

Young Global City Leaders: Building a conceptual model to explore the next generation of school leadership innovation

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Background

Internationally, teacher disinterest in leadership roles (Gronn & Lacey, 2004) and escalating headteacher retirement rates (Howson, 2008) are causing school leadership shortages. In London, these trends are resulting in younger leaders taking on senior school leadership team roles (DCSF, 2009). Anecdotal evidence also suggests that other urban centres are experiencing the same trends. However, to date, little is known about the relationship between leader age and their experience or approach to leadership. More specifically, there has not been any research to date on the experience of the new generation of leaders that are moving into senior school leadership posts.

As Bennis and Thomas (2002) suggest that leaders are defined by their generations. Anecdotally school leaders who are under 35 suggest that they are experiencing their roles differently than their predecessors. In addition, as this incoming generation of leaders is the first to have 'grown up' with technology, they may also have different models of leading and different career expectations. All of these issues will have an affect on their leadership and, in turn, their colleagues, students and communities. There may also be significant implications for local and national leadership development policy and practice.

Global Cities (Sassen, 1991) are internationally important sites of migration, diversity and innovation. They provide important settings for researching emerging urban trends. As such, our team will be launching a 3-year study examining the context, experience and leadership influence of these young school leaders in 3 of the top 10 Global Cities-London, New York and Toronto (Foreign Affairs, 2008). Due to the paucity of research in this area, the first phase of work has involved creating a conceptual model to guide each stage of the work. This paper presents the conceptual framework underpinning an upcoming study of this new generation of leaders as they take on deputy, assistant and headteacher roles under the age of 35.

Research Questions

In June 2009, in order to explore the issues, a London-based pilot study reviewed literature and tested assumptions and research tools with 20 young educational leaders. Two focus-group events engaged leaders in individual and group tasks. Pilot data indicates that young leaders are mobile, crave meaningful opportunities for peer networking and opportunities to contribute. Based on data emerging from the preliminary pilot (Edge, 2009), the overall study explores the following questions: 1) Are there distinct patterns of experience of young Global City leader (YGCL) career development, professional identity and leadership? 2) Do intersections of age, gender and ethnicity influence conceptions of professional identity and individual/collective theories of leadership? 3) How do YGCL conceptualise leading of school improvement and student achievement? and 4) Are they developing new models of leadership?

Methods

Within the educational and organisational literature, research on the relationship between age and leadership is sparse (Bennis and Thomas, 2002; Wilson et al, 2006). The literature also makes little mention of the relationship between age/generation and school leadership and the intersection of leader age with their gender and/or ethnicity.

Literature on the relationship between age and organisational outcomes tends to focus on age-based discrimination of older workers (Kite et al, 2005) with only occasional mention of bias against younger

workers (Snape & Redman, 2003) and the perception of 'correct ages' for certain professional workers (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). As a result, this study draws on organisational sociology studies of generational patterns of workplace that explore the behaviour, values and aspirations of different generations including Baby Boomers (1943-60) and GenerationX (1960-80) (Zemke et al, 2000).

The young leaders of interest within this study are GenerationXers (GenX). According to Zemke et al (2000), GenXers are globally-minded, technoliterate, informal and pragmatic. These oft-shared traits are seen to shape GenXers' desire for collaboration, (Smola and Sutton, 2002), mobility (Duscher & Cowin, 2004), diversity and more experimental structures in organisations (Kunreuther, 2003). Smola & Sutton (2002) state, "With the transition of one generation to the next into top leadership positions, organisation will be influenced by the next generation's values." Therefore, even though this new generation of educational leaders will influence their schools and wider education systems, few research studies-if any-have explored this emerging generation of leaders.

Almost all generational studies are located within private sector corporate organisations. Most studies focus on how to lead GenXers (Zemke et al, 2000) or manage generation-based workplace conflict (Deal, 2007).

Research findings

To answer these questions, in the first instance, this study builds on urban educational leadership research (Harris, 2002; Riley, 2008). It also builds on the research exploring the relationships between leadership and gender (Coleman, 2003; Schnurr, 2008), race (Banks, 2000; Bush et al, 2006) and student outcomes (Leithwood et al, 2007; Robinson, 2007). This study aims to understand GenX leaders by examining their career trajectories (Gronn, 1999), professional identity formation (Busher, 2005; Luhrmann & Eberl, 2007) and the intersections of race, ethnicity and gender on their experience and work.

This paper will not be reporting findings from the pilot study or the preliminary stages of the research. However, this paper presents an important conceptualization of age and leadership that is currently missing from both the educational and corporate literature. The academic community will have the opportunity to explore and challenge this preliminary theoretical proposition of possible age/generation influences leadership, the influence of the intersections of age, gender, ethnicity and leadership and school-level models of next-generation leadership theories of action. Policy makers and practitioners will have the opportunity to explore the possible implications of this model for their own work in shaping the development and

Evidence from this study will support those responsible for policy and practice in the recruitment, development, management and retention of young Global leaders. Leadership programmes will have evidence to support their own programme innovations. Advisory Panel and Young Leader Network members will have engaged in the research process, established new professional networks. Young leaders will have resources to guide their development and career planning.

The study informs the leadership knowledge base and builds a policy and practice-relevant model of Young Global City Leadership. Beyond traditional academic strategies, products will include books for young leaders and Global City educators, policy reports, an interactive website and final city-level conferences.

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