

# Every Public Servant Was Once a student: Reimagining Education for Ethical Leadership, Public Service and Good Governance in Fiji and the Pacific

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## ABSTRACT

Not every student will become a public servant, but every public servant was once a student. This simple proposition raises a significant but insufficiently examined question about the wider purpose of education: to what extent does education contribute to forming the values, ethical judgement, critical consciousness and sense of public responsibility of those who later serve within public institutions? While education is frequently evaluated through academic achievement, qualifications, employability and economic productivity, comparatively less attention is given to its longer-term contribution to ethical public service and good governance. This conceptual paper critically examines the relationship between education, public-service formation and governance, with particular attention to Fiji and the wider Pacific. Drawing upon literature on democratic education, critical pedagogy, character and values education, the Capability Approach, public-service ethics and Indigenous Pacific epistemologies, the paper argues that the foundations of ethical public service begin long before an individual enters government employment. Schools, tertiary institutions, families and communities contribute to developing integrity, responsibility, empathy, critical thinking, cultural understanding, respect for diversity and commitment to the public good. These capabilities become increasingly important as public servants confront complex challenges involving inequality, climate change, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, cultural diversity and declining or contested public trust. The paper proposes an Education–Public Service–Society Cycle to conceptualise the intergenerational relationship through which education contributes to professional and civic formation; public servants subsequently influence policy implementation, institutional integrity and service delivery; and the quality of public institutions, in turn, shapes the educational and social opportunities available to future generations. In the Fiji and Pacific context, the paper further argues that ethical public-service formation should integrate professional competence with Indigenous values of relationality, collective responsibility, service and cultural accountability. It concludes that education should not merely prepare people to obtain employment in public institutions, but contribute to developing people capable of serving the public ethically, competently, equitably and with humanity. Reimagining education in this way positions the classroom as one of the earliest foundations of trustworthy institutions, responsible public administration and sustainable Pacific futures.

**Keywords:** education; public service; public-service ethics; ethical leadership; good governance; integrity; human agency; public trust; Indigenous Pacific epistemologies; Fiji; Pacific education; public administration.

## INTRODUCTION

Every public servant was once a student. Before becoming a teacher, administrator, policy officer, health professional, regulator, planner, diplomat, accountant or senior government official, the public servant first experienced processes of learning and social formation. Long before entering a government office, individuals encounter ideas about right and wrong, authority and responsibility, fairness and inequality, service and self-interest, culture and identity,

and the relationship between individual aspirations and collective wellbeing. Education is therefore more than preparation for employment. It is one of the formative environments through which future citizens and professionals develop the knowledge, values, ethical judgement and human agency that they may later carry into public institutions.

This proposition is important because the quality of public administration cannot be separated entirely from the people who exercise public responsibilities. Public institutions depend upon laws, regulations, administrative

systems and accountability mechanisms, but these structures ultimately operate through human judgement and behaviour. Public servants interpret policies, administer resources, communicate with citizens, provide advice, deliver services and make decisions that can directly affect people's opportunities and everyday lives. Consequently, professionalism, integrity, impartiality, accountability and respect are not abstract administrative concepts; they are human qualities that must be understood, practised and sustained.

The Fiji context makes this relationship particularly explicit. Section 123 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji identifies professionalism, professional ethics and integrity, freedom from corruption, efficient use of public resources, respectful and equitable service delivery, accountability and transparency among the values and principles governing State service (Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, 2013). These principles establish clear expectations regarding how public authority should be exercised. Yet the deeper educational question remains: where do the dispositions necessary to uphold such principles begin to develop? Codes of conduct and institutional regulations can establish standards of behaviour, but ethical public service cannot depend upon compliance mechanisms alone. Integrity, fairness, responsibility and respect must also be supported by the values, capabilities and judgement of the people working within institutions.

This shifts attention towards education as an important foundation of public-service formation. Dewey (1916) argued that education is fundamentally connected to democratic social life because it develops capacities for participation, communication, reflection and collective problem-solving. Freire (1970) similarly emphasised the development of critical consciousness and human agency rather than passive acceptance of established knowledge and authority. From these perspectives, education should not simply produce technically competent workers; it should contribute to developing people capable of thinking critically about their responsibilities to others and the societies in which they participate.

The distinction is particularly important for public service. Technical competence is essential, but competence without ethical judgement may be insufficient for positions involving public authority, resources and responsibility. A highly qualified public servant may possess disciplinary expertise yet still encounter situations requiring fairness, empathy, impartiality, courage, discretion and sensitivity to different communities. Sen's (1999) Capability Approach provides an important perspective here because education expands not merely knowledge or economic productivity but people's substantive capabilities to reason, participate, choose and act. Education can therefore contribute to developing the human capabilities necessary for responsible public participation and professional service.

At the same time, education should not be assumed automatically to produce ethical behaviour. Formal qualifications do not guarantee integrity, compassion, accountability or commitment to the public good. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) demonstrate that educational institutions may reproduce existing social structures and inequalities, while Freire (1970) cautions against forms of education that encourage passive acceptance rather than critical engagement. The important question is therefore not simply whether future public servants have been educated, but what kind of education they have experienced and what kinds of knowledge, values, relationships and capabilities that education has helped to develop.

This distinction suggests the need to reconsider the meaning of preparation for public service. Conventional approaches often concentrate on professional qualifications, recruitment procedures, induction, workplace training, performance management and codes of conduct. These remain important. However, they primarily address individuals who have already reached or entered the public service. A broader perspective recognises that public-service formation begins much earlier through schooling, tertiary education, family, community, culture and civic experience. Universities and schools therefore contribute indirectly to the future quality of public institutions whenever they develop—or fail to develop—critical thinking, ethical reasoning, respect for diversity, cultural understanding, social responsibility and human agency.

The issue assumes particular significance in Fiji and the wider Pacific. Public servants frequently work in contexts characterised by geographical dispersion, cultural and linguistic diversity, rural and maritime communities, limited institutional resources, climate vulnerability and changing social and economic conditions. Public administration in such environments requires more than applying standardised procedures. It may require contextual judgement, cultural competence, relational understanding and the ability to respond equitably to communities whose circumstances differ substantially.

Indigenous Pacific epistemologies provide an important contribution to this understanding. Pacific approaches to knowledge and leadership frequently emphasise relationality, collective responsibility, reciprocity, respect and connections among people, community, culture, land and ocean (Thaman, 2003; Sanga et al., 2020). Such perspectives challenge an exclusively individualistic conception of professional success. Public service, viewed through a relational Pacific lens, is not simply an occupation undertaken by an individual; it involves responsibilities towards communities and relationships within which public institutions derive their social

purpose.

This cultural dimension also raises an important question concerning the relationship between professional standards and Indigenous values. Modern public administration requires competence, transparency, impartiality and accountability, while culturally grounded Pacific approaches emphasise relationships, reciprocity, respect and collective wellbeing. These principles need not be positioned in opposition. Rather, their integration may provide a stronger foundation for a form of public service that is simultaneously professionally competent, institutionally accountable and culturally responsive.

Across the Pacific, integrity and ethics remain recognised institutional concerns. Regional work by the United Nations Development Programme and the Public Service Fale has developed an Integrity and Ethics Agency Improvement Framework designed to assist Pacific public institutions to diagnose, strengthen and measure organisational integrity and ethics initiatives (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023). Such initiatives demonstrate the importance of organisational systems in supporting ethical public service. However, institutional frameworks operate most effectively when individuals possess the ethical understanding and professional judgement necessary to translate formal principles into everyday practice.

The relationship between education and public service is also becoming more important because the environment in which public servants operate is changing rapidly. Digital government, artificial intelligence, data analytics and automated decision-support systems are altering how information is processed and how services may be designed and delivered. Public servants increasingly require not only digital competence but also the ability to consider questions involving privacy, algorithmic bias, misinformation, data protection, transparency and human accountability. Education must therefore prepare future professionals to exercise judgement in environments where technological capability may advance more rapidly than established institutional norms.

Climate change presents another significant challenge for Pacific public administration. Public servants may increasingly participate in decisions involving disaster preparedness, infrastructure resilience, environmental protection, community relocation, food and water security, health, education and sustainable development. Such responsibilities require interdisciplinary knowledge, ethical judgement and the capacity to engage respectfully with both scientific and Indigenous knowledge. For Pacific societies, the future public servant will therefore require a combination of professional competence, cultural understanding, technological literacy, environmental awareness and human-centred judgement.

These developments reveal an important limitation in viewing

education primarily through the lenses of academic attainment and employability. Employability remains important, but employment is not the endpoint of educational responsibility. What graduates subsequently do with their knowledge matters. This is particularly evident in public service, where professional decisions may affect citizens who possess little direct influence over administrative processes. Education therefore carries a wider responsibility to prepare individuals not merely to obtain positions, but to exercise their responsibilities within those positions ethically and competently.

This paper consequently advances the proposition that public-service ethics should be understood partly as an educational question. Integrity cannot simply be introduced during induction training, nor can accountability be sustained exclusively through regulation. Ethical public institutions require both strong institutional systems and people capable of ethical reasoning. Education contributes to this human dimension by influencing how individuals understand responsibility, authority, fairness, evidence, difference and service.

The argument does not imply that education alone determines the conduct of public servants. Organisational culture, leadership, political and institutional environments, incentives, accountability systems, professional standards and working conditions all influence behaviour. Rather, the paper argues that education represents an important but comparatively underexplored stage within the longer process through which public-service capability and ethical responsibility are formed. Understanding this relationship requires connecting educational scholarship with literature on public administration, ethics, governance, human capability and Indigenous Pacific knowledge.

To conceptualise this relationship, the paper proposes an Education–Public Service–Society Cycle. Education contributes to the development of knowledge, values, ethics, critical thinking, cultural understanding and human agency. These capabilities contribute to professional and civic formation. Some individuals subsequently enter public service, where their decisions and behaviours influence policy implementation, institutional integrity, resource management and service delivery. These dimensions affect public trust, community wellbeing and social opportunity. Public institutions, in turn, influence the educational and social environments experienced by future generations. The relationship is therefore cyclical and intergenerational rather than linear.

The central argument of this paper can consequently be expressed through a simple but far-reaching proposition: not every student will become a public servant, but every public servant was once a student. The classroom cannot determine how every future public servant will behave,

but it can contribute to developing the intellectual, ethical, cultural and human foundations upon which later professional responsibility is built. For Fiji and the Pacific, reimagining this relationship creates an opportunity to connect educational purpose with a wider vision of ethical public administration, trustworthy institutions and sustainable social development.

Accordingly, this paper examines how education contributes to the formation of ethical and responsible future public servants; how educational experiences, cultural values and human capabilities may influence professional conduct and public responsibility; and how public institutions, in turn, shape the conditions experienced by future generations. It argues ultimately that the pathway towards stronger public institutions begins not only with administrative reform but also much earlier—with the education of the people who may one day be entrusted to serve. In this sense, the future quality of public service is partly being shaped in the classrooms of today.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between education and public service extends across several bodies of scholarship, including democratic education, critical pedagogy, values and ethical formation, public administration, public-service motivation, governance, human capability and Indigenous knowledge. However, these fields have generally developed along parallel rather than fully integrated pathways. Educational scholarship has extensively examined how learning develops knowledge, identity, citizenship and human agency, while public-administration scholarship has concentrated more strongly on motivation, professional ethics, institutional integrity, accountability and organisational behaviour. Bringing these perspectives together provides a broader foundation for examining how educational experiences may contribute to the formation of individuals who later exercise public responsibilities. The following review therefore moves from the wider purposes of education to ethical formation, public-service motivation, institutional integrity, Pacific relationality and emerging challenges associated with technology and sustainability.

### *Education Beyond Academic Achievement*

Education has historically been understood as serving purposes extending beyond the acquisition of qualifications. Dewey (1916) positioned education as fundamental to democratic social life because it develops capacities for communication, reflection, participation and collective problem-solving. From this perspective, education contributes to preparing individuals not only for occupations but also for participation in society.

Freire (1970) similarly challenged conceptions of education based predominantly upon the transmission and reproduction of knowledge. His concept of critical consciousness emphasises learners' capacity to question assumptions, understand structures of power and participate actively in transforming their circumstances. This perspective is particularly relevant to public-service formation because public servants frequently operate within institutional structures where professional responsibility may require more than procedural compliance. They may need to interpret complex situations, consider competing interests and exercise informed judgement.

Biesta (2009) provides further conceptual depth by distinguishing among the qualification, socialisation and subjectification functions of education. Qualification concerns the knowledge and skills required for participation in economic and social life, while socialisation relates to becoming part of existing traditions and practices. Subjectification concerns the development of individuals capable of independent thought and responsible action. Applied to public service, these dimensions suggest that professional qualifications alone are insufficient. Public servants also require ethical and civic capacities enabling them to exercise responsibility within institutions and towards citizens.

Education should therefore be understood as both a learning process and a formative process. This distinction provides the first foundation of this paper: the future public servant enters employment carrying more than qualifications. Individuals also bring values, assumptions, habits of reasoning, cultural understandings and conceptions of responsibility developed across earlier educational and social experiences.

### *Education, Values and Ethical Formation*

Ethical public service requires individuals capable of distinguishing between what is administratively possible and what is professionally and ethically responsible. Education can contribute to this capacity by creating opportunities for ethical reasoning, dialogue, reflection, perspective-taking and engagement with questions of justice and responsibility.

Freire (1970) emphasises dialogue and critical reflection as fundamental to meaningful education. Such an approach has particular relevance to professional ethics because ethical challenges rarely involve only memorising rules. They frequently require individuals to interpret circumstances, consider consequences and balance competing obligations. Education that encourages critical inquiry can therefore contribute to developing the judgement necessary for complex professional

environments.

At the same time, ethical formation should not be understood as the simple transmission of predetermined values. Ethical education is strongest when learners are able to examine why particular principles matter, consider alternative perspectives and understand the consequences of decisions for others. The objective is not merely compliant behaviour but ethically informed agency.

This distinction becomes particularly important in public institutions. Codes of conduct, regulations and accountability mechanisms remain essential, but formal rules cannot anticipate every situation encountered by public servants. Ethical public administration therefore requires both external accountability and internalised professional responsibility. Education can contribute to the latter by developing the capacity to reason about fairness, responsibility, dignity, evidence and the public good.

### ***Public Service as an Ethical and Civic Responsibility***

Public administration scholarship has long recognised that public service involves responsibilities extending beyond ordinary employment. Public servants operate within institutions entrusted with public authority, resources and responsibilities. Their decisions may affect access to education, health services, infrastructure, social protection, licensing, justice, environmental protection and numerous other dimensions of social life.

Dobel (1990) argues that integrity in public service involves more than adherence to rules because public officials exercise judgement within complex institutional and moral environments. Integrity therefore concerns the relationship between professional responsibilities, institutional obligations and ethical conduct.

This distinction is important because public administration cannot function entirely through regulation. Rules establish boundaries, but public servants must interpret and apply them across diverse circumstances. The quality of administration consequently depends partly upon professional competence and partly upon the ethical judgement exercised by individuals within institutional systems.

Public service can therefore be conceptualised as both professional work and civic responsibility. This reinforces the relevance of education because the qualities expected of public servants—integrity, impartiality, responsibility, fairness, critical judgement and respect—do not necessarily originate only after employment. Their foundations may develop much earlier.

### ***Public Service Motivation***

One of the most influential bodies of scholarship relevant to

this discussion concerns Public Service Motivation (PSM). Perry and Wise (1990) proposed that individuals may possess motives associated specifically with public institutions and public purposes, including rational, norm-based and affective motivations. Their work shifted attention away from the assumption that employee behaviour can be understood predominantly through economic incentives.

Subsequent scholarship considerably expanded the concept. Perry et al. (2010) reviewed two decades of PSM research and demonstrated the development of a substantial field concerned with understanding individuals' motivations to contribute to public purposes. Perry and Vandenabeele (2015) subsequently highlighted both achievements and continuing theoretical challenges within PSM research, including the need for greater attention to contextual and cultural variation. Ritz et al. (2016), in a systematic review of 323 publications, similarly demonstrated the substantial expansion of the field.

This scholarship is directly relevant to the present paper because it establishes that public-service behaviour cannot be explained entirely by salary, career advancement or organisational incentives. Commitment to public interests, compassion, civic responsibility and willingness to contribute to society may also influence why individuals enter and behave within public institutions.

However, this creates a further question: where are such orientations formed? Public-service motivation research has extensively examined motives, organisational behaviour and institutional contexts, but there remains scope for stronger integration with educational scholarship examining how values, civic identities, ethical reasoning and social responsibility develop before individuals enter public employment.

The present paper therefore extends rather than replaces PSM scholarship. It proposes that understanding public-service motivation may benefit from examining the educational antecedents of public responsibility.

### ***From Public Service Motivation to Public Service Formation***

Motivation and formation are related but conceptually distinct. Motivation asks why individuals may be attracted to or committed to serving public purposes. Formation asks how individuals develop the knowledge, values, capabilities and dispositions that enable them to exercise public responsibility.

This distinction is central to the argument of this paper. A person may possess strong motivation to serve while lacking particular professional competencies. Conversely,

a technically competent employee may lack a strong orientation towards public responsibility. Ethical and effective public service therefore requires the interaction of competence, motivation, values, judgement and institutional conditions.

Education potentially contributes to each of these dimensions. Formal schooling develops foundational knowledge and social interaction; tertiary education develops disciplinary and professional expertise; civic education may strengthen understanding of rights and responsibilities; ethical education can develop moral reasoning; and culturally grounded education can strengthen relational responsibility and contextual understanding.

Public-service formation should therefore be understood as a longitudinal process rather than an event occurring during recruitment or induction. The pathway may be conceptualised as:

**Education → Values and Capabilities → Professional and Civic Formation → Entry into Public Service → Institutional Practice → Public Outcomes.**

This conceptualisation broadens conventional approaches to public-sector capacity building by asking what happens before the employee reaches the public institution.

#### ***Human Capability and Public Responsibility***

Sen's (1999) Capability Approach provides another important foundation for understanding this relationship. Rather than defining development simply through economic resources, Sen emphasises the substantive freedoms and capabilities people possess to pursue lives they have reason to value.

Education is central to capability development because it expands people's ability to understand, reason, participate and make informed choices. From the perspective of public service, these capabilities have significance beyond the individual. A public servant's capacity for critical thinking, communication, ethical judgement and evidence-informed decision-making can influence the opportunities available to others.

This creates an important connection between individual capability and institutional capability. Public institutions do not possess human judgement independently of the people working within them. The knowledge, reasoning and ethical capabilities of public servants contribute to the practical capability of institutions to deliver services effectively and equitably.

Education therefore creates potential public value extending beyond private economic returns. When educated individuals subsequently work in public institutions, their capabilities can influence communities and citizens who were not directly involved in their education. This constitutes an important social dimension of educational investment.

#### ***Institutional Ethics, Integrity and Public Trust***

Ethical public service cannot, however, be explained exclusively through individual character. Institutional culture, leadership, accountability arrangements, incentives, professional standards and organisational systems also influence behaviour.

This relationship between individual and institutional ethics is recognised within contemporary Pacific governance initiatives. The United Nations Development Programme's Integrity and Ethics Agency Improvement Framework, developed in consultation with the Public Service Fale, is intended to help Pacific public agencies diagnose, plan, manage and measure integrity and ethics initiatives and thereby strengthen organisational cultures of integrity and public confidence (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023).

Such approaches are important because ethical public service requires both ethical people and ethical institutions. Education may contribute to developing the values and judgement individuals bring into public organisations, while organisational systems can reinforce, enable or constrain those qualities.

The relationship can therefore be expressed as:

**Individual ethical capability + institutional integrity + accountable leadership → stronger ethical public service.**

This interaction prevents the argument from becoming overly individualistic. Education cannot compensate for dysfunctional institutional environments, just as strong institutional rules cannot entirely compensate for the absence of ethical judgement among those required to interpret and implement them.

#### ***Public Service, Governance and Public Trust***

Trust represents an important outcome of the relationship between citizens and public institutions. Citizens encounter government not only through legislation or political discourse but through everyday interactions with public agencies and public servants. Administrative responsiveness, fairness, competence, transparency and respectful treatment can therefore influence perceptions of institutional legitimacy.

Public servants consequently occupy an important position between policy and lived experience. A policy may be formally equitable, but citizens experience its practical meaning through implementation. This makes frontline and administrative judgement particularly significant.

The connection to education is indirect but important. If education contributes to developing empathy, critical reasoning, cultural competence and ethical judgement,

these capabilities may later influence how public servants interact with citizens and implement public responsibilities. Conversely, educational environments dominated by narrow credentialism may provide fewer opportunities for developing the wider human capabilities associated with public responsibility.

Public trust should therefore not be treated solely as a communications issue. It is also connected to the quality, fairness and integrity of institutional behaviour.

### ***Indigenous Pacific Epistemologies and Relational Public Service***

The relationship between education and public service requires particular contextualisation in Fiji and the Pacific. Public-administration theories developed primarily in Western institutional settings may not fully capture Pacific understandings of relationships, community, responsibility and leadership.

Thaman (2003) argues for greater recognition of Indigenous Pacific perspectives, knowledge and wisdom within education. Her work challenges educational systems that privilege externally derived epistemologies while marginalising local understandings of knowledge, values and relationships.

Similarly, Sanga et al. (2020) demonstrate through tok stori in Solomon Islands how relational and culturally grounded forms of engagement can support leadership learning. Their analysis illustrates that professional learning need not be separated from Indigenous ways of communicating and knowing.

These perspectives are significant for public-service formation because Pacific public servants frequently operate within communities where relationships, cultural protocols, collective identity and obligations to place remain important. Professional competence without cultural competence may therefore be insufficient.

A Pacific conception of ethical public service may consequently integrate principles such as:

Professional competence + integrity + relational responsibility + cultural understanding + collective wellbeing + accountability.

Such an approach does not reject universal principles of impartiality, transparency or professionalism. Rather, it examines how these principles can operate meaningfully within Pacific cultural and relational contexts.

### ***Education, Equity and the Public Servant***

Equity provides another important intersection between education and public service. Public servants often participate in allocating resources, implementing policies and determining access to services. Their decisions can therefore

affect groups differently according to geography, disability, socioeconomic circumstances, gender, language and other conditions.

Sen's (1999) Capability Approach is particularly useful because equal treatment does not always produce equitable opportunity. Individuals and communities possess different capacities to convert resources into meaningful outcomes.

For public servants, this means that fairness cannot always be reduced to identical treatment. Ethical administration may require understanding contextual differences and recognising barriers affecting particular populations. Education capable of developing critical social awareness and contextual reasoning can contribute to such understanding.

This is especially relevant in Pacific settings where rural, maritime and remote communities may experience substantially different conditions from major urban centres. Ethical public service therefore requires sensitivity to how apparently uniform policies may produce unequal practical consequences.

### ***Education and the Digital Public Service***

Digital transformation is changing both education and public administration. Public institutions increasingly use digital systems for information management, communication, service delivery and decision support. Artificial intelligence may further transform administrative processes.

These developments create opportunities for efficiency but also generate ethical challenges concerning privacy, surveillance, algorithmic bias, data protection, misinformation, transparency and accountability. The future public servant therefore requires more than technical digital skills. Public employees increasingly need the capacity to evaluate when technology should be used, whose interests it serves, what risks it creates and where human judgement must remain decisive.

This reinforces the importance of education as preparation for responsible technological citizenship and professional practice. Critical digital literacy, ethical reasoning and human-centred judgement should become important dimensions of professional formation.

The relationship can therefore be conceptualised as:

**Digital competence + ethical judgement + human agency → responsible digital public service.**

For Fiji and Pacific Island countries, technological transformation must additionally consider infrastructure inequality, affordability, institutional capacity and culturally appropriate implementation.

### ***Climate Change, Sustainability and Future Public***

## Service

Climate change further expands the responsibilities facing Pacific public servants. Public administration increasingly intersects with disaster management, infrastructure, health, migration, environmental planning, education, food security and community resilience.

Future public servants will therefore require capabilities extending across conventional disciplinary boundaries. Scientific literacy, systems thinking, ethical judgement, cultural understanding and community engagement are likely to become increasingly important.

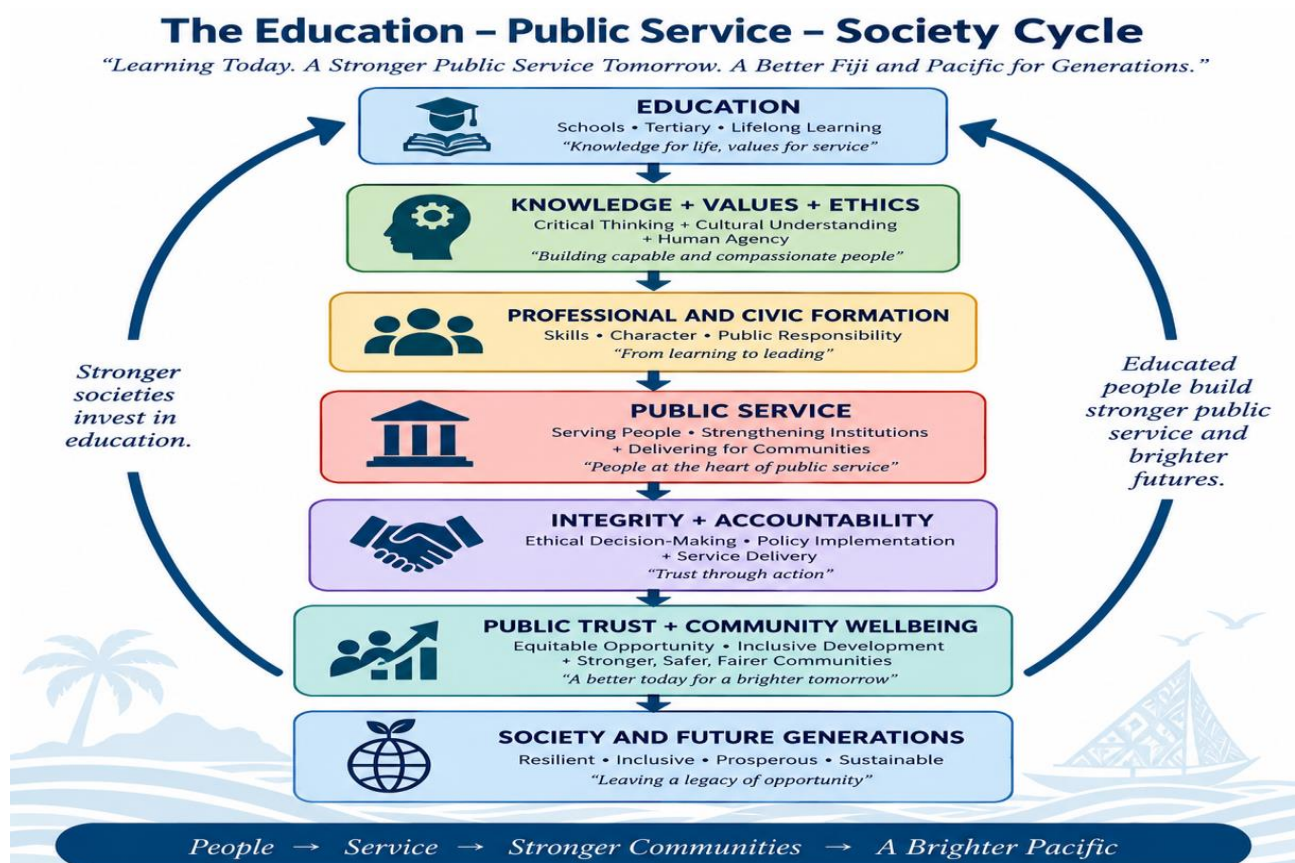
Indigenous ecological knowledge can contribute significantly to this capability. Pacific communities possess accumulated knowledge concerning land, ocean, weather, food systems and environmental relationships. Integrating such knowledge with contemporary scientific approaches can support more contextually grounded public decision-making.

Education for public service should consequently be future-oriented. Preparing public servants only for existing administrative routines risks underpreparing them for emerging challenges requiring interdisciplinary and adaptive judgement.

## Towards an Education–Public Service–Society Relationship

Taken together, the literature suggests that education, public service and society should not be understood as separate domains. Education contributes to developing the people who subsequently enter professions and public institutions. Public servants then participate in implementing policies, administering resources and delivering services that influence society. Public institutions, in turn, shape the educational, economic and social environments experienced by future generations.

This relationship can be conceptualised as an Education–Public Service–Society Cycle:



The cycle highlights the intergenerational significance of educational formation. Education cannot guarantee ethical public servants, and public institutions cannot depend on education alone to maintain integrity. Nevertheless, the literature provides a strong basis for recognising that the human qualities required by trustworthy public institutions

begin developing long before an individual receives a public-service appointment.

The proposition underlying this review is therefore straightforward but consequential: public-service reform should not begin only when people enter public service. It should also consider the educational processes through

which future public servants are formed.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework drawing upon Human Capital Theory, the Capability Approach, Social Learning Theory, Public Service Motivation, and Indigenous Pacific epistemologies. These perspectives provide complementary explanations of how education contributes to the development of knowledge and professional competence, human capabilities, values and behaviours, commitment to public service, and culturally grounded responsibility. Their integration is particularly appropriate to this paper because ethical and effective public service requires more than academic qualifications or technical expertise; it requires competent individuals who possess ethical judgement, social responsibility, cultural understanding and a commitment to serving the public good. Human Capital Theory, associated particularly with Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964), provides the starting point by conceptualising education as an investment in the knowledge, skills and competencies of individuals. Education strengthens human capacity and can contribute to individual productivity and wider social and economic development. Applied to public service, the theory helps explain why investment in education and professional preparation is important for developing capable teachers, administrators, health professionals, planners, policymakers and other public-sector employees. However, Human Capital Theory alone is insufficient for the argument advanced in this paper because technical competence does not necessarily ensure integrity, ethical judgement or commitment to public responsibility.

The Capability Approach broadens this understanding by shifting attention from educational inputs and economic productivity towards what people are genuinely able to be and do (Sen, 1999). From this perspective, education should expand people's capabilities to reason, participate, make informed choices and exercise human agency. Applied to public service, the Capability Approach suggests that education should develop not only occupational competencies but also the critical thinking, ethical judgement, communication and decision-making capabilities required to exercise public responsibility. It therefore provides an important bridge between education as individual development and education as preparation for meaningful contribution to society.

Social Learning Theory provides an additional explanation of how values, attitudes and behaviours may develop. Bandura (1977) argues that individuals learn through observation, interaction, modelling and reinforcement within their social environments. This perspective is particularly relevant because the ethical dispositions of future public servants are unlikely to emerge solely through formal instruction. Learners

also observe how teachers, institutional leaders, families, communities and other authority figures demonstrate fairness, integrity, respect, responsibility and accountability. Schools and universities therefore function not only as places where ethical principles are taught but also as environments in which ethical and professional behaviour is modelled and experienced.

Public Service Motivation (PSM) provides the most direct theoretical connection between individual formation and commitment to public service. Perry and Wise (1990) argue that individuals may be motivated by considerations associated with public institutions and the public interest rather than solely by economic or personal rewards. Subsequent scholarship has further demonstrated the significance of values, compassion, civic responsibility and commitment to public purposes within public-service motivation (Perry et al., 2010; Perry & Vandenabeele, 2015). For the present paper, PSM raises an important educational question: if commitment to public service is influenced by values and orientations towards society, how might these orientations be developed before an individual enters public employment? This provides theoretical support for examining education as one potential antecedent of public-service responsibility.

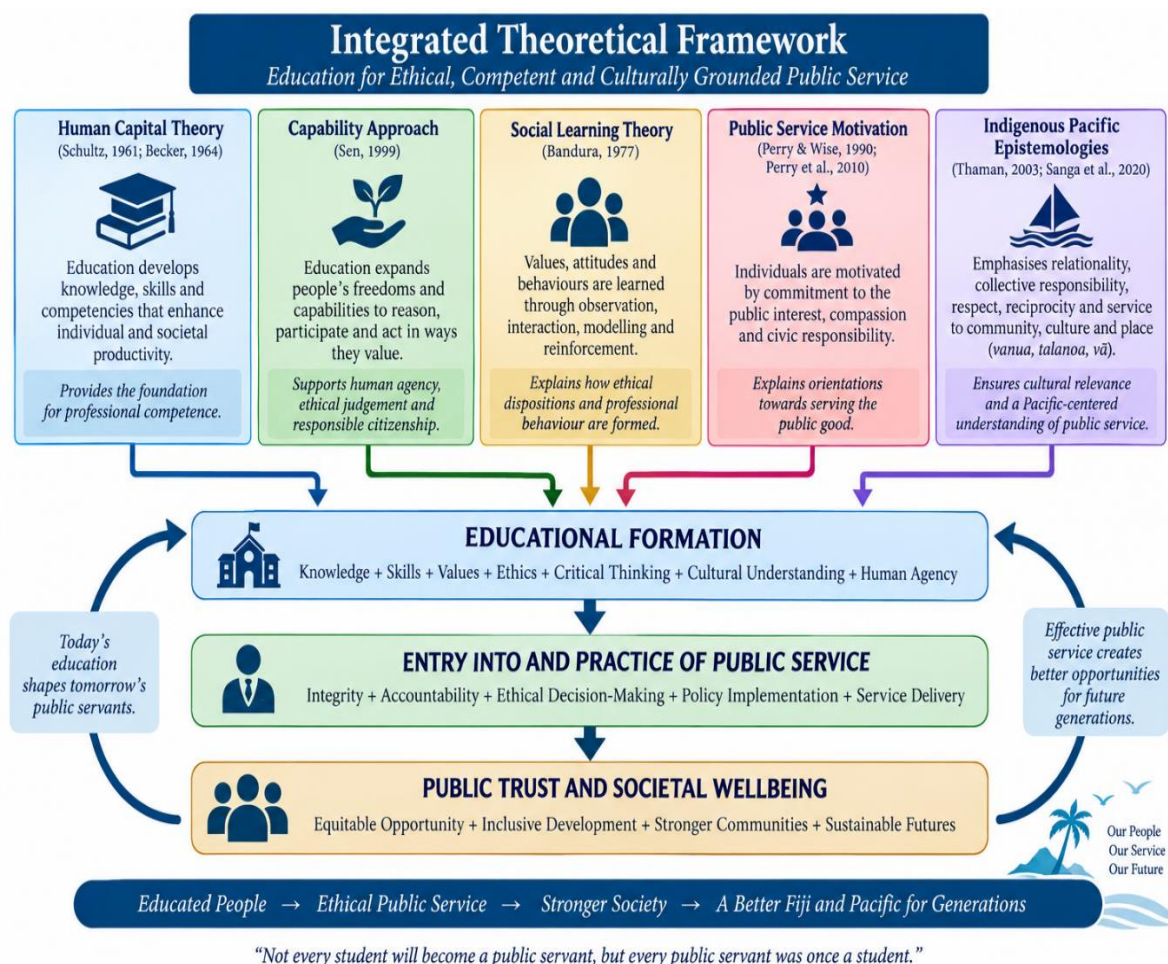
Finally, Indigenous Pacific epistemologies provide the cultural and relational grounding necessary for applying these perspectives to Fiji and the wider Pacific. Pacific approaches to knowledge and leadership emphasise relationships, reciprocity, collective responsibility, cultural identity, respect and obligations to community and place (Thaman, 2003; Sanga et al., 2020). Concepts and practices associated with *vanua*, *vā*, *talanoa* and *tok stori* broaden understandings of public service beyond individual career achievement towards relational responsibility and service to communities. These perspectives are especially important because public servants in Pacific societies operate within culturally diverse environments in which professional decisions may intersect with community relationships, customary values and collective wellbeing.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that the formation of an effective public servant involves the interaction of knowledge and competence, human capability, learned values and behaviours, motivation to serve, and culturally grounded responsibility. Human Capital Theory explains the development of professional competence; the Capability Approach emphasises freedom, agency and substantive human capabilities; Social Learning Theory explains how values and behaviours may be learned and modelled; Public Service Motivation explains orientations towards serving the public interest; and Indigenous Pacific epistemologies locate public responsibility within relationships, culture

and community. Their integration therefore provides the theoretical foundation for the Education–Public Service–Society Cycle developed in this paper.

The framework ultimately supports the paper's central proposition that public-service formation begins before public-service employment. Education cannot guarantee ethical behaviour, nor can it independently determine the quality of public institutions. Nevertheless, it provides an important formative environment in which the knowledge,

competencies, values, critical judgement, cultural understanding and human agency required for responsible public service can begin to develop. In this sense, not every student will become a public servant, but every public servant was once a student, making education an important starting point for understanding the longer-term development of ethical, competent and culturally grounded public service in Fiji and the Pacific.



## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework developed for this paper is the Education–Public Service–Society Cycle, which explains the relationship between educational formation, public-service practice and societal wellbeing as a continuous and intergenerational process. The framework is based on the central proposition that not every student will become a public servant, but every public servant was once a student. It therefore shifts attention beyond the conventional assumption that public-service development begins with recruitment, induction or professional training and recognises that the foundations of professional competence, ethical judgement, civic responsibility and human agency may begin

much earlier through education.

The framework begins with education, through which learners develop knowledge, skills, values, ethics, critical thinking, cultural understanding and human agency. These dimensions contribute to professional and civic formation, preparing individuals not merely for employment but also for responsible participation in society. Some subsequently enter public service, where their knowledge, values and professional capabilities interact with organisational cultures, regulations, leadership and institutional systems. Within this environment, public servants exercise responsibilities involving integrity, accountability, ethical decision-making, policy implementation and service delivery. Education is

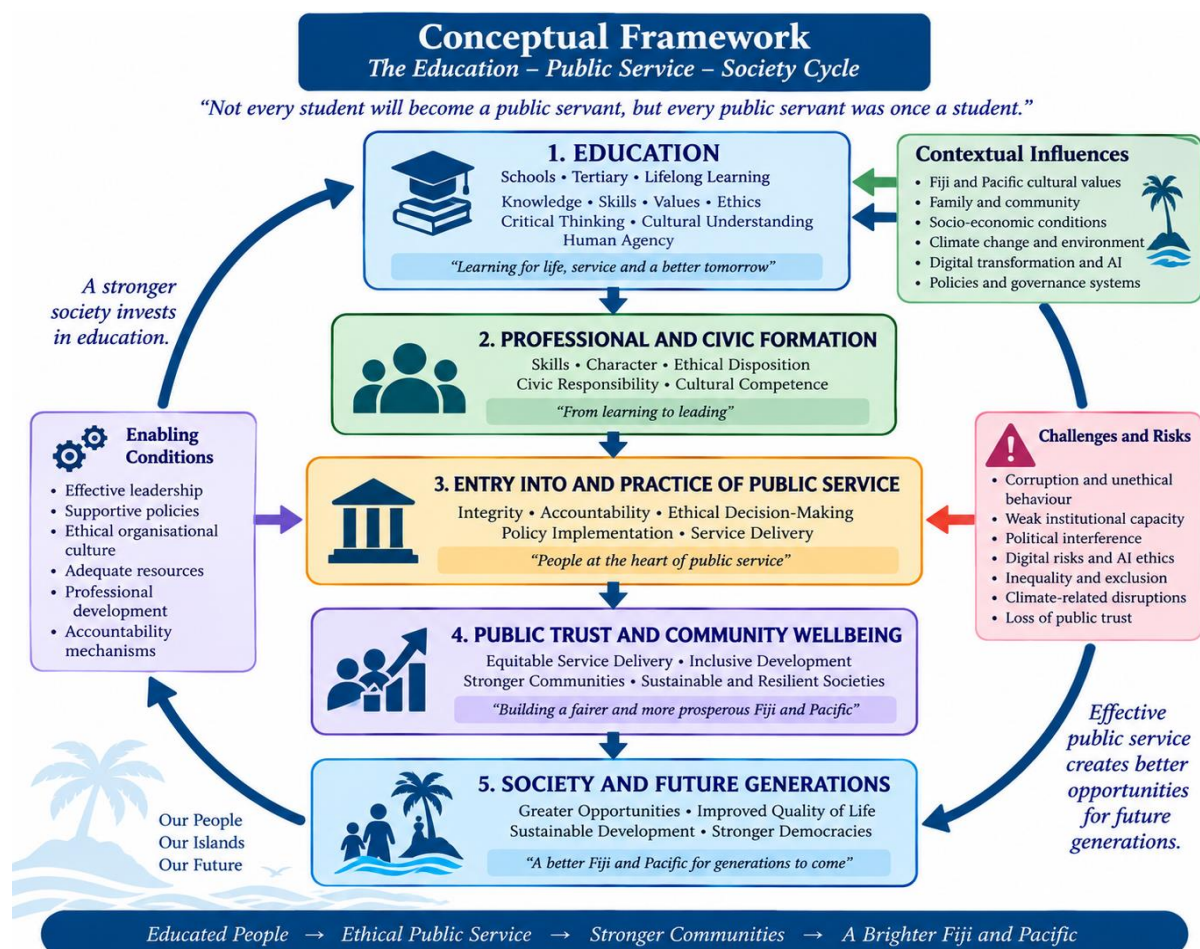
therefore conceptualised as an important formative influence rather than as a deterministic predictor of later professional behaviour.

The quality of public-service practice subsequently influences wider society. Ethical, competent and culturally responsive public administration can contribute to equitable service delivery, institutional integrity, community wellbeing and public trust. Conversely, weaknesses in accountability, professional competence or ethical judgement can constrain institutional effectiveness and citizen confidence. The framework therefore recognises that the relationship between individual formation and public outcomes is mediated by the institutional environments within which public servants work.

Importantly, the cycle does not end with service delivery. Public institutions shape the social, economic and educational conditions experienced by communities and future generations. Decisions concerning education, health, infrastructure, social protection, technology, environmental resilience and resource allocation can expand or constrain people's opportunities. These conditions subsequently influence another generation of learners, some of whom will

eventually enter public service themselves. The relationship therefore returns to education, creating an intergenerational cycle of formation, service and societal influence.

Within Fiji and the wider Pacific, the framework is situated within cultural, relational and geographical realities. Indigenous Pacific values of reciprocity, collective responsibility, respect, relationality and service to community provide an important cultural dimension, while contemporary challenges such as inequality, climate change, digital transformation and artificial intelligence increasingly shape the responsibilities of future public servants. The Education–Public Service–Society Cycle consequently proposes that strengthening public institutions requires attention not only to administrative reform after recruitment but also to the educational formation of those who may later be entrusted with public responsibility. In this sense, today's education contributes to tomorrow's public service, while the quality of tomorrow's public service helps shape the opportunities inherited by future generations.



## CONCLUSION

This paper has advanced a simple but consequential proposition: not every student will become a public servant, but every public servant was once a student. Behind this statement lies a broader argument about the purpose of education and the origins of ethical public service. Public servants do not begin their professional lives as blank institutional actors. They enter public organisations carrying knowledge, values, attitudes, cultural understandings, habits of reasoning and conceptions of responsibility developed through years of interaction with families, communities, schools, tertiary institutions and wider society. The foundations of public service therefore precede public employment. Recognising this relationship expands discussion of public-sector integrity beyond recruitment, regulation and professional development towards the longer educational processes through which future public servants are formed.

The analysis has demonstrated that education should consequently be understood as more than preparation for employment. Human Capital Theory appropriately emphasises education's contribution to knowledge, skills and productive capability (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964), but the requirements of contemporary public service extend beyond technical competence. Public servants frequently exercise judgement in circumstances involving competing interests, unequal needs, scarce resources and consequences for other people. Sen's (1999) Capability Approach therefore provides an important extension by positioning education as a means of expanding people's substantive capabilities to reason, participate, choose and act. For public service, the implication is that an effective education should contribute not only to what future professionals know, but also to what they are capable of judging, doing and becoming.

This broader understanding is reinforced by Social Learning Theory. Bandura (1977) demonstrates that attitudes and behaviours are shaped partly through observation, interaction, modelling and reinforcement. The ethical education of future public servants consequently occurs not only through formal courses on ethics or citizenship but also through the everyday cultures of educational institutions. Learners observe how authority is exercised, how differences are treated, whether rules are applied fairly, whether dialogue is encouraged and whether integrity is practised by those entrusted with responsibility. In this sense, educational institutions teach ethics both through their curricula and through their conduct. A school or university that speaks about integrity while tolerating unfairness communicates a different lesson from one in which fairness, respect, responsibility and accountability are consistently modelled.

Public Service Motivation further strengthens the connection between educational formation and later public

responsibility. Perry and Wise (1990) established that motivations associated with public institutions and the public interest cannot be understood solely through material incentives, while subsequent scholarship has demonstrated the significance of civic commitment, compassion and orientation towards public purposes (Perry et al., 2010; Perry & Vandenabeele, 2015; Ritz et al., 2016). This literature raises an important question that sits at the heart of the present paper: if commitment to serving others matters within public institutions, greater scholarly attention should be given to the environments in which such orientations are initially developed. Education is one such environment, although it interacts continuously with family, community, culture, religion, professional experience and wider social conditions.

At the same time, this paper does not suggest that education automatically produces ethical public servants. Such a conclusion would be both theoretically and practically inadequate. Formal qualifications do not guarantee integrity, and even individuals with strong ethical commitments operate within organisational environments capable of enabling, constraining or reshaping behaviour. Public-service ethics therefore emerges through the interaction between individual formation and institutional conditions. Codes of conduct, transparent procedures, accountability mechanisms, ethical leadership, professional development and organisational cultures remain essential. The UNDP's Integrity and Ethics Agency Improvement Framework, developed in consultation with the Public Service Fale, reflects precisely this institutional dimension by supporting Pacific public agencies to diagnose, strengthen and measure integrity and ethics initiatives with the aim of strengthening organisational cultures and public confidence (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023).

The argument developed here therefore rejects a false choice between educating ethical people and building ethical institutions. Sustainable public integrity requires both. Education can contribute to developing individuals capable of critical and ethical judgement, while institutions must create conditions in which integrity is expected, supported and protected. Conversely, ethical institutional cultures can reinforce professional values throughout an individual's career. The relationship can therefore be understood as mutually reinforcing: ethical formation strengthens institutions, while ethical institutions strengthen and sustain ethical professional practice.

This interaction has particular significance for Fiji and the wider Pacific. Public service in Pacific societies operates within cultural and relational environments that cannot always be adequately explained through administrative

models developed elsewhere. Indigenous Pacific epistemologies emphasise relationality, reciprocity, collective responsibility, respect and connections among people, communities and place (Thaman, 2003). Sanga et al. (2020), for example, demonstrate the pedagogical significance of *tok stori* as a relational and culturally familiar approach to leadership learning in Solomon Islands. Such perspectives suggest that professional public service in the Pacific can be strengthened by recognising that accountability is not solely bureaucratic; it also operates through relationships and responsibilities towards communities.

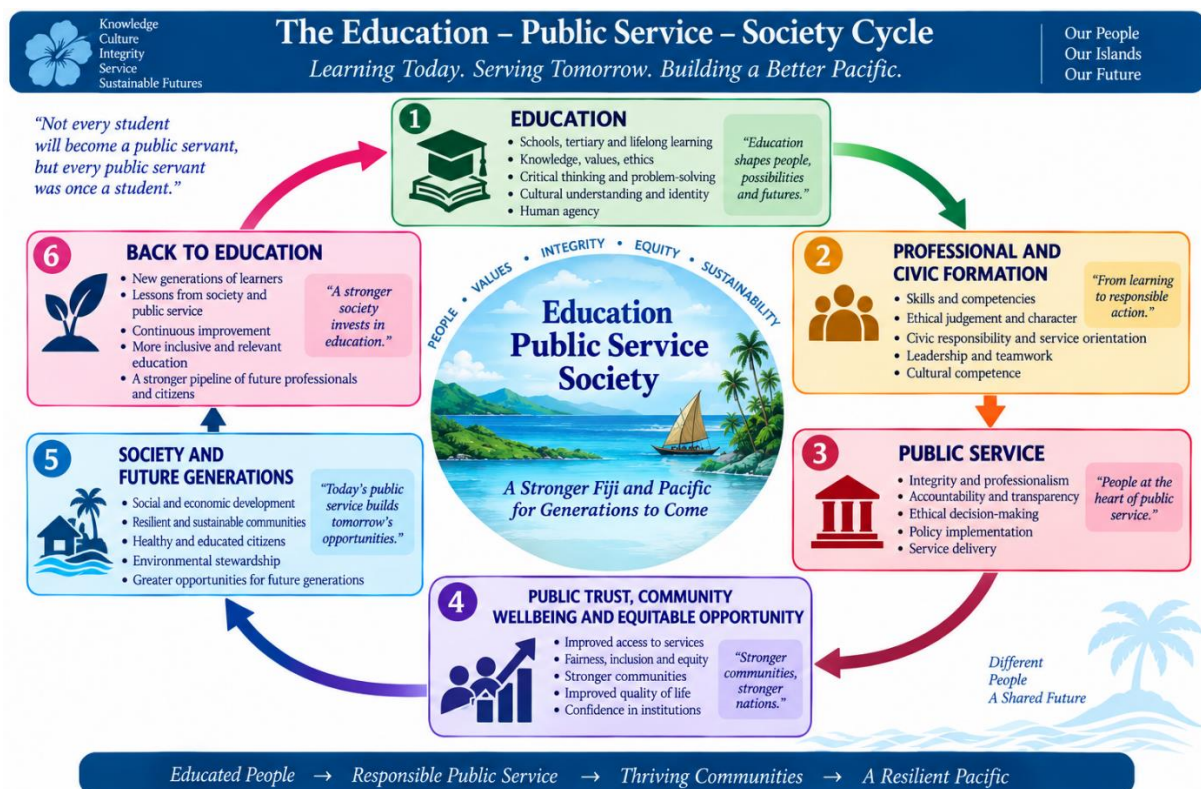
This does not require choosing between professional administrative principles and Indigenous Pacific values. Integrity, impartiality, transparency and accountability can coexist with relational responsibility, cultural understanding, reciprocity and respect. Indeed, their integration may provide a stronger foundation for Pacific public administration. Future public servants require the professional competence to operate within contemporary institutions while also possessing the cultural intelligence necessary to understand the communities those institutions exist to serve. Ethical public service in Fiji and the Pacific should therefore be simultaneously professionally competent, institutionally accountable, culturally grounded and human-centred.

The analysis has further demonstrated that equity must remain central to this understanding. Public servants routinely participate in decisions concerning resources, services and opportunities. Apparently identical administrative treatment may produce unequal consequences where communities face different geographical, economic, infrastructural or social conditions. Sen's (1999) Capability Approach is especially important here because it shifts attention from the formal distribution of resources towards people's actual opportunities to convert resources into valued outcomes. Ethical public service therefore requires not only procedural fairness but also an understanding of the circumstances affecting citizens' ability to benefit from public services.

For Fiji and other Pacific Island contexts, this has practical significance. Citizens living in urban centres, rural communities and geographically isolated islands may experience very different levels of access to institutions, infrastructure and services. Public servants therefore require contextual judgement as well as procedural knowledge. Education capable of developing empathy, critical reasoning, cultural understanding and awareness of inequality can contribute to preparing professionals to recognise such differences rather than assuming that uniform administrative procedures necessarily produce equitable outcomes.

Artificial intelligence and digital transformation make this argument increasingly urgent. Future public servants will

operate within administrative environments shaped by digital platforms, automated systems, data analytics and AI-assisted decision-making. These technologies may increase efficiency and expand access, but they also raise questions concerning privacy, bias, transparency, misinformation, exclusion and human accountability. UNESCO's contemporary AI competency frameworks consequently emphasise human-centred thinking, ethics, human agency and responsible use alongside technical competence (Miao & Cukurova, 2024; Miao et al., 2024). The significance for public-service formation is considerable. The future public servant must be able to ask not only whether a technology can perform an administrative function but whether its use is fair, transparent, inclusive and appropriate. Human judgement cannot simply be surrendered to technological systems because public accountability ultimately remains a human and institutional responsibility. Education must therefore prepare future professionals to work intelligently with emerging technologies while retaining ethical judgement, cultural sensitivity and responsibility for consequences. Climate change similarly reinforces the need for a broader conception of public-service preparation. In Pacific societies, future public servants will increasingly encounter questions involving disaster resilience, infrastructure, community adaptation, health, migration, environmental protection, food and water security and sustainable development. These challenges do not fit neatly within single administrative disciplines. They require interdisciplinary knowledge, systems thinking, community engagement and the ability to bring scientific and Indigenous knowledge into meaningful dialogue. The public servant of the future must therefore be more than an administrator of established procedures; he or she must increasingly be capable of learning, adapting, collaborating and exercising judgement amid uncertainty. Taken together, these considerations support the central conceptual contribution of this paper: the Education–Public Service–Society Cycle. The framework conceptualises the relationship as a continuing progression through education → knowledge, values, ethics, critical thinking, cultural understanding and human agency → professional and civic formation → public service → integrity, accountability, ethical decision-making, policy implementation and service delivery → public trust, community wellbeing and equitable opportunity → society and future generations → education. The cycle illustrates that the consequences of education can extend far beyond the learner, just as the consequences of public service can extend far beyond the individual public servant.



Importantly, the cycle is neither automatic nor inherently positive. Education may expand capabilities but can also reproduce inequality. Public institutions may strengthen public trust but can also weaken it. Technology may expand access but can also create new forms of exclusion. Organisational cultures may reinforce integrity or discourage it. The value of the framework therefore lies not in claiming a predetermined causal pathway but in identifying the relationships through which formation, institutions and societal outcomes interact across time.

This recognition produces an important shift in thinking about public-sector reform. Conventional reform often begins after a person has entered government: recruitment is improved, codes are introduced, professional development is provided, performance is measured and accountability mechanisms are strengthened. These interventions remain necessary. However, the argument developed in this paper suggests that reform should also look further upstream. If societies desire public servants who are ethical, critically minded, culturally responsive, technologically responsible and committed to the public good, consideration must also be given to the educational environments in which these capabilities and dispositions begin to develop.

Schools and universities therefore carry a responsibility that extends beyond producing graduates who can obtain employment. They contribute to forming teachers who will educate children, health professionals who will care for patients, administrators who will allocate resources, planners who will shape communities, policymakers who will advise

governments and officials who will exercise public authority. The consequences of educational quality and educational purpose therefore eventually travel beyond educational institutions themselves.

This does not mean transforming schools into training institutions for government employment. Most students will pursue lives and careers outside public service. Rather, the qualities considered important for ethical public servants—critical thinking, integrity, empathy, responsibility, respect, evidence-based judgement, cultural understanding and concern for others—are also qualities of responsible citizenship. Education that develops these capabilities benefits society regardless of the occupations learners eventually enter.

The deeper implication is therefore that public-service formation is also citizenship formation. The distinction between preparing a responsible citizen and preparing an ethical future public servant is not absolute because public servants remain citizens entrusted with particular institutional responsibilities. The ethical foundations relevant to public administration are consequently connected to the wider democratic and social purposes of education identified by Dewey (1916), Freire (1970), Biesta (2009) and Sen (1999).

For Fiji and the wider Pacific, this creates an opportunity to articulate a distinctive approach to public-service formation—one that combines professional competence with human capability, institutional integrity with personal responsibility, technological readiness with

human judgement, and contemporary administrative practice with Indigenous Pacific relationality. Such an approach would recognise that effective public service is ultimately about people serving people, within institutions that exist to advance collective wellbeing.

The paper therefore concludes that the pathway towards stronger public institutions cannot begin only at the doors of government ministries and public agencies. It begins much earlier—in families, communities, schools, universities and other environments in which people learn what responsibility, fairness, service and integrity mean. Public institutions must subsequently reinforce these foundations through ethical leadership, accountable systems, professional development and organisational cultures that protect integrity.

Ultimately, education is not solely preparation for earning a living; it is also preparation for exercising responsibility. For those who eventually enter public service, that responsibility acquires particular significance because their decisions may influence the opportunities, wellbeing and trust of people they may never personally know. The classroom therefore cannot guarantee ethical government, but it can help cultivate the human capabilities upon which ethical government depends. The enduring proposition of this paper can consequently be expressed in one final progression: The cycle then begins again.



In this sense, not every student will become a public servant, but every public servant was once a student. What societies teach, model and value in education today may eventually enter their public institutions tomorrow. The long-term challenge for Fiji and the Pacific is therefore to ensure that education develops not only people who are qualified to hold positions, but people capable of exercising those positions with competence, integrity, cultural understanding, ethical judgement and a genuine commitment to serving others. The quality of tomorrow's public service may, in part, be taking shape in the classrooms of today.

## WAY FORWARD

The way forward requires a broader understanding of the relationship between education and public service. Strengthening public institutions cannot be approached solely through recruitment reforms, codes of conduct, professional development and accountability mechanisms introduced after

individuals enter employment. These measures remain essential, but the argument developed in this paper suggests that public-service formation begins considerably earlier. Education should therefore be recognised as part of the long-term ecosystem through which societies develop the knowledge, capabilities, values and ethical judgement required for responsible public service. This requires moving from a narrow emphasis on education for employment towards education for capability, citizenship, responsibility and service (Dewey, 1916; Sen, 1999).

A central priority should consequently be to strengthen ethical and civic formation across education without reducing education to training for government employment. Schools, universities and professional programmes should provide learners with meaningful opportunities to engage with integrity, fairness, accountability, human dignity, social responsibility and the public good. Such learning should move beyond

memorising ethical principles towards analysing dilemmas, evaluating consequences, considering different perspectives and exercising reasoned judgement. Freire's (1970) emphasis on critical consciousness is particularly relevant because responsible professionals need the capacity to question assumptions and examine how decisions affect others rather than simply reproduce established practices.

Importantly, values should not only be taught but also modelled within educational institutions. Social Learning Theory suggests that behaviour and attitudes develop partly through observation, modelling and interaction (Bandura, 1977). Schools and universities therefore contribute to ethical formation through their institutional cultures as well as their formal curricula. Fair assessment, respectful relationships, transparent decision-making, responsible leadership, academic integrity and meaningful student participation can provide practical experiences of the principles later expected within professional and public life. Educational institutions seeking to develop ethical graduates must therefore endeavour to embody the values they expect graduates to demonstrate.

The way forward should also involve stronger connections between education and public-service preparation. Universities and other tertiary institutions preparing graduates for fields such as education, health, administration, planning, law, finance, environmental management and policy should integrate professional competence with ethical reasoning, public responsibility and cultural competence. Public-service organisations can contribute through internships, mentoring, professional engagement, community projects and case-based learning. Such collaboration would help learners understand that professional knowledge is ultimately exercised within social and institutional relationships rather than in isolation.

For Fiji and the wider Pacific, public-service formation should additionally be culturally grounded. Indigenous Pacific epistemologies emphasising relationality, reciprocity, respect, collective responsibility and service provide important foundations for conceptualising public responsibility (Thaman, 2003; Sanga et al., 2020). Rather than positioning professional administrative principles and Indigenous values as competing approaches, educational and public-service systems should explore productive integration between them. Integrity, accountability and professional competence can be strengthened by culturally informed understandings of responsibility to people, community and place.

Another important direction concerns equity and inclusion. Future public servants should be prepared to understand that citizens do not experience policies and services under identical circumstances. Geographic isolation, disability, socioeconomic disadvantage, digital inequality and other conditions can influence people's ability to access opportunities. Sen's (1999) Capability Approach provides a

particularly useful foundation for recognising the distinction between formal equality and substantive opportunity. Educational preparation should therefore develop professionals capable of asking not merely whether services are available, but whether people can meaningfully access and benefit from them.

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence and digital government creates an additional priority. Education should develop digitally capable but ethically responsible future professionals. UNESCO's AI competency frameworks emphasise human-centred approaches, ethics, responsible use and human agency alongside technological knowledge (Miao & Cukurova, 2024; Miao et al., 2024). Future public servants should therefore understand privacy, data responsibility, algorithmic bias, transparency, misinformation and the limitations of automated systems. The objective should not be technological resistance but responsible technological adoption in which human judgement and accountability remain central.

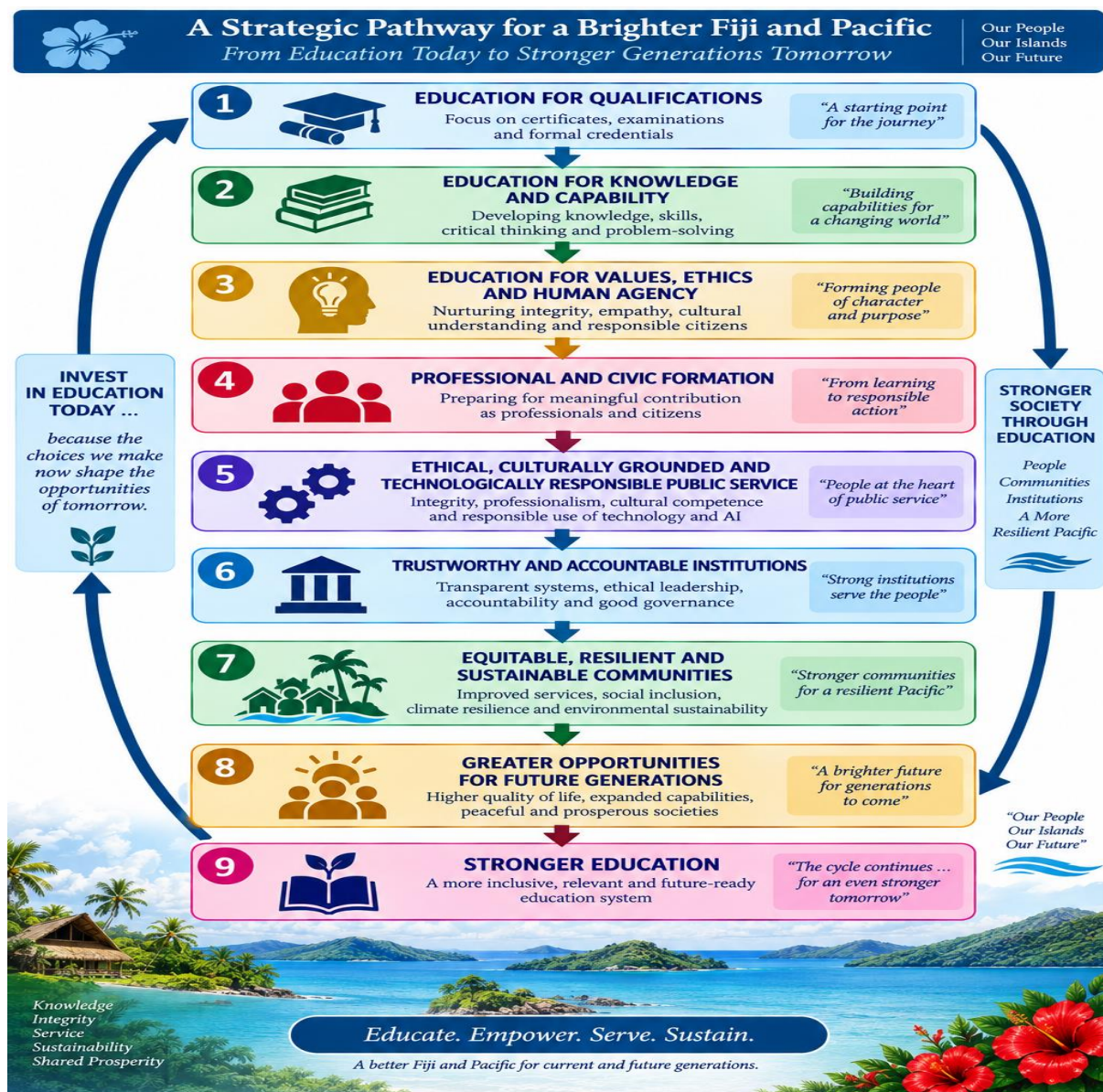
Climate change and sustainability must similarly become integral to the preparation of future public servants in Fiji and the Pacific. Public-sector responsibilities increasingly intersect with disaster preparedness, infrastructure, environmental management, public health, food and water security, education and community resilience. Educational institutions should therefore strengthen interdisciplinary learning, systems thinking, environmental responsibility and the capacity to work respectfully with communities and Indigenous knowledge. Future public servants will require the ability to operate under conditions of uncertainty and complexity rather than merely administer established routines.

Public-service organisations must simultaneously strengthen the institutional environments into which graduates enter. Education can contribute to ethical formation, but ethical individuals require organisational systems that support integrity. Transparent processes, ethical leadership, effective accountability mechanisms, professional development and institutional cultures that reward responsible behaviour remain indispensable. The UNDP's Integrity and Ethics Agency Improvement Framework provides a Pacific-relevant example of strengthening organisational approaches to integrity and ethics (UNDP, 2023). The longer-term objective should therefore be an alignment between educational formation and institutional integrity.

Finally, greater research is required on the relationship proposed in this paper. The Education–Public Service–Society Cycle provides a conceptual framework, but its relationships should be examined empirically across Fiji and other Pacific Island contexts. Research could investigate how educational experiences influence public-

service motivation, ethical judgement and professional identity; how organisational cultures reinforce or weaken earlier values; how Indigenous epistemologies inform public responsibility; and how digital transformation affects ethical

public administration. Longitudinal studies following individuals from education into professional life would be particularly valuable.



The central direction is therefore not to transform education into public-service training. Rather, it is to recognise that the qualities required for responsible public service are also qualities required for responsible citizenship and human development. The way forward begins by educating people not only for the positions they may one day hold, but for the responsibilities they may one day carry.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing upon the literature, theoretical framework and proposed Education–Public Service–Society Cycle, this paper recommends an integrated approach to strengthening the educational foundations of ethical public service in Fiji and the

wider Pacific.

First, education systems should broaden the definition of educational success. Academic achievement, qualifications and employability should remain important, but they should be complemented by ethical judgement, critical thinking, civic responsibility, cultural competence, empathy and human agency. Curriculum design should therefore recognise the wider social responsibilities learners may eventually assume as citizens and professionals.

Second, ethics and public responsibility should be integrated across curricula rather than confined to isolated subjects. Learners should encounter ethical questions through authentic situations, case studies,

debates, community-based learning and problem-solving across disciplines. Such approaches can help students understand that integrity and responsibility are not abstract concepts but principles that influence real decisions affecting people and communities.

Third, educational institutions should model the ethical cultures they seek to develop. Schools and universities should strengthen transparency, fairness, respectful relationships, academic integrity, responsible leadership and meaningful learner participation. Because values are learned partly through observation and interaction (Bandura, 1977), institutional practice should reinforce rather than contradict formal teaching about ethics.

Fourth, universities and public-service institutions should strengthen partnerships in professional formation. Structured internships, mentoring, practitioner engagement, service-learning, community projects and public-sector case studies can expose learners to the realities of public responsibility before employment. These experiences should emphasise both professional competence and ethical decision-making rather than focusing exclusively on technical skills.

Fifth, public-service induction should build upon rather than initiate ethical formation. Recruitment and induction programmes should recognise that employees enter public service with existing values and experiences. Induction should provide opportunities to connect these foundations with professional standards, public-service values, institutional responsibilities and the practical ethical challenges employees may encounter.

Sixth, continuing professional development should incorporate ethical reflection throughout public-service careers. Ethics should not be treated as a one-time induction requirement. Regular professional learning should address emerging ethical dilemmas, accountability, leadership, citizen engagement, equity, digital governance and changing professional responsibilities. This would recognise public-service formation as a lifelong process.

Seventh, Indigenous Pacific knowledge and values should be meaningfully integrated into education and public-service development. Principles of relationality, reciprocity, collective responsibility, respect, service and connection to community and place can strengthen culturally grounded understandings of public responsibility (Thaman, 2003; Sanga et al., 2020). Integration should involve meaningful engagement with Indigenous knowledge holders and communities rather than symbolic inclusion.

Eighth, equity and inclusion should become core competencies for future public servants. Educational and professional programmes should prepare learners to recognise how geography, socioeconomic conditions, disability, cultural diversity and digital access can influence people's experiences of public services. Future professionals should develop the capacity to distinguish between identical

treatment and equitable opportunity, consistent with the capability perspective advanced by Sen (1999).

Ninth, digital ethics and responsible AI should become essential components of professional preparation. Future public servants should develop competencies in data responsibility, privacy, algorithmic bias, transparency, cybersecurity, misinformation and human oversight. Technological competence should be accompanied by the capacity to determine when technology is appropriate and when human judgement must remain decisive (Miao & Cukurova, 2024; Miao et al., 2024).

Tenth, climate literacy and sustainability should be embedded across relevant professional education. In Fiji and the wider Pacific, future public servants should be equipped to respond to climate-related challenges through interdisciplinary knowledge, systems thinking, community engagement and culturally grounded approaches to resilience. Indigenous ecological knowledge and contemporary scientific knowledge should be treated as potentially complementary resources for responsible decision-making.

Eleventh, public institutions should strengthen organisational cultures that enable ethical behaviour. Educational formation alone cannot guarantee ethical public service. Public organisations require transparent procedures, accountable leadership, effective oversight, fair human-resource practices and environments in which employees can raise ethical concerns responsibly. Strengthening individuals and strengthening institutions should therefore proceed together.

Twelfth, public-service leadership should actively model integrity and accountability. Senior and middle-level leaders influence organisational norms through their decisions, relationships and everyday conduct. Ethical expectations are more credible when they are demonstrated consistently by those exercising institutional authority. Leadership development should therefore integrate ethical reasoning, relational responsibility and accountability alongside administrative and managerial competence.

Thirteenth, public-service effectiveness should be assessed partly through citizen and community experience. Administrative efficiency remains important, but public service ultimately concerns the quality, fairness, accessibility and responsiveness of services experienced by citizens. Monitoring systems should therefore consider whether institutional processes translate into meaningful and equitable outcomes for communities.

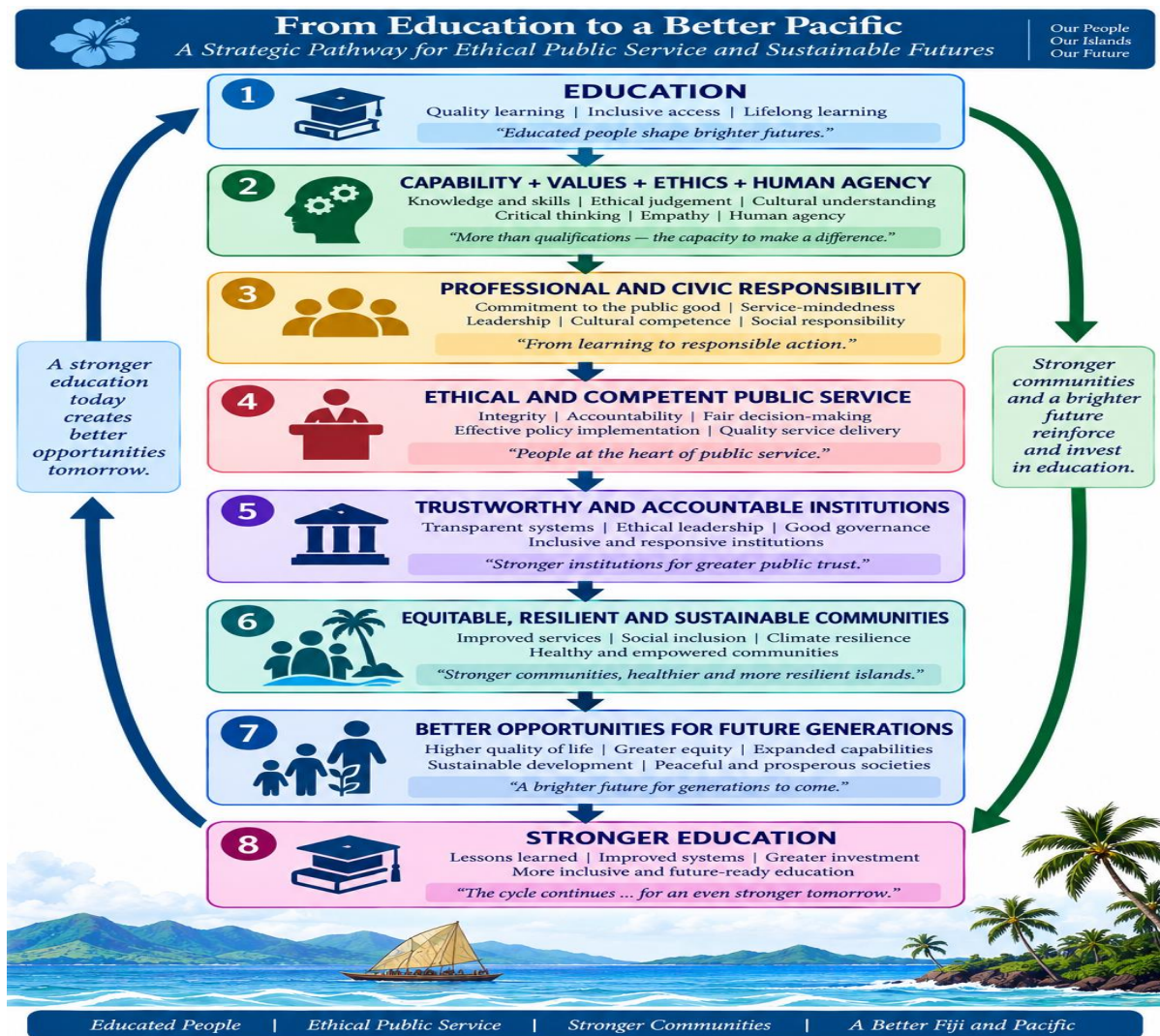
Fourteenth, research institutions and universities should investigate the educational antecedents of public-service behaviour. Empirical research should examine relationships among educational experiences, public-service motivation, ethical reasoning, professional identity

and organisational behaviour. Comparative studies across Fiji and other Pacific Island countries could determine which aspects of the proposed Education–Public Service–Society Cycle are context-specific and which have broader relevance. Finally, Fiji and Pacific education and public-service institutions should consider public-service formation as an intergenerational responsibility. Today's learners include tomorrow's teachers, administrators, health professionals, planners, policymakers and public officials. The institutions

these future professionals eventually operate will, in turn, influence the opportunities available to another generation. Investment in ethical and human-centred education should therefore be understood not simply as educational development but as a long-term investment in institutional capability, community wellbeing and public trust.



The overarching recommendation of this paper is therefore to recognise that strong public institutions are built not only through better systems, regulations and administrative reforms, but also through the long-term formation of the people who operate them. Education cannot by itself guarantee ethical public service, but it can contribute substantially to developing the knowledge, capabilities, values, judgement and cultural understanding upon which ethical public service depends.



Ultimately, the most important recommendation is also the simplest: educate today with an awareness of the responsibilities people may carry tomorrow. Not every learner will enter public service, but the knowledge, values and human capabilities developed through education can strengthen every profession, every community and every sphere of citizenship. For those who do become public servants, these foundations may help shape how public authority is exercised, how citizens are treated and how future generations experience the institutions created to serve them.

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