. So they always come to me. I guess it might happen to any other person who is holding that job. Their wantoks would come to him to seek official means or otherwise to discuss those issues and they would feel comfortable discussing it with him or her so that they get a quick answer. So, customary-wise, people want to go direct to the person they know that they will get an answer.

The ease with which people sought administrators who were closely related to them reflects family loyalty and the need for family support. Administrators of schools and the Department of Education routinely seek family support through relatives or wantoks higher up in the authority structure to get answers to their questions. Such a practice might be judged by modern bureaucratic standards as unhealthy to organizational goals or as nepotism. The Indigenous administrator, confronted with a dilemma, must make choices between upholding a communal lifestyle or pursuing the bureaucratic model in which there is “selection of personnel based on technical qualifications rather than on such things as family ties or friendship with the leader” (Bolman and Deal 1987:31). As an example, the Indigenous administrator must decide between upholding the communal value system, in which helping a close relative find employment could be considered proper, or upholding the bureaucratic value system, which perceives the employment of a close relative as favoritism.

Wantok System

Closely related to kinship relationships is the wantok system. Although the concepts are similar, the wantok system has been influenced by recent changes in Papua New Guinea society. The wantok system has potential for both positive and negative practices. On the positive side, wantoks provide human concern and security. At the same time, however, the system is open to the pitfalls of nepotism. As MacDonald (1984) explains, this is more evident with people in high places in public service and business who seek to help their wantoks to the detriment of other citizens. In observations of “the people in high places” in the education arena of New Ireland, participants noted instances of both positive and negative aspects of the wantok system.

Positive Aspects of the Wantok System. Administrators relied on their wantoks’ support to mobilize the bureaucratic machinery of the educational system. Headmasters argued that it was easier to get their wantoks to perform certain tasks that were ultimately for the benefit of the organization. For example, one female headmaster easily convinced village workmen to make repairs to the school. Subordinates in an organization were committed to their wantok leader and, hence, would assist in carrying out organizational goals. One former teacher and current University of Goroka lecturer observed of the current headmaster that he would talk to the village leaders if there were any problems. She also observed that “the village leaders would join us at our staff meetings” to discuss routine school matters. The wantok relationship necessitated that support be reciprocated between the administrator and subordinates. The university professor described the way in which the reciprocal relationship operated:
They [the village leaders] felt obliged to come up to the school and tell the headmaster if they were not happy with what the students were doing, especially if the students went to the village gardens or there were problems like fights. The villagers came in and saw the headmaster. There was a lot of interaction between the school administration and the village leadership.

One participant claimed that in the years when he was headmaster and education adviser of the province, he relied on the few wantoks he was with to get things done. He claimed that because of the wantok relationship, the wantoks working in the provincial office with him were more committed to necessary tasks. He further commented that he did not expect the same kind of commitment from people who were not his wantoks. For example, decisions were reached more easily and quickly between superiors and subordinates who were wantoks. As the education adviser noted:

They always come to me, people from our area, and I would guess it might happen to any other person who is holding that job. Their wantoks would come to him to seek official means or otherwise to discuss an issue and they would feel comfortable discussing it with him or her so that they get a quick answer. So, customary-wise, people want to go direct to the person they know that they will get an answer.

A participant from the island of New Hanover agreed that one's wantoks are supportive in the operations of an institution. He observed about his New Hanover wantoks that:

Since I started getting a lot more New Hanover people in, I won't call names, but all I have to do is go and speak in Tok Ples and tell them that I want this done, or I send them to go and do an errand: "I want requisitions raised and then go and get a drum of fuel." I know that at the end of the day they'll do those jobs. And it's easier to relate to them whereas other people from other places, you may not have that ease. But, I'm not saying that you trust all New Hanover people, but if you have got a good group of working New Hanoverians, you can establish that working relationship. They'll do a lot more than what you expect and it would be the same for any other group or any other ethnic groups, not only New Hanoverians.

A number of participants expressed the idea that they had to help their wantoks because of the kinship ties they had with the people who were seeking assistance. Illustrative of the sentiments are the following headmaster's comments:

Well, I think reminiscing and reflecting on what I have done, it's not so often that the relatives come. But when they come, yes, I think I am obliged to help them [with their personal requests for assistance], because of the attachment. Sometimes they come with issues that are not very important but because they are my wantoks and because of the family traditional obligations and kinship ties, I have to allow them to come in and help them by whatever means I can.

A parent who was a school board member noted another positive aspect of the wantok system. Teachers express great caring for wantok students they teach by giving personal attention. At the same time, they have the duty to discipline wantok students if need be, with the approval of the students' parents. As one principal commented:
When a teacher of a certain ethnic origin is at the school, she/he works hard so that her/his wantoks are well educated. The teacher also takes on the role of a guardian for her/his wantoks and encourages them to work hard academically as well as instilling approved social behavioral patterns in them. They tell them that if any student strays from what is expected of him/her, then the student will be punished because they are all together and it would be the teacher’s duty to see that the wantok student is in the right. Furthermore, the student’s parents know the teacher because they are related and it would be accepted if the teacher disciplined the wantok student. If a student is punished, the parents will not object because they know they are related. Regarding that, traditional customary practices make it easy for certain things in the school, particularly in disciplinary matters.

To summarize the positive aspects of the wantok system, wantoks of the high school administrators from both within and out of the school provided the necessary support to carry out the different tasks required of administrators, particularly in the area of discipline. A headmaster told Tivinarlik about one disciplinary case that is exemplary of the support that wantoks provide in disciplining students. The headmaster decided to resolve a conflict between two students in the traditional way, avoiding a conflict between two rival tribes. One of the boys shot the other boy with a stone during playtime. The matter was reported to the headmaster. The headmaster used the New Ireland way of resolving conflicts and sent word for the fathers to come and see him at his residence. In this cultural setting, men are generally the ones who have the primary say in the resolution of conflicts. When school was over, the parents came and the headmaster provided them with food and a cup of tea. They discussed local happenings. In essence, the headmaster was creating the setting for the meeting: All parties must be at peace, with a sense of goodwill established. The two students were told not to go home yet and were playing with their friends on the school grounds. When all were enjoying themselves, the headmaster told the parents about the problem and asked them how they were going to deal with it. Both parents decided that the two students would shake hands in the presence of the headmaster and end it there. The parents further told the students not to tell their people about the situation when they returned to their villages. That was the end of the matter and the meeting circumvented tribal conflict.

Negative Aspects of the Wantok System: In Papua New Guinea, the wantok system often has a negative connotation, typified in what MacDonald (1984) describes as evidence of malpractice, especially nepotism. Participants attested to the veracity of this connotation. One example of nepotism was the way in which teachers were assigned. The appointment of teachers to schools in the province was disrupted to the point that one headmaster described it as “a total mess.” He explained that nobody knew where to go. Before school began on the first Monday of the 1999 academic year, the teachers were told on Sunday to move to their new locations, an impossible task for many. When asked what had happened, the headmaster reflected:

There was a Provincial Education Board appointment committee meeting. The PEB appointment committee approved all the postings. They are the only ones who make such decisions. After that meeting, the appointment officer brought the list, ... approved by the provincial appointment committee, to be read out. Before it went out to the media, the appointment officer made his own changes without notifying ... and he put in people that ... it was somewhat like a ... wantok system. So, he crossed out this person who was in this school because he knows her. So, she asked to be transferred to [another school], so he gets someone from somewhere, and puts that person in that area and then brings that officer that he knows to
somewhere close by. In other words, he was entertaining requests from people that he knew were his relatives or his tambus [in-laws].

In this case, the appointment officer inappropriately used his leadership position to entertain requests from his wantok for teachers to be transferred to certain schools.

A second case involved the son of the vice chairman of a school board. The son and a female student at the school were taken to the discipline committee for a sexual misconduct charge. Both students were found guilty of breaching a major school rule and expelled. On appeal, the PEB overruled the decision to expel the boy and he was reinstated in the same school. Tivinarlik saw the student at school, but the school records indicated that he was enrolled under a different name. A headmaster made the following remarks:

"In my belief there is some kind of wantok system that exists between the PEB and the parents of the concerned child. Often the students who get into trouble are the children of parents who work in town. They are children of important people and often the people themselves are respected citizens and yet their children are the ones committing the offenses. When an offense is committed, we call them to face the board or the disciplinary committee and they try to defend their children even though they know their child is at fault and they say, "If you expel him/her, we will take the matter to the PEB."

It was alleged that the wantok system clouded the objectivity on the part of the PEB members who decided to reinstate the boy in the same school. The girl, however, was still expelled. Powerless and frustrated by the entire situation, a headmaster said:

"Well, actually we are not happy with that kind of situation. I'd like to see that if a case came up in the PEB and a student happens to be reinstated, at least the student is reinstated in another school. Because each governing council or board of governors in any school must be seen to be making decisions with respect to all these things. And if a student who has been expelled because of a particular offense gets reinstated into the same school, how then do you think the rest of the students are going to feel about that?"

In exercising their administrative responsibilities, participants were conscious of the pressures involved with the influence of the wantok system. The pressure that comes with the responsibilities of maintaining the institution without misuse of power often stood in opposition to pressure from family or wantoks to support and assist in an area of need. A headmaster provided this example of the dilemmas that administrators often face:

One classical example is the telephone. I have a telephone in my office and the ruling by the district administrator is that the public is not allowed to use the phone. It will only be used for official matters. But at times, I used to go off track because when an immediate family member travels from Rabaul to here and wants to make a call, that situation makes it very difficult for me to give.

It is often the case that an administrator will choose to help her/his family or wantoks as opposed to maintaining the institutional roles. Questioned as to why he chose to help his wantoks, the headmaster continued:

"Ah well, those people asking you are from your blood family. They are your blood, they are part of you and if you fail in this instance, while you are secure here in your workplace, when you go home, people will tend to say that I went to his office and he never helped me."
So, it sort of creates that barrier between you and your family. So, once you give him/her the phone, in time you are helping him/her. I will be good to him as a person because that family tie or family bond is held together and I don't fail, even though it's bad for my setup. But on the other hand, it is good for the continuity of service upon my part as I am obligated to support the family ties.

Participants were thus faced with a range of dilemmas and tensions emanating from the wantok system. They valued their wantok relationship and very often chose to reciprocate favors or assist wantoks in their needs. When asked whether the wantok system perpetuated nepotism, a headmaster made the following comments:

No, I don't see that. I think a lot of us who are in contemporary organizations are starting to realize where we draw the line and I think there is no nepotism in the kinds of decisions that we make. A lot of people may see otherwise, but we are not doing it for our own sake. We are doing it for everybody else. So there is a beneficiary in the end. So, regardless of what other people think about it, there is always a beneficiary. And at the back of our minds, we can feel that, yes, we have given some assistance to this person although the other person may feel that he had been overlooked. But if you look carefully, that's a fact of life. You cannot satisfy everybody.

This headmaster clearly adhered to the wantok system but was aware of the bureaucratic principle of treating people impersonally. His comment that "you cannot satisfy everybody" alludes to the pressure headmasters experience as they find themselves caught between two systems. This may be a hopeful sign of more equitable implementation of bureaucratic practices, but it also could signal heightened tensions between communal values and bureaucratic practices.

From one perspective, the wantok system provides human concern and security for its members; from a bureaucratic perspective, the system encourages nepotism, viewed as negative by many educated Papua New Guineans, following the logic of their former colonizers. However, some participants argued that there is potential for a greater good in organizations if the wantok system is used in such a way that other people in the organization are not unnecessarily overlooked. This argument supports the bureaucratic model of administering rules based on individual behaviors. The greater good of equal opportunity and access for education may suffer when wantoks receive favorable treatment. For example, one high school received a larger portion of grants than the other high schools because certain members of the provincial government had sons and daughters attending that school. This favoritism obviously sacrificed the greater good of the other schools to accommodate privileged families.

Big Man Leadership

The structure of leadership in Papua New Guinea varies from place to place. Historically, leadership in New Ireland cultures was exercised only over rather small groups of people. Very few practices of leadership were based on the exercise of accepted authority. Rather, the consent and consensus of those being led was vital to the leader, with an overwhelming emphasis on personal talents and achievement. Leadership in New Ireland is emergent rather than hereditary. One becomes a leader because of his/her contribution to community affairs, ability to persuade or coerce others, and the accumulation and distribution of wealth (MacDonald 1984).
Many New Ireland communities were governed by big men, the official leaders of the community who saw that their people were protected and led festivities and important decisions. One earned the position of big man through hard work, fighting ability, and personal wealth. A big man must be successful in economic transactions and settling disputes. He also must be a major contributor and organizer of feasts and gift exchange transactions for marriages, funerals, and public ceremonies. A participant reinforced the fact that to become a leader, one had to earn the respect of his/her people:

In New Ireland and most of the New Guinea side, leadership was very much earned, which is different from the very few chieftain systems operating in the country like the Mekeos and Trobrians. Those are a very few groups of people that had this chieftain system and so leadership was hereditary. In most of the New Guinea side leadership was earned.

Women in New Ireland communities can be awarded the status accorded to big men. One female participant was a recognized leader in her village and was given the respect due her as both a school administrator and a big man. (It is important to note that at the time of the study there had been only two women headmasters in New Ireland high schools. One was a New Irelander and the other an expatriate from Australia. One woman headmaster served in another province.) She commented that in her home village, she often took the lead in organizing festivities and was duly recognized in her local society. There were significant uncles in her family who helped her to become the leader:

I have an uncle, an only uncle back at home, who has been directing me. I am also the eldest in the family. The other boys were younger so there is no one else to be looked upon except me. So, I got most of what I know in terms of organization skills from my own clan, for example, knowing how to go about things. My uncle has helped me out on that as well as my father. And so I was given that recognition and my uncle himself or even my great-grandfather was a chief himself. So, that could have been inherited, especially on the organization side of things. With me being a woman that thing has been passed on to me. So, that is a contributing factor and when I came in as an ordinary teacher, I would take the lead in whatever tasks were assigned to do.

Although this female headmaster may have inherited her status, in general, the sons and daughters of big men are not guaranteed such a position.

Even though one person was the big man, decisions still were made collectively. Every member of society had to be consulted about issues that required a decision. The chairman of one of the school boards explained thus:

Yeah, we have a big man in charge of a hamlet. Before we had hamlets and what he did and how he did all the activities, he didn’t do them all on his own and with his own ideas. There was consultation.

Leadership by big men continues in modern New Ireland society and has implications for the administrative practices of school leaders. A reported case of a politician who requested that a decision regarding the expulsion of his son be rescinded is a good example of this carryover. The governor’s son was expelled from one of the high schools after the disciplinary committee met. The education adviser of the province, a study participant, received a call in the middle of the night from the
politician, who asked the education adviser in his capacity as PEB chairman to change the decision. The education adviser had to attempt to convince his fellow PEB members to reconsider the case. When asked why he felt compelled to comply with the politician's wishes, the adviser responded:

Well, our culture promotes the notion that we respect big people and we always want to try and please big people so that we are in their good books. So, basically that was what I did. And you know the decision that I made in the end was partially for my benefit.

With situations such as this, how does a big man earn the respect of his/her subordinates in a modern bureaucratic organization? A participant in charge of all the schools in a different province claimed that he had to think less of his position and authority and relate to his subordinates on their level:

Now working in the office again it was a great experience for me. I am from New Ireland but working in Milne Bay they also have different ethnic backgrounds and cultural values. But I never stepped out or did away with that kind of style of leadership that we have in New Ireland, the mentality where you think less of your job or your authority and think more about the people. We in New Ireland, and particularly in New Hanover, we have this kind of attitude that someone in authority does not look at himself as a big man. While you've got authority, you've a job that warrants respect, you at the same time have this attitude that you lower yourself down to the level of the people you are working with. And then you start to develop an understanding and they begin to appreciate you. "Oh! This man has got a big job, but here we see him with the grassroots." I think we in New Ireland should not do away with that kind of approach. Yes, they know that I have a big job; I have a big position, yes, they know that I am the head of the education division, but at the same time they know that I am just a person like them. That is important and by doing that, by coming down to their level, you begin to pick up a lot of respect from them and from that society.

Admittedly not everyone has the personality to relate with people the way the adviser did. He went out of his way to win the respect of those who served under him. An implication for modern-day administrators is that while one has responsibilities that warrant respect from subordinates, the leader still must earn their respect by relating at their level and treating each individual with dignity. Consequently, the authority of a headmaster or a provincial education adviser is fully realized when she or he earns the respect of colleagues. In effect, the educational leader attains big man status within the organization in a modern-day context. The attainment of status as a "bureaucratic big man" would suggest blending of these cultural forms—perhaps a goal for future achievement.

Conclusions and Implications

The communal value system has both positive and negative influences on the current Papua New Guinea educational system. Although kin-based and relational leadership helped some participants pursue school organization goals, these same culturally valued qualities, and the communal nature of New Ireland societies, sometimes impeded fair and equitable decision making and school practices. This tension raises many questions as the Papua New Guinea educational system undertakes reform. It is important that Papua New Guinea educators and policy makers examine the current education system in terms of the goals it hopes to achieve—universal education to meet the needs of all, including the return of children to village life,
improved access to and enrollment in primary and secondary education, increased educational opportunities for all regions, improved retention, and provision of non-formal education and literary groups (Josephs 2000; Temu 1997). The bureaucratic model is well designed to support attainment of its reform goals. Realistically, however, communal values have carried over into modern bureaucratic practices. Leadership styles and practices must be accepted into Papua New Guinea’s culture. Papua New Guinea has to create an educational system based on its own ethical and moral principles and cultural and social norms.

School administrators should be well informed about the two value systems by which leadership styles and practice are affected. Although cultural values are important, more effective yet culturally appropriate practice is imperative in high school administration. New Irelanders and Papua New Guineans may need to relinquish certain cultural norms in the bureaucratic context, even as they adapt new ones. Such changes will require extensive commitment and time because the change will impact fundamental values of most Papua New Guineans. To make a blanket policy for the entire educational system is unrealistic due to the multiple cultural and value systems involved. Each individual province or administrator will need to make such choices according to the local situation and school context.

The lessons learned from this study may assist other developing countries undertaking school reform. Importing organizational structures from different cultural contexts may create confusion, tension, and, more importantly, impede progress the reform movement seeks. Educational officials in other countries are advised to modify adopted structures to fit their unique cultural values.

Interpreting bureaucracy as culture with unique norms for acceptable behavior, this study refines the anthropological concepts of heritage culture and cultural therapy in developing countries. While imposing educational models from Western society adds to the heritage culture of the developing country, the additions are not completely or uniformly assimilated and may have the unintended consequence of detracting from the original intent. Conceptualizing the Native school leader’s role from the perspective of adding the responsibilities of the street-level bureaucrat explains what could be perceived as “corrupt” policy implementation as a clash between the cultures of community and bureaucracy. Educational anthropologists may explain educational reform in developing countries by interpreting culture broadly without imposing Western values on Indigenous customs.

This study also helps us better understand the pressures of local community values on school leadership. National initiatives to reform preparation of school leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers 1996) call for more attention to the leader’s role in inviting and supporting diverse community participation. Yet school leaders in the United States typically place importance on federal and state directives with low attention to parent and community concerns at school sites (Hannaway 1989). Central office (Berne 1995) and powerful principals (Malen and Ogawa 1988) retain their power even if policies promote site-based management of schools. Our study stresses the effect of acquiescence to local expectations at the expense of policy implementation as intended. Future research of educational leadership in the United States would benefit from a critical examination of community expectations as they affect schools and their principals. The blending of uniquely different cultures of schools and communities, as we have shown, changes the nature and relationship of both institutions.
Alfred Tivinarlik is dean of the Faculty of Education of Divine Word University and pro vice president of St. Benedict’s Campus in Wewak, Papua New Guinea (ativinar@yahoo.com). Carolyn L. Wanat is associate professor of Educational Policy and Leadership Studies at the University of Iowa (Carolyn-wanat@uiowa.edu).

Note

1. Participants use “wantoks,” an English plural form for the Indigenous term *wantok*. Use of the English plural marker “s” has appeared in urban and anglicized varieties of spoken Tok Pisin. This usage became common on radio news broadcasts as a distinct form of the language emerged in periodicals and radio following World War II. Media Tok Pisin is a journalistic variety for news reports, announcements, editorials, educational features, and letters in urban socilects. However, it is incorrect to add an “s” to Tok Pisin words as a pluralizer. The Indigenous pluralizer that has been in universal use since the 1970s is *ol* (Siegel 1985).

References Cited

Ahai, Naihuwo, and Michael Bopp

Berne, Robert

Bolman, Lee G., and Terrence E. Deal

Clay, Brenda Johnson

Council of Chief State School Officers

Crowson, Robert L.

Demerath, Peter

Education in Asia and Oceania, Regional Office

Flaherty, Teresa A.

Garret, Gertrude

Guthrie, Gerard

Hannaway, Jane
Leadership of Papua New Guinea Principals

Johnson, Patricia L.

Josephs, John

Lahui-Ako, Boe

Lipsky, Michael

MacDonald, Mary

Malen, Betty, and Rodney T. Ogawa

Marshall, Catherine, and Cynthia Gerstl-Pepin

McLaughlin, Denis

Narokobi, Bernard
1983 Life and Leadership in Melanesia. USP, Suva, Fiji and UPNG, Port Moresby, PNG: Sanon Printing Corporation.

Nongkas, Catherine

Ogawa, Rodney

Rannells, Jackson

Rogers, Edward S.

Siegel, Jeff

Smith, Michael French

Spindler, George D.
Spindler, George D., and Louise Spindler
Spindler, George D., and Louise Spindler, eds.
Spindler, George, and Louise Spindler, with Henry Trueba and Melvin D. Williams
Strauss, Anselm L., and Juliet M. Corbin
Swatridge, Colin
Temu, Ila, ed.
Whiteman, Darrell L.