

Article

'Culture', 'Context', School Leadership and Entrepreneurialism: Evidence from Sixteen Countries

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Abstract: In the face of ongoing school budget cuts, increasing student numbers and national educational policy environments that demand more from schools, like it or not, school leaders are being forced to be much more market-oriented in their thinking and ways of being than at any other time before. A school is an important site for social development, and in some communities in some countries, there may be only one school in an entire community. Nevertheless, as countries continue to grapple with reduced government funding on education, many schools risk the threat of closure. And, as education consumers (parents) and users (students) demand more and better value and results from schools, competition between schools have simultaneously increased. Thus, the environment in which school leaders' work is requiring and fostering entrepreneurial leadership. The findings reported in this paper, derive from a larger sixteen country, five continent study of 61 school leaders on the "Nature of School Leadership". The main conclusions presented in this paper are that, male and female school leaders approach entrepreneurial in very different ways; "national culture" and "national context" significantly influences and shape the work, and thus the attitudes and behaviours of school leaders, who must embrace entrepreneurialism as an essential skill, and a response to changes in school funding arrangements, and the changing role of education in national educational policy agendas.

Keywords: school leaders; entrepreneurial; educational policy; leadership; context; culture

1. Introduction

Across the world, school leaders are having to re-imagine and re-invent their approach to school leadership. Changing national priorities and policy contexts, competition between national education systems, competition within national education systems evolving systems of monitoring and accountability, the deepening of performativity cultures are contributed to this renewing of focus. Additionally, changes in the socio-political, economic, technological and cultural landscapes, nationally, reveal a complexity of demands and expectations associated with the practice of school leadership. Accordingly, for national governments in both developing and developed countries, "... The search for new levers to improve school performance and education quality becomes particularly critical in a context of increasing global competition and tight fiscal constraint" [1] (p. 12).

School leadership is arguably the second most important factor in the success or failure of schools. Thus, school leaders have a crucial role to play in improving school level efficiency and in transforming national education systems through schooling. As, custodians and drivers of social and economic change in society, the role of the school leader continues to evolve "from a traditional managerial role to a performance-based distributed leadership role" [2] (p. 9), defined by greater pressures and demands which requires them "... to be more reflective, relational, contextual, socially and environmentally aware and entrepreneurial" [3] (p. 2).

The reality of 21st century school leadership was laid bare by [4] (p. 5) who noted,

“School leadership is not simply putting prescribed solutions into action, but a constant encounter with quandaries that demand thinking and problem solving, responding, and adjusting to the situations at hand.”

School leaders are also operating in national education contexts where many significant and life changing events are outside their control, some of which directly influence and/or challenge their own performance as well as the performance of their schools. According to [3] (p. 5), the changing external environment of schools, in particular, “increased global competition among educational systems, social, political and civil unrest, multiple and competing policies requiring simultaneous implementation frameworks for increased accountability, frameworks for and increased and improved performance, the quality and adequacy of infrastructure and resources, the threat and impact of natural disasters; growing national/international economic uncertainty”, are all having an impact on the way school leaders are able to enact their roles. In addition, [3] (p. 5) also notes that school factors such as “the quality and availability of teachers and aspiring school leaders; quality teaching and learning, pupil behaviour, quality of support received from and by parents, location and size of a school, size and gender make-up of staff and student bodies as well as the degree of support/challenge received from the school board, have a direct impact on the ability of school leaders to enact their roles as well as on the kinds of outcomes schools can or may have”. This conundrum facing school leaders is further highlighted by [5] (p. 16) who note,

“There is a growing concern that the role of school principal designed for the industrial age has not changed enough to deal with the complex challenges schools are facing in the 21st century.”

And by DeVita [6] (p. 1) who also propose,

“More than ever, in today’s climate of heightened expectations, principals are in the hot seat to improve teaching and learning. They need to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. They are expected to broker the often-conflicting interests of parents, teachers, students, district office officials, unions, and state and federal agencies, and they need to be sensitive to the widening range of student needs.”

These observations highlights major tension in school leadership, although simultaneously providing an invitation and a challenge to school leaders. That is, in order for schools to deliver the promise of education to students, and in order for society to derive (the) intended benefits from education, school leaders must “do education differently” [7] (p. 9). Accordingly, school leaders must learn to cope with reduced funding, keep standards high, as well as raise them, ensure staff are provided with appropriate teaching resources, keep students engaged and classrooms resourced, effectively, producing more from less, whilst at the same time, ensuring theirs and their school’s duty and responsibility to national economic development is not comprised.

2. Entrepreneurial School Leadership

An entrepreneur is a person who organises and manages an enterprise, usually with considerable initiative and risk [8]. Although not all school leaders manage the same degree of risk (e.g., financing and budget, security and safety), all school leaders engage in some entrepreneurial activity since the organising and management of an enterprise, i.e., a school, is not risk free.

Entrepreneurial school leadership, an aspect of leadership, is not a new form of leadership. According to [9] (p. 149), “Entrepreneurial leadership in education sits at the nexus of a relatively

old, established topic (entrepreneurial leadership) applied to a relatively novel setting (compulsory education)". Nevertheless, as an aspect of school leadership, it is one that has steadily moved up the list of attributes and skills required for existing and aspiring school leaders in both developing and developed countries, due to the embedding of the market culture in education, which is demanding school leaders think and act like entrepreneurs. As also noted by [9] (p. 149), "Schools are more like businesses and their leaders are more like business leaders—for better or worse". From their study of school leaders in England, [10] (p. 237) define entrepreneurial leadership as,

"... the predisposition to and practice of achieving valued ends by creating, taking or pursuing opportunities for change and innovation and finding new resources or utilising in new ways existing resources (financial, material and human)."

Furthermore, from their study of primary school leaders in Cyprus, [11] (p. 424) concluded instructional and entrepreneurial are the two "domains of practice for successful school leadership", whilst noting that entrepreneurial school leadership involve parents in school the community and other stakeholders in the school, through projecting the school and through funding for infrastructure and other resources. Additionally, research on school leadership in England and Jamaica that found, school leaders showed evidence of a "corporate mindset" [12] (p. 120), which means being able to "engage internal and external factors in pursuit of new and different opportunities or ways to realise a school's mission, notwithstanding events or ongoing changes in the environment" [3] (p. 102).

2.1. Drivers of Entrepreneurial School Leadership

According to [13] (p. 21), "schools are supplied and consumed." The consumption of education, according to Coffey, involves choice and risk and although education is a public good, as a market good or commodity, its very provision by schools is an act of competition. This global cultural shift in how education is perceived require school leaders to acquire and demonstrate entrepreneurial skills, for their own success and the success of their schools, in increasingly competitive national schooling environments. As schools engage in various marketing strategies to attract and secure consumers [14], parents are exercising their right of choice in respect of schools [15]. Furthermore, "Both provider (schools) and consumers (parents) are engaged in a risky business: schools in making the 'perfect' pitch to encourage consumers to apply, parents in undertaking to choose the 'best school' for their children" [13] (p. 27).

As noted by [16], conditions of compulsory schooling have changed in ways that are encouraging more entrepreneurs in education and for those in education to behave entrepreneurially. Several other reasons are behind the thrust for school leaders to develop and demonstrate entrepreneurial skills, including:

- Environmental change—school leaders need to be able to manage rapid changes in a school's environments since "paradox, ambiguity and uncertainty are becoming the new norm" [17] (p. 9).
- Increased accountability—there is "increasing global emphasis on accountability" [18] (p. 407).
- Choice—parents and students have much greater choice and flexibility over where and how they study [15].
- League tables—a school's and a nation's performance in national and international league tables is a feature "a quasi-market framed by performance indicators" [19] (p. 988).
- Decentralised autonomy-school leaders are increasingly expected, and in some cases encouraged, to show "increased sophistication" to understand and use the "business model" as well as the "education model" [20] (p. 302).
- Improvements in teaching and learning—quality teaching has potential to create a "citizenry with a capacity to compete successfully in the global village" [21] (p. 113).
- Supporting economic growth—the overarching objective of a school system is being able to "respond to the need to promote equity, to respond to cultural diversity and to reduce early school leaving" and to "contribute to supporting long-term sustainable economic growth..." [22] (p. 4).

This list is not exhaustive, and responding to these global and cultural shifts brought about by market forces outside of education is fast becoming an everyday feature of schools/school leaders.

2.2. Entrepreneurial School Leadership: Key Attributes

Entrepreneurial school leadership is believed to be associated with a combination of traits and behaviours. For example, being, “tenacious, optimistic, creative, courageous, persistent, willing to take risks, resourceful, independent, opportunistic, and thoughtful” [8] (p. 28) are key traits. Conversely, [23] propose that successful entrepreneurial leaders prioritise:

- Financial management—developing and selling a business plan; raising funds and spending it wisely,
- Communication—being able to share the vision, mission, and strategies with staff, students, parents, other stakeholders, in a way that inspires actions and confidence,
- Motivation—having a can do attitude, and helping others find their ‘can do’ attitude.

Furthermore, in his sixteen country study of school leadership, [3] (p. 115) identified team working, collaboration, improving or enhancing processes, environmental awareness, working in partnership with others; responsiveness to market forces, opportunity spotting, risk-taking, innovation, purpose led; shrewdness, expediency and pragmatism, as key traits and behaviours associated with entrepreneurial school leadership.

3. Culture

The concept of culture has become very important to research on organisations, including schools. Although the concept of culture itself has been widely researched, its definition remains contested. It has been suggested that culture can be understood in two distinct ways where the first is through visible characteristics such as a country’s boundaries and/or through characteristics such as the skin colour and language [24]. The second aspect is the invisible characteristics possessed by individuals such as feelings, beliefs and personalities. The second aspect is closely aligned to [25] view that culture refers to unique beliefs, norms, feelings and behaviour of a distinctive group of people. Furthermore, this view also support [26] (p. 13) who described culture as “a shared system of meaning. It dictates what we pay attention to, how we act and what we value”, and by [27] (p. 9) who defined national culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another”.

Culture and Educational Leadership

As noted above, culture is and can be acquired, shared, transmitted and integrated, and national culture has a strong influence on organisational practices and leadership behaviours. As articulated by [28] (p. 70) “Culture forms the context in which school leadership is exercised. It thus exerts a considerable influence on how school leaders think and act” Put differently, national cultures are enduring, they exist independently of both individuals and organisations, and may be thought of as a driving force behind the actions and behaviours of both individuals and organisations. Seven dimensions of national culture, important to our understanding of entrepreneurial leadership as practiced by school leaders have been identified by [29] (pp. 75–76). These are:

1. Power-distributed/power-concentrated. In societies where power is widely distributed through decentralisation and institutionalised democracy, inequity is treated as undesirable. In societies where power is commonly concentrated in the hands of a few, inequities are often accepted and legitimised.
2. Group-orientated/self-orientated: In self-oriented cultures, relationships are fairly loose and tend to be based on self-interest where people are judged and status ascribed in line with individual performance or individual accomplishment. In group-oriented cultures, relationships are important and individual needs and values are secondary to group needs and values.

3. Consideration/aggression. In aggression cultures, achievement and competition are dominant features, and conflicts are resolved through power and assertiveness. In organisations, assertiveness is taken as a virtue, and so is selling one's self and being decisive. In consideration cultures, relationships and solidarity are emphasized, as well as humility and team working.
4. Proactivism/fatalism. In proactive societies, people tend to be more tolerant of different opinions and are not excessively threatened by unpredictability. In fatalistic cultures, people can be fairly inflexible and dogmatic.
5. Generative/replicative. In generative cultures people value new ideas and the knowledge development and ways of working and are more likely to focus on solutions or on simplifying processes. In replicative cultures, people are more likely to borrow and implement innovations, ideas and inventions developed elsewhere, usually with little or no regard to indigenous and/or local cultural contexts.
6. Limited relationship/holistic relationship. In limited relationship cultures, interactions and relationships tend to be determined by explicit rules which are applied equally to everyone, e.g., promotion decisions are based on explicit criteria. In holistic cultures, greater attention is given to relationship obligations, e.g., kinship, patronage, friendship, over impartially applied rules.
7. Male influence/female influence: In some societies, male domination of decision-making in political, economic and professional life is widely accepted as the norm, although in others, women have come to play a more significant role.

I will return to these later, in the discussion.

4. Context

School context is a complex and multifaceted issue which directly impacts and shapes the practice of school leadership as well as the success or failure of schools. No two schools are exactly alike, and neither are national education systems. Although schools and national education systems may have the same zeal or passion, their ability to deliver on their ambitions are severely influenced by, for example, economic conditions, policy priorities, social and political conditions. Thus, school leadership is closely associated with context.

From research conducted around the world by several researchers, five "contexts" influencing the practice of school leadership can be identified:

- Institutional Context—the institutional context of school leadership/schooling is comprised of factors internal to a school as well as those factors outside a school that have a direct bearing of what goes on inside [30].
- Community context—the community context of school leadership/schooling is comprised of factors in the immediate local environs of a school which have the potential to be brought into school or which can have a direct bearing on what goes on inside [31].
- National cultural context—the national cultural context of school leadership/schooling is comprised of factors found within a society at large, and are part of a pattern of group identity or socialisation. Since no member of a school community is exempt from these factors, these are likely to be brought into a school, and have potential to influence what goes on in a school [32].
- Economic Context—the economic context of school leadership/schooling is comprised of factors in the economic environment of a country or nation, and has to do with government spending on education, including capital investments, spending on material and resources for teaching and learning, and staffing. Factors in a school's economic environment, such as teacher quality, class size, expenditure per student, education level of parents; parental involvement in schooling; and size and quality of the school library and access to technology can have a direct bearing on the ability of the school/school leaders to deliver (quality) education [12].

- Political Context—the political context of school leadership/schooling is comprised of factors in a country's national environment, and has to do with political structures, educational policy-making and implementation and the power structures and relationships between educationalists and governments. Educational policy agendas, for example, can significantly affect the ability of schools/school leaders to deliver quality education [3,33,34].

Acknowledging the role context plays in school leadership, [30] note that the peculiarities of context shape the behaviour of school leaders, and that successful school leaders adapt their leadership to the needs, opportunities and constraints within their own work contexts.

5. The Research

This study was undertaken over a period of two years, 2014–2016. Data was collected using a mixed method cross-cultural approach. This allows us we compare different practices in different cultures and subcultures, e.g., how context and national culture influences the of school leadership in different countries. Cross-cultural research focuses on comparability [35], and leads to a body of evidence on issues, practices and/or events within and across multiple national country contexts. This study therefore acknowledge 'emics' (things that are unique to a culture) and 'etics' (things that are universal to all cultures), and their relationship in helping to improve our understanding of the practice of school leadership within and across national cultures/ contexts, since the practice school leadership can be viewed as a functionally equivalent phenomena, irrespective of the country and/or location within a country within which it is enacted.

5.1. Analytical Approach

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from participants. Correlational and regression analyses were conducted on the quantitative data to establish patterns of dependence and/or correlation. Qualitative data were the larger of the two data sets and these were analysed using narrative post-structuralism. In using this approach, I focused on discourse and narratives provided by school leaders in relation to social institutions (e.g., schools) and cultural products (e.g., a national education system). According to [36] (p. 101), "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it." Discourse therefore is a useful tool for understanding practice since narratives constructed by actors are often subsumed into the actions that comprise their practice.

I also incorporated ethnographic methods and procedures (such as key informant interviewing) in this analytical frame, in order to generate critical insights from school leaders in relation to their practice in their national, local and cultural settings. This allowed me to access events, discourses and tactics in different school contexts and/or cultural spaces, which may not be [adequately] captured by quantitative methods, thus providing me with "a more direct style of thinking about relationships among knowledge, society and political action" where the "central premise is that one can be both scientific and critical, and that ethnographic descriptions offers a powerful means of critiquing culture and the role of research within it" [37] (p. vii). Incorporating ethnographic methods within the analysis of data was therefore a methodological and a political act for giving voice to school leaders, especially those located in smaller and developing countries, as well as for zeroing in on how school leaders manage shifting educational policy agendas in different national and cultural spaces. The interview excerpts included in this paper are therefore to illustrate and enable our understanding and analysis of discourses and 'events' in these spaces.

5.2. Participants

Sixty-one school leaders from sixteen countries were involved in this study. Each is currently a "principal" or "Headteacher" in their country's national education system. All participants work in public schools or schools operated by their country's national education ministry or education

department. Twenty-four male and thirty-seven female took part in the study. Forty-six lead schools in urban and/or inner city areas and 15 lead schools in rural and/or remote areas. Thirty-six are primary school leaders and twenty-five are secondary school leaders. Their combined teaching experience in years is 370 or an average of 6 years. Their combined years of school leadership experience in years is 145.5 or an average of 2.3 years. Male school leaders' combined years of experience in teaching was 256 or 10.6 years on average, whereas their combined years of leadership experience was 106 or 4.4 years on average. Female school leaders combined years of experience in teaching was 248 or 6.7 years on average, whereas their combined years of leadership experience was 85 or 2.2 years on average. Overall, male school leaders had more teaching and leadership experience in years.

6. The Evidence

Evidence from this study involving school leaders in sixteen countries confirms points to numerous tensions in the enactment of school leadership due mostly to reduced government spending on schooling/education and competition within and between schools, which by necessity, and arguably by policy, fosters and promotes entrepreneurial leadership in schools.

6.1. Reduced Government Spending on Schooling/Education

Increasingly, schools are being organised along business lines with strict performance targets and exacting accountability requirements. No matter in which part of the world a school is located, these changes and demands are catching fast. Events in the national contextual environment of a school are demanding school leaders develop and demonstrate "business thinking" or to apply a "corporate mindset" to their management and leadership of schools.

"Budgets are being cut and we have to provide a service that continues to improve standards. Recent government policies . . . mean that schools are having to operate within largely unknown contexts . . . This requires school leaders to operate in new ways . . . " (England, 1F).

"[A] school must be innovative, resourceful, creative, adventurous, business-like and willing to take risks as it attempt to address the challenges that emerge daily. When the leader incorporates these elements into the school's operation it gradually establishes an enterprising and entrepreneurial culture" (Montserrat, 1M).

Although reduced funding on schooling/ education is becoming more common in developed countries, this is part of the daily reality among school leaders in developing countries, where cuts to school funding places schools are at an increasing risk of being unable to fulfil their obligations to students, and where being involved in fundraising activities is second nature to school leaders.

"The enterprising or entrepreneurial leader will devise ways to ensure that projects can be financed supplementally as public funds are limited to certain projects and all aspects of school life must be fostered/catered to" (Jamaica, 4F).

"School leaders have to be entrepreneurial and enterprising because the Ministry of Education does not provide enough funds to sustain the school" (Jamaica, 6F).

"School achievements and improvement depends on how well leadership is able to implement and execute fundraising activities" (Jamaica, 9F).

There was agreement among school leaders that they have to raise funds to make up any shortfall in government allocation to schools. Although some school leaders in developed countries saw this as a novelty, for those in developing countries this was part and parcel of the norm. Despite country location, school size, school type, etc., events in the global and national environments appear to unify school leaders in a common narrative about the (necessary) role and (normative) status of entrepreneurialism in school leadership

“Schools need to find resources to subsidize annual budget. I don’t think this should be the school’s responsibility to finance its activities, and we currently fund several . . . ” (Antigua, 1F).

Although school leaders were clear about the national and/or contextual factors in relation to why they had to engage in fundraising or marketing activities, they also regarded their involvement in fundraising activities as a distraction from their core function of managing instructional leadership. This apparent paradox highlights major tensions and continuing shifts the recalibration of school leadership, globally, towards (national) economic transformation and away from social transformation.

“Having enough funds to meet the needs of the school and even go beyond is always a bonus. However, most schools in my area of work are provided with funds to meet the basic needs. In my opinion, a school principal should not need to be an accountant or money manager. Being the accountant and entrepreneur takes away from time/energy that is required in school to support staff and students” (Canada, 1F).

Evidence from this research provides that school leaders in developed and developing countries are involved in multiple fundraising activities. Furthermore, those in Brazil, Cyprus, Jamaica, Mozambique and South Africa appear more reliant on returns from fundraising activities to fund aspects of schooling. These findings extend findings from earlier research, in Cyprus by [11], which found, school leaders were engaged in multiple fundraising activities due to necessity and not because they wanted to. The results also highlights that reduced funding to schools, associated with conditions in the global and national economic environments, is demanding that school leaders develop and demonstrate entrepreneurial skills and behaviours.

6.2. Marketing Schools

The marketing or promotion of schools goes hand in hand with entrepreneurial leadership in education and reduced funding to schools. School leaders realised they were in a fight for their survival and that of their school, where the tools were not physical but borne from political sophistication.

“School Leaders should aim to position their schools to be self-reliant as far as possible in these austere times. Marketing has now become the business of the school and leaders should be open to new business ideas to promote their school” (Jamaica, 3F).

“We are very much involved in promoting what we do and making sure our “brand” is seen and marketed” (Anguilla, 2F)

“As an entrepreneurial and enterprising principal, I execute these skills in order to make my school marketable and viable” (Jamaica, 2F)

These observations are consistent with the [17] project, which provides that entrepreneurial leadership means utilising appropriate and effective techniques to interact with the community, including students, prospective students, parents, businesses, other stakeholders. From the interview data, it is clear that the use of marketing terms and the application of marketing principles forms part of a developing “business” lexicon used by school leaders. Marketing strategies are deployed routinely, and school leaders share of they use teachers’ qualifications and experience, a school’s safety record, a school’s physical environment and appearance, location, participation in community events, pastoral record and examination results in marketing endeavours. That school leaders appear steeped in the marketing and “business thinking” highlights an apparent tension that school leaders are “caught in a game” which was leading to “the cultural re-engineering of school leadership . . . ” [38] (p. 47) and that “Schools are more like businesses and their leaders are more like business leaders—for better or worse” [9] (p. 149).

Teachers were encouraged and supported to working in partnership with teachers from other schools, in particular “feeder” schools; student ‘ambassadors’ were also appointed and tasked with

generating goodwill from the public, especially business interests towards their school. At the same time, school leaders became immersed in engaging social media and in producing convincing narratives and documentation to “sell” their brand. It was noted by [14], that schools were using well-established marketing strategies to (re)produce themselves in ‘glossy’ imagery. The range of strategies used by school leaders in this study to interact with different community interests in attempting to boost recruitment and secure sustainability for their schools, are broadly consistent with strategies identified earlier by [10,12,14].

“When I became part of a team/school that has poor support and negative feedback in the community, I decided to “sell” all the positive aspects regarding the students and believed that the rest would eventually follow. It began with social media and the community started to state they never knew all this good came out of the school. The positive aspects did not begin when I walked through the gates. It began before, but no one previously “sold” it. No one placed a price tag on the school’s work or on the students’ crafts . . . ” (St Maarten, 1F).

From the evidence, school leaders in smaller countries, especially those located in the Caribbean (e.g., Guyana, Anguilla, Antigua and Montserrat), were most likely to be engaged in direct marketing of schools/ activities. Always this was sometimes to showcase to the community what was happening at school, it was also about ensuring the community’s continued support through goodwill gestures. Although acknowledging the spin off benefits that can accrue to schools as a result of having to market schools, [13] also noted that investing in the marketing or selling of a school is part and parcel of the of the current educational landscape—a view sustained by findings from this research.

6.3. School Leadership as Entrepreneurialism

Whereas events in the global and national policy contexts are producing clear impacts on the practice of school leadership, school leaders identify and locate these events as parts of a much wider set of socio-cultural circumstances which are influencing the ways in which they conceptualise and practice leadership.

“I have certainly embarked on projects I didn’t think at the start I would be able to achieve, and I have, at times, acted on instinct, very much flying by the seat of my pants! I suspect this aspect of school leadership will grow . . . but I wonder if sometimes it will take Headteachers away from their central role of ensuring children’s learning is supported as well as it can be” (England, 10F).

That the very conceptualisation and practice school leadership is being redefined (primarily) by factors and events in a school’s external environment, and not (within) its internal environment is as problematic as it is paradoxical. From the research evidence, national governments have been unable to fund education/schooling in their entirety, which has led to different approaches to addressing this issue in different countries. For example, in Turkey and Pakistan, finding creative ways to meet budgetary shortfall is part and parcel of everyday school leadership. In England, Canada and the United States, school leaders are having to make behavioural and cultural shifts in the ways they enact leadership in order to develop and demonstrate entrepreneurial school leadership. In Israel and Cyprus, securing resources from community and business interests is not uncommon, although this is becoming much more firmly embedded in the everyday practice of school leaders. Despite differences in starting points, the end result is the same—national education systems in which the dominant and most visible approach to school leadership is fast becoming entrepreneurial school leadership—for better or for worse.

“ . . . school leadership is entrepreneurial, but this area of leadership should not become a substitute to compensate for reduced central funding. Some aspect of current educational policy in England may be breeding an unhealthy set of . . . entrepreneurial leaders” (England, 9F).

“School leadership in the current political landscape has great scope for being . . . entrepreneurial . . . The government has insisted on trying to improve the system by giving headteachers greater ‘freedoms’ . . . However, these freedoms have also been abused by some leaders and care should be taken when exercising ‘freedoms’; as without moral purpose, an enterprising headteacher quickly becomes a self-centred empire builder—taking advantage of the system in personal self-interest and not in the best interest of the learners” (England, 3M).

All school leaders in this study were involved in varying degrees of entrepreneurial school leadership. School leaders in England saw the increased focus on entrepreneurial activities as a major distraction from instructional leadership, and a potential threat to the propriety of some school leaders. This tension was exacerbated by the fact many did not want to be involved in fundraising and marketing activities whereas others accepted they had to do it, although they admitted not having the appropriate skills in this area of leadership practice. This was particularly the case among female school leaders. Although these findings confirm mirror earlier research from [9] who reported that school leaders in developed countries were less likely to be engaged in entrepreneurial activities in favour of procedural compliance, inclusiveness, managing competing political demands, upholding professional norms and stewardship of public resources, a significant difference however between [9] and the findings reported in this study is that, whereas, previously, school leaders in developed countries could prefer not to engage in entrepreneurial activities, current economic and policy conditions demand they must, and not doing so or doing so improperly could signal their demise and that of their schools.

Although all school leaders understood the thrust towards entrepreneurial school leadership, they were motivated by different factors, primarily national economic conditions, and by their natural inclination. As noted above, school leaders in England expressed some concern that their current educational policy and economic context could challenge the propriety of some school leaders. Although other school leaders in the study may have also had this concern, it was not mentioned by any other group. Nevertheless, the potential for misdeeds to occur as a result of a school leader’s engagement in entrepreneurial leadership, primarily fundraising efforts, is problematic, whether this is based on inexperience or deceit or some other grey area. This contradiction is appropriately surfaced by [9] (p. 150) who notes, “Entrepreneurial individuals seek out entrepreneurial settings, and the growth of those settings attracts entrepreneurs. Each feeds the others” and by [39] (p. 4) who cautions that, due to the market orientation in education, “most distinctions between the roles of public school, private school, and proprietary school leaders will disappear.” The potential for the blurring of the lines is confirmed by a number of school leaders in this study who acknowledged their lack of skill in the area of entrepreneurial school leadership.

7. Making Sense of It All: Culture or Context?

There is a fine balance between culture and context. Whereas national context influences school or organisational practices and culture, national culture exists independently of context, although, paradoxically, the national context itself feeds the national culture. This interlocking between culture and context makes it somewhat difficult, if not superficial to untangle which aspects of leadership practices are influenced by either or both. School leaders across the globe are increasingly required, to acquire and demonstrate entrepreneurial leadership, although the degree to which this is related to culture or context is debatable. In a context of economic challenges, school leaders have no choice but to use their position to leverage resources to secure the best possible school experience and outcomes for students. Similarly, in cultures where education is highly valued, school leaders constantly press for improvements in teaching, learning and leadership in order to secure the best outcomes possible for students. This is not to say that countries facing economic challenges cannot and do not value education. Indeed, there is evidence countries in both the developed and developing world place equal emphasis on education and what it can achieve for the individual and the state [33] (p. 3). However, despite the intended outcomes being rather similar, their starting points may be different.

The overriding drive and intent behind the entrepreneurial activities of school leaders is their desire to provide students with a qualitatively different learning experience and to keep their schools open for the foreseeable future. National economic and national policy conditions however were found to be distracting them from their main task of “leading learning”, and national economic conditions also presented a risk of creating a (new) breed of leaders and a (new) brand of leadership where the lines between leadership of learning and school fundraising and marketing are becoming increasingly blurred. These risks and tensions are applicable to school leaders globally, regardless of the country in which they live and work and/or the size or type of school they are in charge of. This is consistent with current thinking that entrepreneurial leadership is likely to become much more firmly embedded in their daily work of school leaders, prompting [3] (pp. 115–116) to suggest “This is a two-edge sword, where one could assume a school leader is in charge; except, in reality, s/he is caught in a vicious cycle of long term thinking but short term acting due to, mostly, financial constraints”, and [40] to suggest “Business entrepreneurialism” appear set to be much more firmly into the everyday practice of school leadership. These are contextual issues.

Female school leaders did not especially like to engage in fundraising activities, and were more inclined towards marketing activities preferring instead to work with teachers and parents to showcase their schools. Male school leaders preferred fundraising activities, in particular those that presented opportunities for increasing their or their school’s network and for direct engagement with prospective donors or benefactors. These patterns of behaviours are consistent with findings from [28] that national culture influences leadership behaviour, where both females and males were drawn to certain roles and exhibited certain tendencies. This was found to be the case among school leaders located in all sixteen countries in this study, confirming [29] socio-cultural view, whilst also underlining important gendered differences in the approach to school leadership [24].

School leaders are operating in different contexts and cultures, some in high achieving results oriented cultures and others in improvement contexts. In either case, school leaders are not in charge of the rules of their performance or their performance goals. According to [29], in aggression cultures, achievement is stressed, competition, selling one’s self and being assertive are valued, whereas in consideration cultures, collaborative relationships are emphasised. The findings from this study presents an apparent paradox to this notion. That is, whereas female school leaders in general showed greater inclination towards “selling” their schools, school leaders in developing countries engaged in more direct and aggressive fundraising activities, although school leaders in developed countries followed closely behind. These findings simultaneously confirm and reject [29] view of how national culture influences leadership behaviour in terms of aggression/ consideration, since by necessity, all school leaders, including those from developed countries who would not usually engage in entrepreneurial school leadership [9], are now having to exercise some form of “aggression” in the form of marketing and/or direct fundraising. This finding is therefore both related to culture and context. On the one hand, aggressively engaging in fundraising activities is inherently embedded in the everyday practice of school leaders in developing countries due mainly to deep-seated long and standing economic conditions—and without supplemental income from fundraising their schools would not be able to survive. On the other hand, in developed countries, school leaders are having to engage in entrepreneurial activities as a response to market and other forces within their national educational environments.

The findings of this study is also completely opposite to [29] characterisation of proactive and fatalistic societies. That is, whereas [29] assert that in proactive societies people tend to believe they have some control over situations, are more tolerant of different opinions and are not threatened by unpredictability, this study found that school leaders in all sixteen countries felt significantly threatened by events in national educational policy environments, as a result, they were feeling sidelined and less in control. This is a crucial point. As earlier mentioned, although national culture exists independently of context, national context also feeds national culture. Thus, feelings of loss of control or threatened, experienced by school leaders, was believed to be much more widespread within national

societies—and across different industries—resulting in the emergence of a (new) national culture of fear and unease directly associated with events in national economic and policy environments.

School leadership is not an end in its own right, but a means to an end. Consequently, to ignore school leadership the potential benefits of developing and demonstrating entrepreneurial skills and behaviours is as problematic as indeed to focus solely on its potential pitfalls. However, as noted by [9] (pp. 156–157), “While it may sound desirable, even fashionable, for education leaders to be ‘entrepreneurial’, it is more likely the case that entrepreneurial leadership in education has value only to the degree that the education sector of society provides conditions where entrepreneurial behaviour can flourish.” The accounts and examples provided by school leaders in sixteen countries shows that, instead of conditions provided by national governments, national economic conditions is at the heart and the root of their immersion in entrepreneurial school leadership—for better or worse.

8. Conclusions

Factors and events in a school’s external environment are transforming the ways school leaders enact leadership within their schools. National economic and policy conditions are having significant impacts on the ability of school leaders to deliver a qualitatively different learning experience to students, and these conditions are also simultaneously reshaping and redefining their approach to leadership. As noted by [7] (p. 9),

“Much less is being spent on education in real terms by many governments, when more is being demanded; fewer teachers are being employed at a time when some systems are experiencing growth in pupil numbers and class sizes; and education institutions are struggling to respond in a timely manner to changes in their environment brought about by the impact of information and communications technology. That said, educational leadership in these unpredictable and swiftly changing times requires an approach that is neither top-down nor bottom-up, but that is encompassing, synergistic, innovative, and practical.”

The evidence from this study shows that, to stand a chance of leading their schools to success, school leaders need to approach leadership in this way, acquiring and demonstrating entrepreneurial skills and behaviours through team working, environmental awareness, responsiveness to market forces; opportunity spotting, risk-taking, innovation, shrewdness, expediency, pragmatism and “business thinking”. Although entrepreneurial leadership can benefit schools, if not carefully managed, entrepreneurial leadership can also result in a loss of focus on teaching and learning, and can also lead to (accusations of) impropriety. School leadership requires accountability, but entrepreneurial leadership also requires trust, checks and balances and support in order for it to be beneficial to an entire school community. In all sixteen countries, developed and developing countries, Muslim countries, Christian countries, Jewish countries and secular countries, school leaders were in sync in their understanding and exposition that entrepreneurial leadership is an important aspect of school leadership which can only be more firmly embedded into their everyday practice—the result of changing cultural values and contextual realities.

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