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Kailua Canoe Club: A Values-based Holistic Approach to Leadership

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Cover Page Footnote

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Case Study



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Introduction

Ocean voyaging canoes brought Polynesian ancestors to Hawai'i. They are respected by subsequent generations as a living spirit embodying the mana (spiritual energy of power and strength) of those who first paddled them (Meyer, 2004). Canoes are also respected as a connection to ancestral homelands, and valued as a cultural sanctuary, or pu'uhonua (Case, 2021). Individuals and families often remain with the same canoe club for generations. Paddlers nurture each other's spirit of competition, team building, respect for the ocean, and life skills.

In this unique context of culture, nature, sport, and family, how are the leaders chosen? Do leaders emerge or are they selected by the community? This qualitative case study of Kailua Canoe Club (KCC) on the island of O'ahu investigated the nature of leadership in a Hawaiian outrigger paddling community. Conversations with paddlers, coaches, and board members revealed a values-based, holistic approach to leadership (Best, 2011). Those values were written into a mission statement 50 years ago with the intention of establishing KCC as a space to connect members with kupuna (respected elder) wisdom, develop paddling skills, and to honor the canoe, the ocean, and each other. A component of leadership, kuleana (responsibility) is constant reflection on those values, and the mentoring of younger generations to become future leaders who embody KCC values. This article details how those values manifest – in developing personal skills for the sake of team success, and in respect for the canoe, kupuna wisdom, the ocean, and ohana (family).

Background

The Hawaiian Renaissance movement in the early 1970s inspired a “renewed sense of identity and history” for Native Hawaiians, and those who came from Polynesian ancestry (Case, 2021; p. 11). This renaissance rekindled aloha āina, a love of the land as a provider of all sources of sustenance and identity in the preservation of the Hawaiian people (Case, 2021). Aloha āina “embodies the tangible and intangible values of our culture” that have been passed down through generations (Kikiloi & Graves, 2010; p. 75).

Canoe racing, along with surfing and other practices that missionaries felt were hedonistic, was banned after Europeans colonized the islands. In 1875, Hawaiian King David Kālakaua revived the sport of canoe racing. The first outrigger club was founded in 1908 on the island of O’ahu (Hawaiian Paddle Sports, n.d.). Canoeing and surfing crept back into the Hawaiian lifestyle until the cultural revival in the 1970s inspired even broader reflection on what it means to be uniquely Hawaiian. The Hawaiian Renaissance was triggered in large part by the building of the Hōkūle’a, a replica of the traditional Polynesian voyaging canoe (Case, 2021). Members of the Polynesian Voyaging Society (PVS) sailed the Hōkūle’a from Hawai’i to Tahiti in 1976, using only the stars for navigation. Because the art of open ocean navigation had been largely lost among Hawaiians, Mau Piailug, a young Micronesian master navigator, agreed to pilot the voyage (Polynesian Voyaging Society, n.d.). Following their successful journey, Piailug agreed to teach navigation to the PVS leaders. Hawaiian native Nainoa Thompson was able to navigate the next voyage in 1980 to Tahiti, as well as the return trip – something that had not been done for 600 years. These achievements gave Hawaiians renewed pride in their ancestral heritage. Hōkūle’a has since made numerous voyages to other Polynesian Islands and beyond. The PVS has developed youth initiatives to teach navigation, restore koa forests, and encourage stewardship of the land and oceans (Polynesian Voyaging Society, n.d.).

Aside from racing, canoes are used for transportation, fishing, fitness training, and recreation. As stronger, lighter materials are developed, builders of canoes and paddles take advantage

Image 1: Canoe Blessing



of these innovations. Lighter canoes are easier to carry, and lighter paddles result in fewer injuries. However, the reverence for traditional hand carved koa canoes remains strong. It is honored as a symbol of Hawaiians’ respect for all living beings in their ecosystem (Oreiro, 1995). While the koa boats are now only paddled during special races, the start of each racing season is marked by a blessing of the koa canoes. At the ceremony in May of 2022, at the Kailua Canoe Club site on O’ahu, a kahuna (priest)

chanted in Hawaiian while sprinkling water on the canoes and the surrounding circle of

paddlers using leaves from the ti tree. The koa boats had been polished, rigged in the traditional method with ropes, and decorated with flower leis. Kamoā Kalama, one of the original members of KCC and head coach for the women's team, told origin stories about canoe paddling in the region, and sang songs in Hawaiian.

In other coastal locations like California, Florida, Vancouver, and New York, outrigger paddling has been adopted as a competitive sport. These clubs incorporate some aspects of the sport's rituals out of respect for the culture and its values. Many individuals paddling for clubs on both the mainland and in Hawai'i find other reasons to paddle that are not directly connected to the culture or history of the sport. Fitness, community, competition, and connection to the outdoors are often cited as reasons to engage in canoe paddling.

Kailua Canoe Club

Kailua Canoe Club, located on the windward side of O'ahu, was created in 1972 when founding members Cliff Ornellas and Jimmy Marciel were approached by the Hawaiian Civic Club and encouraged to start their own outrigger canoe club. Over the last 50 years, the club has grown to 475 active club members, with 24 fiberglass canoes and two koa canoes (Kailua Canoe Club, n.d.).

The club was founded with the goal of perpetuating the sport of outrigger canoe paddling as it is rooted in Native Hawaiian culture. In their original mission statement, founders created a set of values outlined using the acronym "ALOHA" to guide KCC leadership in managing club operations and in developing coaching techniques. This acronym is broken down as follows: The A stands for Akahai, meaning "kindness, expressed with tenderness." The L stands for lōkahi, meaning "unity, expressed with harmony." The O stands for 'olu'olu, which translates to "agreeable, expressed with pleasantness." The H stands for ha'aha'a, meaning "humility, expressed with modesty." The final A stands for ahonui, which translates to "patience, expressed with perseverance" (Kailua Canoe Club, n.d.). By emphasizing these values, KCC founders, coaches, and paddlers hope to foster a welcoming space that brings people together for the mutual growth of knowledge, skill, and community. This connection to place and community is mentioned often by KCC board member, coach, and community figure Kamoā Kalama when he recounts his childhood in Kailua. He recalls the neighborhood kids coming together to sleep on the beach. Piled together in the sand, he and his companions knew that they were members of a tight-knit community; one that would provide a warm meal, a place to stay, or share knowledge should the need arise. These days, the space where Kalama and his companions slept is now part of a community park. The KCC boathouse and canoes are situated in that park along the river.

In the 50 years since the club's inception, coaches and paddlers have worked to embody the ALOHA values outlined above. They have devoted time, energy, and finances to ensure not only that KCC paddlers have the resources they need to succeed, but also to ensure the health of Kailua Bay overall. One of the central tenets of the ancient Hawaiian land management system known as "ahupua'a" holds that that which occurs upland ("mauka") will eventually flow down and impact the ocean ("makai"). In their efforts to ensure that the ahupua'a is healthy from the mountains to the sea, paddlers from KCC recognized that their 'āina upstream – a historically vibrant and productive fishpond – was being overrun with invasive mangrove trees. In 2011, with help from a grant from the Castle Foundation, also based in Kailua, KCC was able to remove these mangroves from the areas where they practice. Through

this effort the Kailua community – represented by the Castle Foundation – and KCC came together to increase the vibrancy of the natural system that is Kailua, as well as pay homage to the historic fishpond. KCC paddlers who know this story are reminded of these bonds to community and place every time they see the canoe named Kaulana Pākui o Ka'elepulu, whose name honors this valuable role the fishpond plays in the ecosystem, past and present.

Values-Based Holistic Leadership

In describing the evolution of leadership theory development, Best (2011) explains how each paradigm shift is actually theory evolving as a consequence of the strengths and weaknesses of the previous theory. The historical charismatic leader theory evolved to include a contextual lens that made space for the motivational needs of the follower and a situational context. A subsequent group of contingency theories likewise yielded to more integrated theories. Among those integrated theories are the popular transformational, servant, and authentic leadership models (Best, 2011). Each of these theories present the leader's relationships with individual or team followers as linear cause and effect interactions (Popper, 2004).

To break from this one-dimensional framing, leadership must be viewed as a more dynamic process responding to influence from multiple sources. Best (2011) explains that wrestling leadership development theory away from perceived person to person interactions and seeing it more as a “person-in-environment” (p. 5) interface requires taking a bird's eye view of leadership development theory. This perspective embraces a holistic system state engaging physical, psychosocial, and sociocultural dimensions (Best, 2011; Wapner & Demick, 2003).

This holistic framing of leadership centralizes motivation towards meaningful work. Meaningful work is recognized as being unique to each individual worker as well as playing a central role in the values-based vision of the organization. An organization that creates a safe space for individuals to align their own self-development and performance goals with the organization's stated values is generating a values-based holistic environment.

The values-based model developed by Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) identifies four essential components central to creating a safe organizational space which stakeholders find meaningful. Those components include “developing and becoming self, unity with others, expressing full potential, and serving others” (Best, 2011; p. 8). Incorporating the beneficial development of the collective as well as the performative aspirations of the individual establishes a safe space where achievement can be modulated according to the needs of the moment while also recognizing the value of encouraging individuals to participate in the decision-making process. Effective leadership in that safe space, i.e., the organization or group, is the result of employing lessons from the past in motivating the collective towards a meaningful vision of the future (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). Additionally, effective leaders within those organizations or collectives need to be seen by group members as exhibiting behavior representative of the collective social identity in advancing group interests ahead of their own. Those behaviors demonstrate the leader's in-group membership, i.e., sharing the values, concerns, and experiences of that group (Peters & Haslam, 2018).

Research Design and Methodology

The inspiration for this inquiry arose as a result of the principal author's nascent (five-year) involvement in a San Diego, California outrigger canoe club, Hanohano. Visits to Hawai'i for



outrigger races brought to light the different styles of leadership in Hawaiian and Californian outrigger clubs. Two of the authors were doctoral students in leadership studies during those years, which led to questions of how leadership develops within this unique environment.

Research Design

The central question for this study asked whether leadership is tied to culture, community, performance, family lineage, or traits that are difficult to identify. Observation revealed that Hawaiian clubs share similar structural characteristics with other Hawaiian

clubs, but each has unique attributes. Meanwhile, California clubs operate more like each other structurally, and less like Hawaiian clubs. Therefore, a comparison of leadership styles between island and mainland outrigger clubs would be unwieldy and superficial at best. We felt the appropriate design was to perform a case study of one, long-standing, outrigger club in Hawaii that celebrated its 50th anniversary in the summer of 2022.

Research Method

The principal author gained permission to conduct our study at KCC after a race. When the senior men's crew from KCC competed in the Catalina Island to Newport Dunes, California race in summer of 2021, they needed an assistant on their escort boat for the crossing. The principal author volunteered for the job. After the race, Kamoia Kalama, the KCC crew's steersman, invited the author to visit KCC on O'ahu, and interview club members.

We made two separate visits to Kailua, O'ahu. During the first visit, we interviewed one paddler and three coaches, observed workouts, and sat with one of the club elders who no longer paddles but loves to tell stories. The second visit three months later was timed to coincide with the koa canoe blessing that marks the beginning of race season. During the second visit, we interviewed four teenage paddlers, four coaches, and two club board members. Several other interviews were conducted either in person or over the phone later in the summer. Ultimately, four teenage paddlers, three adult paddlers, seven coaches, and three board members were interviewed. Most of the coaches have paddled with KCC since they were children. All of the interviews were audiotaped then uploaded to OtterAI for initial transcribing. The principal researcher then listened again to the recordings while reading the transcriptions to ensure the transcripts were correct. The canoe blessing was videotaped.

Interviews consisted of nine questions for leaders/coaches and a similar set of questions for paddlers that were only slightly different. For instance, leaders were asked "How do you earn the trust of your paddlers?" while paddlers were asked, "How does the coach earn your trust?" After recorded interviews from the first visit were transcribed and analyzed, they were coded using affective coding (Saldaña, 2020) by each researcher. Researchers determined we were looking at a holistic style of leadership at KCC that was directly related to a set of values. A

question was then added to our interview guide for the second visit that asked a coach or board member how they define their leadership style.

Analysis

The abductive analytical approach advocated by Timmermans and Tavory (2012) for theoretical construction in qualitative research proved the most appropriate for this study. The term abductive in the context of research refers to a form of reasoning that is generative, introducing new theoretical frameworks. The more commonly employed inductive approach to qualitative analysis focuses on applying existing generalizable theory to observations. After several passes through the transcribed interviews, we determined that the leadership heuristics at Kailua Canoe Club are embedded in the socially-cultivated values of connectivity to ancestral knowledge, respect for the environment, the canoe, and a kuleana to self-development for the sake of one's team, paddling ohana, and the surrounding community.

Positionality

The principal author is a leadership studies scholar and outrigger paddler in San Diego, California. She has also paddled in outrigger races in Hawai'i. The second author is a leadership studies scholar focusing on leadership development among marginalized identities. The third author was born on O'ahu. She moved to California at a young age but made yearly visits to Hawai'i. In January of 2022, she moved back to O'ahu and currently lives and works in Kailua where she joined KCC, participating in six-person canoe workouts and races. The majority of the interviews were conducted by the principal author. An argument can be made that the third author's involvement in KCC constitutes interference with authentic responses during interviews. However, we posit that researchers are part of the world they study (Atkinson, 1990; Macbeth, 2001). All researcher positionality is complex, influenced as much by lived experience as the theoretical lenses we adopt through academic training, research immersion, and the social identities that include the "obvious race-class-gender trifecta" (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This researcher's in-group identity allowed her to conduct follow up interviews, to confirm or challenge findings, engage in background research about the club, and suggest perspectives that forced us to dig deeper into topics that emerged during data analysis.

The researchers sought to honor Hawaiian cultural knowledge throughout the process of engaging in conversations, attending practices and ceremonies, and in analyzing the data. Research frameworks centering Indigenous knowledges must be developed according to the values of specific communities (Smith, 2017; Ward et al., 2020). To respect the non-Western lessons associated with Hawaiian outrigger canoe paddling, we present findings using Hawaiian words and phrases that participants used to introduce concepts. We acknowledge the tradition of Hawaiian storytelling for knowledge production and ancestral reverence (Case, 2021; Lipe, 2020; Meyer, 2004) and present those stories not as metaphors but as ways of being.

A Working Definition of Leaders, Leadership

This research inquiry focuses on leadership that is situated within a unique cultural context. It is important, therefore, to not only consider a definition of contemporary Western leaders and leadership, but to also consider Hawaiian traditional leadership qualities.

The previous section briefly explained the paradigm shift in leadership theory development. The evolution of theoretical models follows the transformation of leader-follower relationships as they shifted away from situations wherein one (Great Man) leader told everyone else what to do. A review of studies examining leadership theories in business, military, and sports achievement contexts (Kovach, 2018) reveals the importance placed on selecting or designating just the right individual(s) to lead a given team, be it at a workplace, in combat, or in competitive sports. The review concluded that successful leaders developed a personal vision for infusing the individuals and groups in their care with motivation to work together as a team (Kovach, 2018). These leaders fall into the transformational leadership category. Corporate scandals and the #MeToo movement have increased the need for a more holistic form of leadership (Quatro et al., 2007). A leader needs to demonstrate genuine concern for the well-being of all stakeholders.

Traditional Hawaiian alaka'ina (leadership) was the result of "an accident of birth that conveyed rank, status, and a place within hierarchy" (Chun, 2011; p. 199). Stories told about the exploits of Hawaiian chiefs focus on their behaviors, i.e., whether they were greedy and cruel, or caring, patient and just. The anecdotes tell of "hewa" or bad behavior by a chief, and "ali'i ho'omalua pono" or just and caring behavior. Good leader qualities include being a good listener, surrounding oneself with thoughtful advisers, being considerate of the rights of common folk, protecting the environment, respecting women, being charitable, and heeding the lessons from ancestors (Chun, 2011).

Colonization, with its outsider domination and governance, presents complications for Native Hawaiians who seek to preserve a traditional Hawaiian alaka'ina that is culturally based. Environments where traditional Hawaiian leadership can be practiced have become scarce and marginalized (Chun, 2011). KCC and other outrigger paddling communities are the type of environment where traditional Hawaiian alaka'ina can be intentionally nurtured.

In a 2014 Hawaii Business article, seven notable local leaders discussed their notions of great leadership qualities, and the challenges they face (Hollier, 2014). These leaders continuously mentioned Nainoa Thompson, the leader of the PVS. The specific qualities these individuals felt constituted leadership worth following were a vision of cultural justice, and a dedication to compassion. Thompson said he saw the two men who came up with the idea for Hōkūle'a – an anthropologist in Santa Barbara and an artist in Chicago – as the true leaders. After the tragic loss of Eddie Aikau during a storm on Hōkūle'a's second voyage, the PVS leadership team was full of shame, Thompson told the Hawaii Business reporter. Thompson's father, an elder in the canoe community, admonished the leadership team to "agree on a set of values and beliefs that you'll never compromise" and to let those core values hold them together going forward (Hollier, 2014; p. 41).

Findings

Culture is defined as the rituals, traditions, arts, knowledges, institutional processes, and achievements important to a specific social group (Ward et al., 2020). Respect for culture is the foundation for the structure and values within KCC, from storytelling about the origins of canoe paddling, to explaining the power of ocean currents, and teaching the art of making flower leis.

At the heart of both culture and community is the canoe, the vessel that brings everyone together. Indeed, the canoe is recognized as the living spirit that transported native Hawaiian

ancestors to their current homeland. As such, the canoe is revered as the embodiment of those ancestors, imbued with the mana (spiritual energy of power and strength) of those who first paddled it. These themes dictated the following subsections for presenting the findings in this report.

Image 2: Making Flower Leis



In this section, we have organized the findings into these categories: a holistic approach to leadership, a holistic approach to paddling, and the values that these two approaches are based on – respect for the canoe as a living spirit, the wisdom of elders and the ocean, and passing cultural knowledge and values on to future generations. Within each category, we offer explanations for our findings by presenting details from our conversations with club leaders and paddlers. These leaders are board members and coaches who

have sustained KCC's stated values for the past 50 years despite changes in personnel and technology. Insights from paddlers reveal how the ALOHA principles highlighted above have effectively been passed on to the younger generation.

Values-Based Holistic Approach to Leadership

When an organization's vision for success is directly connected to personal mastery and team learning, it promotes responsibility, motivation, and a sense of meaningfulness in the work (Senge, 2006). Best (2011) concurs, pointing out that a values-based approach to holistic leadership "places equal emphasis on the welfare of the individual, the organization, and the larger community" (p. 8). Our findings reveal that KCC leaders endeavor to incorporate the club's espoused ALOHA values in all club activities from competition to community events. Coaches are aware they need to demonstrate proficiency in the skills they are teaching. They also know they need to model the behavior they expect from paddlers, i.e., in mindful self-reflection on personal strengths and weaknesses, commitment to excellence, and motivating others to achieve their best effort. All coaches said they need to be willing to adapt, to learn from others (including paddlers), and to maintain a balance between being calm and assertive. Performing rituals like the canoe blessing normalizes cultural practices.

Kathy Erwin, KCC vice-president and former head coach, along with club founder Carleen Ornellas, stressed that the mission of KCC leadership is to create an environment based on the ALOHA values expressed in the club's founding documents. That environment needs to be both nurturing for paddlers and supportive for coaches. For instance, when the club registrar Susie Meckler, signs up a new paddler, she makes sure she is at the clubhouse to greet that person by name and make them welcome. Families with children are asked if they need help with resources. "If she sees that a child needs a paddle, if she sees maybe the family's having a hard time paying dues," Erwin said of Meckler, she asks how the club can help. "In this way

it's holistic leadership. We try to help with whatever they need," Erwin added. The values we will explore in this section are Kuleana, Earning Trust, Paddletics, and Chaos vs. Compassion.

Kuleana

Being a KCC board member or coach comes with tiers of kuleana, according to Coach Kamao Kalama. The Hawaiian concept of kuleana does not mean responsibility in the sense of being assigned to accomplish a task. Understanding one's kuleana means developing self-efficacy to fulfill their individual role in empowering their community. Developing one's full potential benefits the community through engaging in stewardship of the Hawaiian language, the ocean, and the islands themselves (Meyer, 2003).

Kalama said his path to becoming a coach started with becoming "knowledgeable and educated by people in the community about a whole number of things outside of canoe paddling." He said he rose from being a skilled paddler to a leader in the organization because people saw his ability to bring people together and his respect for safe practices on the water. "It's just people recognizing that you have attributes that are admirable, that are safe, and you're willing to share those things," he said. "You don't tell people that you can perform. People tell you you're performing by being willing to jump in your canoe with you." Ely et al. (2011) postulated that securing recognition "for one's self-view as a leader bolsters self-confidence, which increases one's motivation to lead" (p. 476).

For other leaders and coaches the journey began with recognizing how their personal experience, knowledge, and energy could benefit the greater community. This approach aligns with the values-based holistic leadership model developed by Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009), which includes serving the needs of others. "This is a place I can contribute," said Erwin. "My thing is serving the community and creating structure, creating organization, creating support, especially support for new leaders." Karen Kiefer, likewise, stepped in to fill a void. She offered to coach the novice crew when the previous coach stepped up to coach a more advanced crew. She felt it was her responsibility to give back to the club. She leaned on her skills as an art teacher to impart information gently, and "to make people feel good about themselves."

Earning Trust

All coaches interviewed for this study said a leader must assume everyone is always contributing their best effort. "If you go into it with that approach," Kalama said, "you get the best out of people." He said he looks beyond a paddler's technical skills when assessing their progress. He considers their heart, i.e., their willingness to do more than just show up for practice. "It's the stuff that happens away from the canoe that matters," he said, like participating in community clean-ups, helping maintain the canoes, and mentoring novice paddlers.

All paddlers said that when a coach models that type of behavior themselves - that is, engaging in activities that enhance the people and places important to the community - it builds trust in their leadership. When leaders exhibit behavior that represents the community's shared values, experiences, and concerns, they demonstrate their in-group membership (Peters & Haslam, 2018). "Coaches earn our trust by teaching rather than criticizing," said Ella Chapman, 16. Mike Adkins, an adult second-year paddler, agreed that a good coach teaches along with any criticism they might render. To earn trust, he said, a coach "has to emanate integrity and honesty in every walk of life even when no one is watching."

Paddletics

Coach Kawai Mahoe defines a good leader as someone who can get people to work together. Making this happen means managing multiple personalities and skill levels. It requires the coach to be both calm and assertive, Mahoe said, which translates to being decisive, but willing to admit when they are wrong. It also means not allowing “paddletics,” or paddler character assassination, to confound efforts to build cohesion within a crew. Four coaches said the best strategy in deconstructing “paddletics” is to set expectations early that spreading disparaging comments about another person’s performance, intentions, or character, or any other activity that creates disunity, will not be tolerated. Kalama said he refuses to acknowledge paddletics as an influence in club performance or relationships. “To me there are no paddletics. Let your paddle do the talking,” he said, adding that coaches play a role in whether or not paddletics can develop. “If the coach is a coach, there aren’t paddletics,” he said.

The same principles apply to the leadership team, Erwin said. If leaders and coaches are “bad-mouthing each other,” she said, “something is fractured.” She underscored that all the leaders are volunteers, and they contribute their time and expertise because the club represents values that are meaningful to them. She compared the leadership team with a canoe crew. “If their intention is the same, and their trust is there, that crew is going to move, ...to be successful,” she said. “It’s the same thing with the leadership.”

Ty Aweau grew up in Kailua. He drove an escort boat for KCC crews during races for decades, and now is the men’s coach for Hanohano canoe club in San Diego. He witnessed the toxicity that exists within many top performing crews. “I’m like, this is not ohana. This is not unity. What is this? I don’t want anything to do with this,” he recalled thinking. Aweau vowed to never be part of a situation where people feel entitled to berate a fellow paddler.

Erwin said when she started paddling 50 years ago, the coaching culture at KCC fit the stereotype of the “yelling coach.” Both Kiefer and Erwin emphasized how destructive that model of leadership can be – the type of coach who screamed at people who were not performing as well as others. Kiefer confessed she had survived several “yelling coaches.” Now, as a coach herself, she refuses to manifest that model.

Over the last 40 years, KCC coaches have learned that using disrespectful language “was not the best way to help people thrive, and grow, and learn, and excel,” Erwin said. The club took the initiative in the 1990s to hire a consulting firm, The Positive Coaching Alliance, to facilitate workshops on applying kinder, gentler, more effective leadership techniques. She said KCC leadership felt this approach helps them more effectively apply the club’s ALOHA values.

Chaos vs. Compassion

All coaches and paddlers agreed that an absence of leadership destroys morale and any sense of unity. The word respondents used to describe the absence of leadership was chaos. Ornellas acknowledged that sometimes leadership falters for whatever reason, and that could cause some paddlers to seek out other clubs. When that happens, leadership gathers for a retreat and reflection. They then craft methods for supporting leaders to realign practices with club values, which usually results in energy and performance rising again throughout the club. “Good leadership attracts good paddlers,” she said.

Kalama said the key to encouraging excellence is to have people’s best interests in mind. He pointed to studies performed by prominent business schools. If an individual’s values are

aligned with the company's values, he said "and the company is aware of that individual's aspirations and is being mindful of it and preparing pathways for them, companies soar." Rob Cates, the current KCC head coach, said leadership develops over time through experience, recognizing one's own personal strengths and weaknesses, and constantly pushing to get better. The smile from paddlers who feel their skills are improving, Cates said, "is payback for a coach's hard work."

Values-Based Holistic Approach to Paddling

In the above section, we explained how KCC leaders recognize their role as holistic, grounded in the club's ALOHA values rather than a dyadic, top-down relationship of command and control. This sustained approach has resulted in a collective understanding that not only do leaders need to demonstrate their in-group status, but that paddlers must share in the leadership process if everyone is to succeed. The pursuit of excellence in the sport requires individual paddlers to contribute to a cohesive, nurturing environment. The values we will examine in this section are: Six as One, Fitness Means a Seat in the Boat, and Paddling Ohana.

Six as One

In *The New Psychology of Leadership*, Haslam, Reicher, & Platow (2011) point out that effective leadership is a quality of the relationship between all members within a social group bound together as a collective "we." Referencing social identity theory, the authors also note that individual outcomes are inextricably entwined with those of the whole group, and those outcomes are therefore directly applicable to leadership analysis.

There are six seats in the canoes used for team racing. To be successful, all six paddlers need to move as one, matching the rhythm and speed of the person who sets the stroke rate from seat one. Kalama said he is constantly rearranging paddlers during practices to see how individuals perform in different seats. Once he has identified where people exercise their strengths, he assigns paddlers their seats for each race. "You realize you've got to have the right people in the right seats," he said. "And those people have to realize they have a responsibility. Everybody from one through six. And my stroker has got to be perfect."

All paddlers said being part of a team means valuing other paddlers' contributions. "Teamwork happens because of love and cohesion in the group," said Kiefer.

Kalama added that each paddler needs to develop a situational awareness of the environment, i.e., the winds, currents, and tides, to anticipate potentially challenging scenarios. He invites paddlers to participate in the decision-making process when winds are up and currents are strong, asking them how they feel about venturing outside the protective reef. Giving paddlers the responsibility of making leadership decisions related to the well-being of others creates a stronger bond within the ohana, he said. Paddling is not always so serious, Kiefer said, smiling and stepping out of the canoe onto the beach after practice. Kiefer said she regularly reminds her crew that it is all about surfing. "When you really get that canoe moving... and gliding, and then moving with the ocean. How beautiful is that?"

Fitness Means a Seat in the Boat

Since there are six seats in a canoe, paddlers are constantly working to prove they deserve to be in one of those seats. The seventh paddler either ends up missing out on racing altogether or being assigned to the next crew down in the hierarchy. Those who have the skills and initiative should be rewarded with a seat in the canoe during a race, Kalama said. And if those

six paddlers in the canoe don't win, "we learn from that, but our pride and integrity are intact," he said. "Failure equals growth," he added. "All the super stars, like Johnny Puakea and Danny Ching, even they at one time were the seventh paddler. Even though they were extremely talented, they learned from someone else." We lose more than we win, Kalama pointed out, but unfortunately all that people tend to notice is the glamour of standing on the podium.

When paddlers neglect their fitness training for whatever reason, it is noticeable, all paddlers and coaches said. "You have one or two with excuses like 'I can't follow this person in front of me' and you try to work with them," Ornellas said. "And then two weeks before the last race, they're back with, 'I can't follow this person,' you know we took them out." Ornellas added that catering to someone who does not put in the work to improve personal fitness or to try and blend with the other five people in her crew isn't fair to the others. "We're not holding back this crew to teach you how to keep in time again," she said.

Kalama said there are times when the numbers do not add up, and there might be a few empty seats heading into a race. Bringing in an outsider to join a team that has been working to blend harmoniously for months can have disastrous consequences if the wrong person is invited in. It is essential to select someone "that shares the same values, that are mindful, that are caring. That the world doesn't revolve around [them]. That's what you want in your boat," Kalama said. Relying on a talented outside paddler to put their best effort forward and lead a crew of people they don't know sometimes backfires. "Many times, they hurt the crew because they never take it upon themselves to accept that it's my responsibility, my kuleana," to become part of the team, Kalama said. He added that a coach who regularly recruits outsiders to elevate a struggling crew's performance for a race has lost their soul.

Paddling Ohana

Some club members would say paddling is bred into them, that it is part of a family legacy. That family atmosphere reflects KCC's values of kindness and unity, creating a safe environment for families, according to Ornellas. Young paddlers are often following in their parents' footsteps. Nani Walter, 16, for example, paddled with her father, a member of KCC, before she was old enough to join the club. "It's generational, a family thing you pass on," Walter said. Kana Barlag, 16, expressed that "KCC is family. It's a home away from home – you don't jump between clubs." Walter added that "paddling with another club is betrayal." David Kalama, cousin to Kamoā Kalama, and whose club, Kai Oni, shares the boathouse with KCC, said being part of a canoe club is like being part of a crime family syndicate, meaning that leaving is unthinkable.

Aweau said that a person's outrigger club is cultural. "And more importantly, it's like you have an identity," he added. "That club is a part of where you're from." Paddlers who are new to the outrigger community also feel this connectivity. One person in his second year with KCC has been in the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) for 20 years. He said he feels "a stronger connection" to his outrigger ohana than he does to his USCG colleagues. Members of KCC perceive themselves as part of the surrounding non-paddling community – the merchants, schools, the neighborhood, and the beach environment where the canoes are stored. That larger community is invited to participate in outrigger events.

The Canoe is a Living Spirit

The following sections offer details about the values that guide KCC members' holistic approach to leadership and paddling. Those values manifest in respect for the canoe as a living spirit, honoring the knowledge learned from the ocean and kupuna, and passing that knowledge and set of ALOHA values on to the next generation.

Respect the Canoe, it is a Living Spirit

A ceremony blessing the koa canoes celebrates the start of race season. It brings the paddling community together and reaffirms reverence for the canoes. Leis are made to adorn the

Image 3: Celebration Commemorating Start of Race Season



canoes, which are carried carefully out of storage then polished and rigged according to tradition. During the ceremony, stories are told about the history of the sport, and the journeys that brought Polynesian ancestors to Hawaii. The ceremony reminds the ohana that outrigger paddling is more than a sport, and the canoe is more than a vessel, it is a living spirit. Kiefer pointed out that contemporary paddlers also put their energy into the canoes. “The koa

canoes are magical. The energy of generations goes into the canoes,” she said, adding that being a part of that energy during a race keeps her going mentally and physically.

The koa canoes are never to be dragged through the sand despite their considerable weight of 400 pounds or more. They are carried from the boathouse to the grass, and then to the water. Children who dare to sit on the iakos (the wooden arms connecting the hull to the smaller, stabilizing ama) are scolded for disrespecting the canoe.

“The canoe is a respected elder. You treat it like you treat your grandmother. Everyone works hard to keep them nice,” reflected B.J. Williston who started paddling with KCC as a teenager, moved away for college, then returned to the island to teach. She took up paddling again for one season with KCC upon her return. Carving a koa canoe “meant sacrificing a rare koa tree. [The koa canoe] is the most important thing, it’s a spiritual connection,” she said. Ornellas added that her gratitude for the canoe includes acknowledging:

The koa canoe for us is our ancestors. Our ancestors came on the canoes. It’s a living, breathing tree that was harvested and turned into a vessel to continue what our ancestors did to get here, to travel island to island. And we’re still doing it. It’s because of them that we get to do this. I know it will never die because everyone’s going to continue paddling with koa canoes that brought us here, that brought our ancestors here.

Williston and two others shared a story from many years ago of a brand new koa canoe that was caught by a rogue wave inside the surf line during a race. The canoe was broken in half. People on the beach watching were crying. Mourning swept through the racers and spectators. "It's like a death in the family," said David Kalama. A local restaurateur offered to match any donations that were raised to replace or repair the canoe. Tourists who happened to be watching the race donated cash. The canoe was repaired, but no amount of money could provide access to a new koa log. Today, even Native Hawaiians have trouble getting permits to harvest a koa tree. For apprentice canoe builders, this stifles their efforts to sustain traditional Hawaiian practices. They are looking for similar materials with which to produce canoes.

As more fiberglass boats are used in racing, many older paddlers fear the reverence for koa canoes, and the knowledge of ancestral Hawaiian culture will fade away. Younger paddlers, however, said those fears are unfounded. Chapman said the koa canoe "represents history. My favorite thing about race season is paddling in a koa. It's special." Walter said it was an honor to paddle in the koa canoe. She noted that it made sense to only bring them out for the blessing and the first regatta. "If you paddled the koa all the time it wouldn't be special." Walter said the canoe symbolizes family for her, adding, "families can be messy, in need of patching up, just like the canoe. You have to put in the work fixing things before you can enjoy the benefits."

The Canoe Keeps Us Together

"We are connected to paddling tradition through the traditional canoes," tenBerge said. "I feel connected to the people who paddled them first." This connection to the mana of earlier paddlers is a common refrain. Adkins, the second-year paddler, embraces the history. "The canoe has so much history that paddling it makes you think of ancestors who paddled and what the Hawaiian Kingdom must have been like decades ago."

After a race where she sat in seat one and experienced having teammates yelling at her to paddle at a different stroke rate than her coach had advised, Barlag felt hurt and conflicted. To be successful during subsequent practices and races, those same paddlers had to put that race behind them and move on. "It was the canoe that brought us together again," she said. Other young paddlers feel the canoe embodies safety and the security of the ohana. "It will always be there to hold you above water," Walter said. "In the canoe we are part of the ocean," tenBerge added. Oreiro (1995) shares similar sentiments from members of the Lummi community, one of the Northwest Coastal Salish tribes. Paddlers in the Lummi community talked of hours of sacrifice, and commitment to training in harmony with each other and the environment to honor the canoes. One personal account reads "the canoe is my brother on these waters, for without it I am nothing and vulnerable" (Oreiro, 1995; p. 181).

Kamoa Kalama reflected that all the local families had houses on the land that is now the park and parking lot back in the 1970s. When their houses were condemned to build the park, and families had to move further inland, "all the kids just came down and slept on the beach. We'd wake up and go surfing or swimming or body boarding or whatever." Aweau remembers growing up with Kalama's grandchildren on that same beach. All the prominent local families paddled, he said. "It was all local kids, brown Hawaiians. It's not like that now," Aweau said.

Outrigger paddling has served as a unifying response to generations of socioeconomic oppression in the community. Many Native Hawaiian families did not have the financial

resources to buy uniforms and equipment for team sports like football, baseball, and soccer. Nor could they afford transportation to practices and games. “Paddling was something we all did, and we didn’t have to go anywhere,” Kalama said. Ironically, paddling made the local kids so fit they were constantly being recruited by coaches for those other sports. Kawai Mahoe credits outrigger paddling with keeping local kids out of trouble, including himself.

Meeting to compete against each other provides an opportunity to establish relationships, and to build strong, sometimes lifelong, ties within the global community of paddlers. In this way, the canoe establishes a support system across different islands. When a paddler needs emergency medical care, for instance, Kalama said, they will put out the word on the “coconut wireless” and set up a relay system of boat and car transportation to get that person from a remote location to a hospital on another island. “Paddling creates the community. I wouldn’t have met most of the people in the club any other way,” Kiefer said.

Aweau understands why non-Hawaiians are drawn to the outrigger ohana. “Paddling attracts people looking for something to connect to. They are drawn to the sport and the culture,” he said. “People from the mainland come here and see what ohana means and they embrace it,” Ornellas said. When Aweau moved to California for his job with the USCG he connected with local paddling clubs. He began driving an escort boat for races, and then visited a local regatta as a spectator, standing on the beach. He went home that day and told his wife he needed to start paddling so he could connect with his roots back in Kailua. The canoe is inseparable from the people and the land, Erwin said. “Our community, and the ocean, the islands, ...our place is really important – the people and the canoe. That canoe is my uncle.”

“I ka wā ma mua, i ka wā ma hope”

(The Future is Behind us Because the Wisdom from the Past is Before Us)

The Ocean is an Elder

When he was young, Kalama’s “uncles and ancestors on the beach” told him the ocean would teach him all he needed to know. “The ocean is an elder,” Kalama said. He would watch rubbish float by to learn about currents. Maori waka ama (outrigger canoe) paddlers also perceive the ocean, ancestry, and tribal history “not only as parts of themselves but as themselves” (Liu, 2021). Several generations ago, the elders began “teaching about the ocean, wind, and tides,” Ornellas said. “Someone figured all that out and started teaching it. We continue it.”

When the ocean surrounds your home on all sides, you grow up with a healthy respect for the waves, the tides, and the reefs on each beach, David Kalama said. That respect is the key to both success and survival. All coaches stressed that real learning comes from the ocean herself. Awareness learned on the ocean transforms us, Cates said. Developing instincts about the physics of how a canoe performs on the ocean comes primarily from being observant. Kamoā Kalama instructs novice paddlers to feel how the canoe moves in different conditions. This helps them learn to take advantage of a swell, and to know when to add more power to their stroke. It also helps them imagine a way out of threatening scenarios when conditions change suddenly. Chapman and tenBerge said paddling has taught them to work with the ocean rather than against it. They feel comfortable, secure, and less stressed when they are on the ocean. Walter added that being on the ocean “sucks the negative energy out of you” after a bad day. Kiefer appreciates the younger paddlers’ feelings but hopes they do

not become so comfortable they lose their survival reflexes. “The ocean is powerful,” she said. “It’s beautiful, but it will always win.”

Bringing up the Next Generation

The value of bringing up the next generation represents two concepts. First, utilizing the wisdom from the kupuna, and second, the relationship between tradition and innovation.

Passing Along Kupuna Wisdom

Most of the current coaching staff at KCC were themselves coached by the individuals who started the club, or even by the parents of club founders. “We carry with us the best of all of them,” Erwin said. She and other leaders feel a kuleana to identify and develop new leaders, “so that chain of caring and commitment and the ALOHA values” continues. “We want to make sure before we go, that we can build, encourage and mentor a group of young leaders,” Erwin said.

The Lummi canoe culture likewise reflects on elders’ cultural knowledge to design programs targeting the youth. Maintaining cultural traditions is integral to the future health of the Lummi Nation (Oreiro, 1995). In the Inuvialuit community, elder knowledge becomes social memory (Lyons, 2010). Each generation uses that social memory to form their identities, engage in social action, and “negotiate their relations with the outside world” (p. 34). Ornellas is worried that there may not be a younger generation to pass the KCC culture on to. Many young people move away to attend college, and not many of them return to the islands, she said. “If you don’t pass it on, it doesn’t carry on,” Ornellas added. Micah Kalama understands this anxiety. He is learning the art of canoe building from his father David Kalama. A third-generation canoe builder, Micah said he is grateful for “all the sacrifices of people who came before us for keeping the culture alive.”

Young paddlers like tenBerge have a greater sense of responsibility than Ornellas realizes. She and her teenage friends said they feel it is their role to nurture those that come up after them. She remembers being 10 years old and seeing the 17- and 18-year-old girls paddle. “I would think ‘Oh my god, I want to be them someday!’ And now that’s us,” she said. TenBerge understands the need to model good behavior by not sitting on the canoes or disrespecting other paddlers. “We have to set an example for the younger girls so they want to grow up to be us,” she said.

Tradition vs. Innovation

Despite KCC being an organization deeply connected to culture and tradition, the theme of innovation was not frowned upon. Cates, whose father was also a head coach, feels that adapting to new techniques and materials is a natural evolution. He said keeping the Hawaiian spirit and “the mana of paddling, the family part of it,” at the forefront does not preclude being competitive. “I think even in the olden days they wanted the newest and best they could get,” he said.

Aweau agreed there is room for the lighter canoes alongside the koa boats. He added:

I know my people. And when I say my people I mean the Hawaiian people. They were innovators at their core. And if they had the materials and the technology that we have today, they would use it to the best of their advantage. They were very innovative.

In fact, Kiefer noted, the lighter materials in the carbon fiber canoes push the edge of how fast paddlers can move a canoe across the water. “There is nothing sacrilegious about it,” she said. Using the koa canoes maintains a foot in the past, while bringing that history into the future. The lighter canoes allow older members to keep paddling longer. “If the Hawaiians had a light canoe to paddle, they would have,” Ornellas said. “Everyone who stops paddling when they get older, it’s because of this 400-pound canoe that you have to carry and paddle. Progress is very important.” The lighter boats, known as “unlimiteds,” are made using carbon fiber blends. In the summer of 2022, racing on the mainland largely consisted of unlimited boats. Many KCC members are ready to accept racing with the unlimited canoes, but the Hawaiian canoe racing associations are not.

The Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association (OHCRA) has a mission statement that identifies its sole purpose to be the perpetuation of Hawaiian culture through koa canoe paddling and other Hawaiian water sports. On Oahu, there is also a second canoe racing association, Na Ohana O Na Hui Wa’a. This group holds a regatta season largely separate from OHCRA, as they race in canoes made from fiberglass. This provides an outlet for those who wish to race but who do not have access to a prohibitively expensive koa canoe. Though they do not race the koa boats, Hui Wa’a still works to promote ideals similar to those of clubs like KCC in OHCRA. According to its website, it works:

...to maintain and perpetuate Hawaiian culture through the promotion of Hawaiian water sports; to teach, train, instruct, and expose children, men and women in the ancient art, craft and history of Hawaiian canoeing; to provide means and facilities for activities tending to foster the development and maintenance of strong and healthy minds, bodies and spirit among all people (Hui Wa’a, n.d.).

At the end of every regatta season, clubs from Hui Wa’a and OHCRA come together for an island-wide regatta race. This competitive event also serves as a means of strengthening ties

Image 4: Preparing for the Regatta Race



between the two associations. The question of whether or not to add a race division for unlimited canoes is moot at this time, since only a few of the clubs have enough money to purchase an unlimited canoe, which can cost \$20,000 or more.

Discussion

Elders worry about young paddlers leaving the islands for college or work, and never returning. At the same time, new members from the mainland are drawn to outrigger paddling for the discipline of team sport, and a love for being on the ocean. Once these non-Hawaiians get a feel of the ohana they embrace it. The KCC elders appreciate the positive attitudes in the new paddlers but feel an urgency to pass along the cultural legacy of ALOHA values and outrigger paddling to the next generation of Native Hawaiians.

Discussions about what canoes should be made of are also rooted in maintaining cultural ties to ancestors and Indigenous traditions. History has shown, however, that colonization and marginalization have erased unique Indigenous practices on every continent (Kikiloi & Graves, 2010; Ward et al., 2020). Once plentiful in the Hawaiian forests, the koa tree is now a protected species. Hawaiians are prohibited from harvesting the tree for making koa canoes, a fact that third-generation canoe builders like Micah Kalama understand but lament. In solidarity with the Hōkūle'a project a collective of Alaskan tribes donated two Sitka spruce logs to be used for carving canoes. They made a statement praising the Polynesian Voyaging Society's inspiration and dedication to reviving cultural heritage, stating "In your canoe you carry all of us who share your vision and aspiration," (Hawaii Paddle Sports, n.d.). Micah Kalama and other canoe builders are currently testing the viability of other trees in the Hawaiian forest.

Conclusion

This case study of leadership within the Kailua Canoe Club, a 50-year-old outrigger paddling club on O'ahu, revealed a values-based holistic approach to leadership. That holistic approach manifests itself in leaders' concern for the well-being of the paddlers and the environment, unity with ohana, and self-reflection on one's own strengths and weaknesses.

KCC coaches work to motivate their paddlers to achieve their personal best. Board members create a supportive environment for the coaches so they can grow in their leadership development. Leadership retreats provide opportunities for club leaders to learn compassionate, nurturing coaching skills. This leadership practice aligns with a values-based holistic leadership model (Best, 2010; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). The ALOHA values set forth by KCC founders in the original mission statement guide those leadership practices. Those values are culturally based. They include respect for the canoe as a living spirit, learning the knowledge of the ocean and kupuna, and passing that knowledge and ALOHA values on to the next generation.

Canoes brought the ancestors across Polynesia to Hawai'i and therefore the canoes embody the mana or spirit of those ancestors. Paddling the koa canoes is a means of connecting to ancestors and homeland. Reverence for the koa canoe notwithstanding, paddlers and coaches at KCC welcome innovation. They feel that if their ancestors had access to the technology and materials of today, they would have used them. Paddlers who participated in this study felt their ALOHA values not only connect them to the canoe, the ocean and wisdom of kupuna, but also to each other. Ohana is part of identity, and rarely do paddlers jump from one club to another. Those who join the club for sport, or simply to be on the ocean, soon feel the connectedness of the paddling ohana. Being part of the ohana comes with a kuleana, or responsibility, to care for one another and the environment, to participate in leadership, and to strive for personal excellence so that the entire team can succeed.

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Born in Hawai'i and raised in California, Maile likes to characterize herself as a life-long learner. She spent the last several years working as the manager of two standup paddleboard rental and sales businesses, where she cultivated her love of teaching and spent days on the water in both Los Angeles and San Diego, California. After graduating from San Diego State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Sustainability, (minor in Anthropology), she began working as the Outreach Associate for the Coral Resilience Lab at the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology. There, she educates the next generation of change-makers, and spends her days developing curriculum or teaching students about coral reefs and sustainability. Researching for this case study of Kailua Canoe Club and their approach to leadership allowed her to combine her passions for outrigger canoe paddling, writing critically, and working to better understand the community of which she is a part. When not otherwise occupied, Maile can be found reading, exploring, or working with a local land restoration group. But most of her time is spent coaching or training with her one-person or six-person outrigger canoe racing teams.

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