



Research Associate Full Report

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Resource

Congruence or Conflict

Using the Every Child Matters agenda to support
leadership succession planning

Spring 2010

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Abstract

This study investigates the extent to which primary school headteachers are able to utilise mechanisms such as the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda in order to further the cause of leadership succession planning.

Headteachers of five primary schools deemed strong in leadership succession planning, from four local authorities, were interviewed and their views triangulated with members of staff, past or present, who had engaged with leadership succession issues and where possible had also had responsibility for delivery of an aspect of ECM. Wider local authority representative views were also sought.

Although small, the cross-sectional nature of the sample nevertheless allows generalised conclusions to be drawn. Findings show that approaches to succession planning vary along a continuum, with school interests at one end and systemic needs at the other. Schools that are most effective are able to maintain a balance between the two. Effective schools make wide use of initiatives such as ECM as a mechanism for leadership development for identified potential leaders, irrespective of their present formal leadership role.

Introduction

Leadership succession planning is a particularly pertinent issue for both schools and their stakeholders, yet its prevalence is variable. At a time of financially straitened circumstances, it could be argued that for individual schools to be directing scarce resources towards the development of the next generation of leaders is a mistake, and anecdotal evidence gathered from informal discussions with senior leaders in various schools and authorities suggests some support for this view. Some headteachers saw the pressure of new initiatives as a key factor in militating against leadership succession activities. Others cited the conflict with the need to retain good staff:

“What’s the point of training them up for leadership quicker than you have to? All it means is that you lose a good member of staff.”

Indeed the headteacher of one school stated that she was aware that some headteachers did not see leadership succession as “... their responsibility” at all. Their stated view was that if a member of staff was good enough, then s/he would get there under their own steam. This is very much part of the traditional pattern of promotion, through the ‘moving up the bus’ pattern. However, several headteachers also saw their role as one of “protecting staff from overload by shielding them from the additional burden of new initiatives imposed from above”. These varying views seem to point towards a potential inequality of provision within the whole leadership succession agenda.

This therefore poses two key research questions:

- How do leaders decide on the allocation of scarce resources in order to fulfil the twin agendas of additional initiatives and leadership succession planning?
- Are these agendas inevitably in conflict or can they be brought into congruence?

In order to investigate what is admittedly a very broad area, it was necessary to narrow the field as much as possible. Therefore, within this research study, it was decided that, as one of the key initiatives to have emerged over the last few years has been the ECM agenda, the focus should be an investigation into the extent to which schools which are strong in leadership succession planning are willing or able to utilise ECM as a mechanism for promoting leadership development.

Within this broad area of investigation there were a number of subsidiary questions. These concerned the actions taken at school, local authority and national level to promote leadership succession and the factors that at each of those levels were seen to hinder or promote the leadership succession agenda. An additional question, which was born from the need to address the issue of a school training up good staff only to hasten the day they left and worked elsewhere, was to look at the issue of the effect of leadership succession activities on the individual and the school which was sponsoring that candidate’s leadership development.

This research focused on the mechanisms for the development of future leaders, as a key element in building the sustainability of change within and across schools. Within this area, the research considered the extent to which the change initiative itself, in this case ECM, could be a vehicle for the development of future leaders. The potential for a symbiotic relationship between the two development agendas could be immense.

Literature review

Every Child Matters (ECM) is a far-reaching and ambitious national programme designed to support the principles of personalised learning and the raising of educational standards through the promotion of a wide range of extended services. These services are centred on schools and are designed to encourage pupils to engage with their own learning, thus achieving higher standards. In addition, they emphasise the importance of building stronger relationships with parents and the wider community.

The ECM agenda is also supported through close working between schools and specialist services, to facilitate the early identification and effective support of additional needs. This encompasses the work that many schools have been doing for some time, through personal social health and citizenship education (PSHCE), anti-bullying policies, the drive for higher standards, rapid response to attendance issues, healthy schools status and the engagement with and support of parents in actively supporting their children's learning and development.

In addition, there is an increased expectation of working together with services for child protection, through information sharing and the Common Assessment framework. The publication *Every Child Matters: Change for children in schools* (DfES 2004) also outlined an expectation of extended services built in and around schools, offering wrap-around care, through the provision of breakfast and after-school clubs, which have been 'shown to improve children's motivation and engagement' (DfES 2004: 3). This outlined additional provision such as study support, family learning, parental support opportunities and excellent referral systems to multi-agency support. The expectation is that by 2010 all parents will have access to childcare at or near their primary school from at least 8am to 6pm and with supervised transfer arrangements.

However, as the publication *Every Child Matters: How school leaders in extended schools respond to local needs* (NCSL 2007b) makes clear, successful schools have been able to contextualise the provision to best suit the needs of their school. This is important for the long-term sustainability of the initiatives. Fink and Hargreaves (2006: 159) recognised this aspect, asserting that: 'Sustainable leadership promotes cohesive diversity and avoids aligned standardization...'. However, an additional benefit of the ability to contextualise provision is the opportunities it potentially provides for leadership succession opportunities. This will be discussed at more length later within the findings of this report.

However, the impact of sustaining the ECM initiative also affects the leadership succession agenda. Davies (2007: 1) highlights this well, when he poses the question 'How do we sustain leaders and their schools to achieve ... longer-term educational success without exhausting themselves and their organisations?'. Putting this into the context of the issues raised in *Leadership Succession: An overview: Securing the next generation of school leaders* (NCSL 2008a), there is potentially a real problem with securing the longer-term viability of the ECM agenda. This is because there is a retirement boom among headteachers, due to peak in 2009 but continuing at high levels through until 2016. Davies (2007: 49) reports that the 'number of advertisements for headteachers was above the average for the past 10 years and the highest recorded for four years', and, as Fink and Hargreaves (2006: 1) trenchantly point out: 'Sustainable improvement depends on successful leadership'.

There are two aspects to securing the sustainability of that successful leadership: the first is the retention of existing headteachers; the second is the recruitment and development of sufficient new leaders to take the place of those who are due to retire within the next few years. And throughout all of these recruitment and retention difficulties, the ECM agenda must be pushed forward and provision sustained and even improved on year on year. On the face of it, the odds do not look good, for as Fink and Hargreaves (2006: 252) state, 'The vast majority of reform efforts and change initiatives ... are unsustainable'.

It is important to understand, however, the full implications of that sustainability. According to Fink and Hargreaves (in Davies 2007: 51), it '... means much more than maintainability ... or affordability ... [it means] ... to meet the needs of the present without compromising ... future generations', and one of the key characteristics of sustainability is 'length of impact ... beyond individual leaders, through effectively managed succession'.

Effectively managing that succession through the recruitment of new headteachers is presently problematic for several reasons. First there is the issue of perception of the role. Leithwood et al (2007: 97) state that many principals report feeling worn out, isolated and under stress and this can influence middle or emergent leaders' perceptions of the headship role in a negative way.

NCSL (now called the National College for Schools and Children's Services) (2008a) report that the traditionally long apprenticeship is also a detracting factor. To obviate this, the National College, among others, offers training at many levels to build capacity within middle and emergent leadership. Moreover, there are many local authorities working with the National College to deliver programmes designed to encourage the growth of leadership at all levels. Additionally at least two of the authorities worked with in this research study are proactively developing their own leadership development programmes. Many staff are already offered structured opportunities within such authorities for secondments and work shadowing as a way of developing leadership capacity. If a mechanism can be found to build on such development of tomorrow's leaders while carrying out the essential work of the school and sustaining initiatives such as the ECM agenda in congruence and not in conflict, then surely that must be both productive and cost-effective.

Methodology

Given the small-scale nature of this study, it was decided to limit the scope of the research to primary schools, across four North of England authorities. Five schools were selected to form a cross-sectional sample varying in terms of intake, context and size. The sample included faith schools, secular, urban and rural contexts and contained significant variations in size, not only of school but also of local authority, to maximise the potential validity of the study. Full details of the sample schools are to be found in the Appendix at the end of this report.

Within each of these schools, an interview was conducted with the headteacher concerning the importance given to leadership succession within the school and the role of the ECM agenda in fulfilling leadership development. These interviews were triangulated by interviews conducted with staff, either past or present, who had themselves benefited from some aspect of leadership development within the school, ideally linked to the ECM agenda. Additionally, two school improvement officers with an involvement in succession planning were interviewed in order to gain a local authority perspective. In all 12 interviews were conducted between the beginning of April and the end of July 2009. All participants in the study have preferred to remain anonymous, as did all the schools and authorities involved.

Since the central question investigated in this study is concerned with schools that were strong in leadership succession, it was necessary to find a way of identifying such schools. This was done by contacting leadership succession consultants/school improvement officers in the various local authorities, by asking for referrals from school improvement partners or by contacting schools through an employee's involvement (past or current) with one of the recognised leadership succession programmes currently available in these authorities.

While there is a need to approach the findings of this study with caution as they draw from only a small sample, it is nevertheless felt that the cross-section of contexts is sufficiently broad enough to provide some generalised conclusions concerning trends, patterns and behaviours. These emerge from the interview outcomes that were transcribed and colour-coded to produce the findings detailed below.

Findings

Analysis of findings

Following the transcription of interviews, it was possible to colour-code the responses in relation to the quantity and quality of the factors identified by the individual leaders of the five schools in terms of the balance between perceived school and systemic needs. Hence, if the school prioritised their own needs over those of the system, then they were coded red, since this is less supportive of systemic leadership. If the systemic needs were prioritised over the school, they were coded amber, as this reflects recognition of the systemic needs but displays a reluctance to develop it internally. The responses that were coded green were those that recognised the need both for school-wide and systemic response. These schools clearly recognised the need for leaders in the present to accept responsibility for developing the leaders of the future. This approach allowed the responses to be encoded for analysis and to then be used as a way of identifying trends within the interviews. Those trends will be examined in some detail later in this report. Table 1 shows the results of the encoding process.

Table 1: Results of the encoding process

	Identification of importance of succession planning	Methods used to develop potential leaders	Methods used to identify potential leaders of the future	Areas of congruence between ECM and succession planning agendas	Role of local authority	Identification of benefits of using ECM to support succession planning
	Green: internal and external Amber: external Red: internal	Green: internal and external Amber: external Red: internal	Green: equitable, transparent system Amber: list of qualities for use by headteacher Red: no system in place	Green: recognised and used multiple aspects Amber: recognised and used some aspects Red: none used	Green: organised, co-operative with headteachers Amber: some involvement Red: no involvement with the school	Green: cited many benefits Amber: could identify some benefits Red: could not see how they could work together
School A	School System	PHT: external ECM: internal	Headteacher identifies from own list of qualities: good with people; good teacher; good communicator; team player; willing to push self; encourages others	Healthy schools Community links Curriculum development Extended schools Development of skills base	Finance holder Facilitator Administration	Self-contained project with discernable end product
Candidate A	School System	PHT: external ECM: internal	Identified by headteacher	Healthy schools Development of experiential learning opportunities	Organisation	Fills in the gaps in leadership knowledge

Local authority A	School System	PHT: external TSLs: external	Identified by headteacher	Leadership skills Team work Inter-personal skills Knowledge for leadership	Finance holder Facilitator Administration	Learn from people really doing the job NCSL always select top practitioners but it is good for candidates to realise that there are many ways of doing the job
School B	School System	PHT: external TSLs: external ECM: internal	Identified by headteacher: reports from senior leadership team/PM etc	Healthy schools Community links Curriculum development Development of skills base – leadership qualities/skills	Finance holder Facilitator Administration	Useful product for school ECM has to be done anyway Headteacher can delegate and develop others Extend headteacher influence through school
Candidate B	School System	TSLs: external ECM: internal	Identified by headteacher	Community cohesion enjoy and achieve Creative curriculum Healthy schools Developing skills and knowledge	Facilitator	Action plan Team work Evaluation Take skills to next level Identifiable end product
School C	School System, but only if staff member requests it	PHT: external	After gaining experience, move to next level of leadership No one fast-tracked	Leadership skills	Facilitator	None identified
Candidate C	School System, but only if staff member requests it	PHT: external	'Move up the bus' system		Organised	None identified
School D	Headteacher/ governing body prefer teachers to remain 'in front of their class'	PHT: external NPOH: external	Move elsewhere for promotion	Small schools allow staff the opportunity to see the day-to-day work of a headteacher – they have a better understanding of the role No areas of congruence seen	Involved through NCSL and network – not really involving local authority	None identified
Candidate D	No candidate	No candidate	No candidate	No candidate	No candidate	None identified

Local authority D	School System	PHT Multi-disciplinary steering group	Generic qualities – headteachers identify at networks			Development of leadership qualities
School E	Governing body and headteacher strongly involved in succession planning, school and system	PHT TSLS NPQH ECM Structured and transparent process of selection	Professional development ladder in use with performance management – transparent, fair	Healthy schools Development of project – action plan, to evaluation and end product Better development of whole schools thinking	Authority took a training approach – left it to the schools to decide which projects to use Facilitated steering group – organisation etc	Extends headteacher influence across school Embeds desired practise Empowers staff Motivational Transparency End product
Candidate E	Governing body and headteacher strongly involved in succession planning – school and system	ECM Structured and transparent process of selection	Professional development ladder in use with performance management – transparent, fair	Fair to everyone Different projects led by anyone interested – can tell line manager at performance management review	Authority took a training approach – left it to the schools to decide which projects to use Facilitated steering group – organisation etc	Extends headteacher influence across school Embeds desired practise Empowers staff Motivational Transparency End product
Local authority E	School System	TSLS Own leadership college – virtual Multi-disciplinary steering group	Multi-disciplinary steering group – 50% headteachers Headteacher referral Self-nomination by email response	Professional development ladder adopted across the authority – headteachers less proactive not actively encouraged to participate	Authority took a training approach – left it to the schools to decide which projects to use Facilitated steering group – organisation etc	Extends headteacher influence across school Embeds desired practise Empowers staff Motivational Transparency End product

Key

PHT: Putting Heads Together (local authority programme)

TSLS: Targeted Support for Leadership Succession (local authority programme)

NPQH: National Professional Qualification for Headship

ECM: *Every Child Matters*, developing leadership qualities through leading in school on an aspect of this agenda

PM: performance management

MFL Modern Foreign Languages

Analysis

Applying the colour-coding analysis shown at the head of Table 1, it can be seen that, of the five schools, School E was the most effective in balancing the needs of the individual establishment against systemic needs. The breadth and flexibility of the approach taken by School E was effective in embedding change, extending the influence of the leadership group and ensuring that the change agenda, in this case ECM, was carried forward in a sustainable way. From the point of view of the candidate, the approach taken was highly motivational.

Towards a systemic model of effective leadership development practice

It is immediately evident, from the analysis of the data in Table 1, that School E was the most effective in using the ECM agenda to support leadership development. It is necessary, however, to examine what generic lessons may be learned from this analysis. Overall the findings are supportive of the need for a systemic response to the issue of succession planning. Almost all the schools contacted had, at some point, used aspects of ECM as a vehicle for developing leadership capabilities in their staff.

Contrary to the negative responses from some headteachers detailed at the start of this report, there was an overwhelming response in favour of the massive benefits to the business of the school – educating children – that stemmed from leadership development activities. The headteachers of Schools A, B and E felt that recognising and answering the aspirational needs of teachers would ensure that they stayed within the system, even when they moved on into a leadership post elsewhere. In the meantime, the children of that school would benefit from a first-class teacher. It was overwhelmingly recognised that modern schools needed leaders who could adapt quickly to changes in the context or political environment within which schools had to operate and that ECM was one initiative which allowed staff to learn and display that adaptability.

All schools reported the importance of headteachers knowing their staff and recognising their potential. This backs up the findings from *Identify and Grow Your Own Leaders* (NCSL 2009), in which headteachers reported that 'discussing the leadership potential of staff with each other was helpful as it enabled them to draw on a wide range of observations and experience'. While this is certainly important, there is a distinct possibility of overlooking potential, since the system relies on human judgement, which is a subjective skill and one which can be influenced by personal preferences, as well as individual values, beliefs and experiences. One of the local authorities considered in this study backed up the headteachers' assessments with opportunities for self-nomination in response to emails. This echoes the tri-level targets cited in the 2009 study mentioned above – that of the individual, the school and the system. The headteachers from Schools A, B and E all regarded the succession planning agenda as systemic in nature. As such it transcended individual schools. This was backed up by the interview with the succession planning adviser from Authority A, who stated:

"A systemic problem requires a systemic response. This is not about individual organisations. There is a need to recognise and promote leadership potential ... for the future."

Only one of the schools or authorities interviewed as part of this project used an approach which employed a specific set of formal criteria such as those cited in *Identify and Grow Your Own Leaders* (NCSL 2009) to identify leadership potential. Individually and informally, however, they all cited criteria by which they judged potential. For example, the headteacher of School A stated the importance of someone being good with people, and being able to make connections at every level within the school. The importance of being a good communicator and being willing to work for the best interests of other people within the organisation was also valued. The headteacher of School B stated the importance of receiving feedback from staff about potential candidates and the importance of being a good listener. However, the expectation this puts on staff was never made explicit. Both saw good communication as key. While it is not within the brief of this study to make

judgements about this, nonetheless, it is fairly obvious that any disparity could potentially lead to an inequality of provision in this area. This means that this model of succession planning is destined to be patchy.

Conversely, the headteacher of School E worked to a rigorous professional development ladder through the performance management system. Through discussions with every individual member of staff she was able to identify projects from school priorities such as ECM that would allow the member of staff to develop leadership skills and knowledge, in line with the ECM leadership toolkit (NCSL 2007a). The professional development ladder had been worked on in the headteacher network meetings and had been adopted across the authority. This approach enabled all staff to understand the expectations of their current role, the demands of further development as well as providing a set of criteria by which they were able to judge their own performance. The headteacher and the succession planning consultant from this authority both commented on how much this improved the self-reflectiveness of staff. The transparency of the process improved staff morale since everyone felt they had an equal opportunity to develop along their chosen career path.

The headteachers, without exception, saw the role of the local authority as a supportive one. The local authority facilitated the administration, handled the budget and supported the headteachers in administering the succession planning activities. The succession planning consultant from Authority E went further. He stated the importance of the steering groups, which had brought together various departments – recruitment and retention; headteachers; human resources; governors' services; continuing professional development (CPD) providers. The headteachers comprised 50% of the group, which gave value to their input, as the people at the point of delivery. However, the involvement of the other departments ensured that the voice of every interested party was heard. It also meant that training could be organised for governing bodies, who were commonly cited in interview as showing a tendency to think of leadership succession in terms of 'our school' instead of across the system. They were able to work very closely with primary, faith-based and small schools, as well as the diocese.

One of the authorities was very proactive in planning and organisation; another relied on the headteacher networks to form the initial statement of interest and apply for funding, only then stepping in to support. Within the one authority that was more proactive, the succession planning went even further, extending into other directorates within the authority, to ensure sufficient leadership development for the future of all departments within the authority.

Working collectively with identified potential leaders then becomes the crucial next step in effective leadership development practice. In Authority A, the headteachers put in a proposal for funding to begin a Putting Heads Together (PHT) programme. This was directed at personnel without the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), who had been identified by their headteachers as possessing leadership potential. This ran alongside the Targeted Support for Leadership Succession (TSLs), aimed at personnel who had gained the NPQH but who had not yet succeeded to headship. This authority is a small unitary one where all the headteachers know each other and are known by the school improvement partners. The interviewee who underwent the PHT programme stated that the nomination by the headteacher was an important factor because it was a 'statement of faith' for those who may feel they needed it.

In terms of the TSLS, there is no information available to inform the authority about likely candidates. The programme is entirely dependent on headteachers passing on the details and on candidates self-nominating. If the headteacher happens to be opposed to or neutral about leadership succession, then people can be passed over. The TSLS candidate from school B felt that the programme was highly effective; it was flexible, responsive and highly appropriate. The coaching element, an effective way of developing confidence and self-belief, was an element of both programmes.

In Authority E, the TSLS programme was planned with the first group of candidates so that it was tailored precisely to their needs. The learning from this cohort fed directly into the provision for the second cohort. However, the overall approach to leadership succession was wider. It started with the newly qualified teacher (NQT) support programme and segued into programmes such as Moving into Management. At every level it focused on exciting people about the possibilities so that they would put out that little bit of extra effort, thus helping to develop a culture where potential was recognised and rewarded. The old 'moving up the bus' system of promotion did not help to develop those aspects of character required in leadership. By enabling and empowering people throughout the system, headteachers reported that they were able to extend their influence further throughout the organisation.

In both systems, the use of residentials was highly effective, taking candidates out of the school environment to allow thinking time and opportunities for discussion of aspects of leadership. Within the often-frenzied atmosphere of a school, such thinking time is a luxury. Another feature of both programmes was the opportunity to shadow an existing headteacher. The candidates felt that this was immensely valuable. It allowed access to the 'nitty-gritty' of the job, aspects that are often not obvious to anyone other than the headteacher within a school.

However, while both these programmes developed whole school perspectives within the candidates and provided opportunities for staff considering a move into leadership to ask probing questions of serving headteachers, what they did not do was provide the experiential opportunities such as developing a project, leading a team, identifying priorities and evaluating impact. This is where the ECM agenda was widely recognised as useful. It provided all these experiences within a small-scale, time-limited project with a discernable end product.

Factors which promote leadership succession planning

Across the board the factor that was most influential in promoting leadership succession activities was the enthusiasm of the headteachers. Without their belief in its value and their commitment to the future of educational leadership, these activities would have been much more difficult. The willingness of these headteachers to engage in the constant self-reflection demanded by their roles in these programmes has been exemplary. The availability of funding from the National College to support programmes like these meant that schools were not in a position of having to choose between competing priorities in the use of scarce resources. This poses the obvious question – what if that funding was not available? Would leadership succession suffer?

At an individual level, all the interviewees felt that their levels of confidence and self-belief increased because of the investment being made in their development. They experienced a raised awareness of the demands of the leadership role and the type of skills required to carry it out. Developing these skills made it easier to carry out their school-based roles, especially in respect of their leadership roles.

At whole school level, the increased effectiveness of the candidates was matched by a heightened level of commitment. School A has been able to internally promote some candidates from the early cohorts. School B has been able to obtain acting-up roles for some of its staff. The leadership training resulted in a wider focus on school improvement, which benefited the children directly. The headteachers of Schools A, B and E stated that the commitment to leadership development transmitted positive messages to other staff and raised expectations.

Another perceived benefit for a school is that it widens the leadership skill base across the school. Schools B and E encourage people to lead teams within the areas of the school development plan. This way, many people gain leadership experience and the knowledge and understanding of the team remains secure if a member of staff leaves. Both PHT and TSLS candidates reported the positive impact of being both recognised for their potential and recommended for leadership development. It had a positive effect on self-confidence and self-belief. Candidates confirmed the motivational strength of such recognition. In addition to the emotional aspects, there are more tangible gains. Candidates have reported improved leadership skills, with a greater degree of self-awareness and an improved ability to reflect and evaluate leadership styles and behaviours. These judgements are confirmed by their headteachers.

Factors which can militate against leadership succession planning

The headteachers interviewed in this study were frank in outlining what they saw as the issues which some colleagues felt could militate against effective succession planning, as well as in their own rebuttal of these.

Issue	Rebuttal
It's not my responsibility	This is a refusal to admit the systemic nature of the succession planning agenda
If they are good enough, they will get there on their own	We need them sooner than that
The age of some candidates can worry governors – 'S/he is just a kid. What can s/he know?'	This is an 'education' issue – governors need to be trained about the issues
The cost of release	This can be helped by applying for grants for recognised programmes
The behavioural cost to the school of frequently having supply cover in potentially difficult classes. It is disruptive for the class and the school	This can be minimised by a whole school commitment to the importance of the development of staff
Attitudes of other staff	This is an 'education' issue as well – they need to understand the issues involved and the need for potential to be recognised
If we develop them they will move on – they are good at their job	In the meantime, the school will have the benefit of higher motivation, better skills and enhanced leadership capabilities

Areas of congruence or conflict – ECM and leadership succession

Considering that all these schools were considered to be strong in succession planning, there were widely divergent differences in the degree given to prioritising either the school or the systemic need for leaders. Schools A, B and E all considered that the needs of the school and the system could be answered by using the ECM agenda to develop leaders in congruence with leadership succession planning. They used many aspects from the five ECM areas to develop leaders within the school, fast-tracking suitably talented or able people. They also used the ECM agenda to

identify potential leaders for leadership development programmes such as PHT and TSLS.

Schools C and D, while co-operating with the succession programmes available, did not use ECM to develop systemic leaders, seeing a potential conflict or dissonance between the agendas. They expressed strong concern about the costs of participation in the programmes and were focused on developing leadership within the school for the school. While the headteachers themselves were involved in the succession programmes, one in particular expressed a strong preference for keeping the teachers in front of their classes “where they belonged”. The leadership succession activities in this school focused strongly around non-teaching staff. This was a very different approach to most of the schools visited in the project.

The priority given to the systemic need for leaders was also reflected in the use of external versus internal development. Those headteachers who, for whatever reason, prioritised the needs of the school over the needs of the system, used exclusively external programmes for developing system leadership. They did not regard initiatives such as ECM as suitable tools for systemic leadership development. The ECM agenda was developed and run by headteachers themselves, with delegation of tasks within the agenda. Thus it was not utilised as a project through which members of staff could begin to develop the extensive leadership skills and knowledge as, for example, listed in the ECM leadership toolkit on the National College website.

All the schools were involved in networking to some degree, but some headteachers were able to take it further and thus made a significantly greater impact. For instance, the headteacher of School E participated in the steering group, which helped to define the authority’s approach to leadership succession planning. Her influence and enthusiasm was therefore greater and the importance given to developing staff within, for and beyond the individual school was also greater.

The findings also give strong indication of the style of headship employed within the school. Where the involvement and benefit was seen as significantly greater than the interests of just that one school, there seemed to be a greater degree of distributive leadership. There was a clear reluctance with Schools C and D to delegate responsibility for aspects of the ECM agenda. This is probably due, at least in part, to the size of the schools and the stated reluctance of the headteachers to overburden staff. However, it raises an important issue, which will be discussed in more depth later in this report – inequality of opportunity.

One important question considered was how much ability each headteacher had to recognise areas of congruence between the two agendas. Unsurprisingly perhaps, those schools which had a commitment to school-wide as well as systemic leadership development were able to recognise greater areas of commonality between the two. They cited the development of exactly the sort of leadership skills and knowledge outlined in the ECM leadership toolkit. They recognised the importance of the CPD opportunities offered by mechanisms such as ECM, as well as the important morale-lifting aspects of being identified as suitable for such development.

However, only one school was in an authority, which made an attempt to move beyond the recommendation of a line manager as a way of selecting candidates. The authority in question not only asked for referrals from line managers, but also asked for self-nomination from interested parties. The selection of candidates to develop initiatives within school, as well as the choice of which initiatives to use, was left to

the headteacher. However, members of staff were able to self-nominate for an external programme if suitably qualified. Only School E provided a way for members of staff to discuss career options in a structured and totally transparent and equitable way. This was achieved through the use of a professional development ladder, which was linked in with the performance management structure. Through this mechanism, members of staff were encouraged to self-nominate for developmental projects if they wished to do so.

All the schools in the study recognised a number of ways in which they could work together. All were involved in working together to deliver the PHT programme, funded by the National College and delivered by local headteachers with administrative support from the authority. Some of the headteachers were also involved at ground level in the planning of the programme.

One area where there was a wide degree of divergence was in the ways headteachers identified potential leaders. Those who were coded as having recognised the importance of succession planning at both school and systemic level were able to identify many more factors to help in the selection process. Schools A and B rated as similarly important the need to know the staff well – their capabilities, their family and the context within which they worked. They reported looking for people who were good with others, good at making connections at every level within the school, good teachers, communicators and team players. They looked for someone who was willing to work for the best of others and willing to push themselves and encourage and motivate people around them.

Both Schools C and D reported looking for candidates who had come up through the system. School E was noticeably different. The headteacher revealed how all staff worked to a professional development ladder in the performance management process. This ladder comprised areas of skills and knowledge, which strongly reflected those in the ECM toolkit. There was capacity for potentially able leaders to take on projects and try new initiatives as a way of self-development. This enabled them to move up the ladder of competencies much more quickly. One of the advantages of this system was its transparency. The inequity that characterised some of the leadership succession activities was greatly nullified because every member of staff could see what opportunities were available to them at any given point in their career development. This approach was reflected at authority level where steering groups comprised recruitment and retention representatives, as well as those from among school workforce advisers, headteachers, human resources, governors' services and CPD. They also acknowledged the need to take the prioritisation of succession planning across into other areas of the authority.

This cross-interest approach is the one that most closely links to the key qualities of potential leaders as outlined in the publication *What Are We Learning About ... Identifying Talent?* (NCSL 2008b). These are outlined as:

- The ability to think beyond boundaries
- Having curiosity and eagerness to learn
- Possessing social understanding and empathy
- Having emotional balance

The publication goes on to echo research by the Hay Group (quoted in NCSL 2003), which identifies other traits that could be pointers to early leadership potential:

- Has confidence and credibility

- Is able to see the big picture and to think of the whole school
- Is able to grasp basics quickly and look for more
- Gets involved
- Takes the initiative and is self-motivated
- Is intellectually curious
- Is resilient and empathetic

In terms of ways of using ECM to promote succession planning, Schools A, B and E were the most effective at recognising such factors. They all cited the importance of external funding, local authority support and the willingness of current headteachers to become involved in the process, facilitating opportunities such as work shadowing. School E went on to cite the authority's responsibility in working with more reluctant headteachers and encouraging them to be more effective and proactive in developing future leaders. The use of coaching to develop a candidate's inter- and intra-personal skills was also highly valued. However, all the external programmes were focused on raising the individual's awareness of the nitty-gritty of headship. They did not, in themselves, develop leaders. The headteacher of School D actually stated that in a small school, all the staff had a much greater awareness of the daily demands of headship and that this, in itself, was demotivating in terms of succession planning. However, no developmental steps were undertaken to counter this impression.

The most effective methods of leadership development occurred in schools where initiatives such as ECM were used as a mechanism for developing leadership skills and knowledge. It was this aspect, most successfully used in Schools A, B and E, that offered the greatest opportunities for leadership development. This view was reinforced through interviews with people who had undertaken just such development in Schools A, B and E. They had been promoted to leadership positions. They stated quite strongly that the skills, knowledge and understanding of leadership, which they developed as part of the ECM project work they did, were instrumental in gaining them their promotion to leadership positions. Such projects allowed a candidate to manage a team as part of a project. They allowed the development of networking skills, as well as offering opportunities to work with external agencies, such as community groups, Sure Start, nurseries, etc. The skills of developing an initiative, forming an action plan and evaluating a concrete result at the end provided candidates with the building blocks for headship in miniature. Taken alongside the external programmes, they were doubly effective and showed a considerable level of success in rates of succession to leadership positions.

A strong characteristic of these three schools was the way members of staff were excited about the possibilities available to them. The prevailing culture, especially in School E, was one where people were willing to take initiatives on and have a go, thereby developing the aspects of character required in leadership. This had a feedback aspect, in that it enabled and empowered people within the organisation, thus extending the headteacher's influence further throughout the organisation. This was identified as a very real benefit of using mechanisms such as ECM for leadership succession planning.

As stated earlier, the sustainability of such initiatives as ECM rests on the degree to which the practices and values become embedded within the school. This in turn is influenced by the degree to which leadership of the disparate areas is spread across the staff of the school. The motivational aspects were less clearly defined in Schools A and B. They were very strong for the candidates who were selected for leadership development programmes. However, the lack of transparency actively worked

against the whole school morale. Where advancement is dependent on a headteacher identifying someone and putting them forward, then other members of staff saw the process as inequitable. Conversely in School E, the transparency of the system allowed everyone to experience the same decisions and opportunities and that had a real positive influence on staff morale.

The headteachers identified other benefits of approaching leadership succession planning through initiatives such as ECM:

- Development of a skill base so that when members of staff were promoted/left there were trained people ready and able to step in. This would ensure continuity in provision for the children.
- Candidates pushed themselves harder and further than they could be pushed by someone else.
- The process engendered greater self-awareness about each person's own development.
- It provided access to coaching and facilitated self-reflection, a powerful mode of learning.
- Candidates developed greater effectiveness in dealing with other staff.
- They achieved more within the school, enhancing provision for the children.
- There were better leadership skills at all levels across the school and this mitigated resistance to change and made it easier to embed new initiatives.
- The approach provided a time-limited initiative with a finite product. This is rarely the case in headship. There is often an accreditation, which provides external recognition of skills and development.
- Skills were developed on a small scale.
- The impact was recognisable in school, both in terms of children's school experience and professional recognition by colleagues.
- It provided staff with the opportunity to work with external professionals through the additional demands it placed on schools to work with outside agencies.
- It could be tailored to the context of the school, such as the development of an Urdu scheme of work as the modern foreign language in a school, which is 99% minority ethnic.
- It created greater motivation among staff.
- Leadership behaviours were more likely to be modelled across the school.

Table 2 outlines some of the ways in which the headteachers in Schools A, B, E and, to a lesser degree C and D, used ECM to develop leadership skills and knowledge. The results are colour-coded according to the degree to which that aspect was used within the school for the development of leadership skills and qualities. Where headteachers led these projects internally themselves, they have not been included in the table.

Table 2: Developing leadership skills and knowledge

Area of ECM	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
Be healthy	Healthy schools Developing gardening area Gardening club After-school cricket, football	Healthy schools Developing emotional intelligence Gardening club After-school cricket, football, T'ai Chi	Healthy schools	Healthy schools Gardening club After-school cricket, football	Healthy schools Sports Mark After-school cricket, football Gardening area Gardening club
Stay safe	Bullying policy Health & Safety	Bullying policy Development of	Health & Safety committee	Health & Safety committee	Health & Safety committee

	committee Community cohesion Breakfast and after-school club Peer buddies SENCO/CP meetings	CP referral policy Health & Safety committee Community cohesion Walking bus Breakfast club Play leaders	Bullying policy	Bullying policy Walking bus Breakfast and after-school club	Bullying policy Walking bus Play leaders
Enjoy and achieve	Attendance procedures Experiential learning Assessment for Learning Personalised learning Visits/visitors	Attendance procedures Experiential learning Creative curriculum Assessment for Learning Personalised learning Visits/visitors	Attendance procedures Visits/visitors	Attendance procedures Assessment for Learning Visits/visitors	Attendance procedures Experiential learning Creative curriculum Assessment for Learning Personalised learning Arts Mark Visits/visitors
Making a contribution	School council Environmental awareness	School council Environmental awareness	School council	School council	School council Environmental awareness
Economic well-being	Setting goals Eco-schools	Target setting Parental education programmes	Target setting	Target setting	Target setting Eco-schools

Note:

SENCO: special educational needs co-ordinator

CP: child protection

Funding is sometimes an issue for headteachers who wish to be involved themselves with external programmes. Candidates are usually funded and have supply cover provided. However, teaching headteachers do not and that can be a limiting factor for them. As one headteacher remarked:

“I am accountable to my governing body for the money I spend. It is very difficult to justify spending money which will not directly benefit their school.”

It could be argued that this is an ‘education’ issue and that it possibly reflects a lack of enthusiasm within such schools for developing systemic leaders or a refusal to admit the systemic nature of the succession planning agenda.

Conclusions

The aim of this report was to investigate the extent to which schools that are strong in leadership succession planning are able to use the ECM agenda as a vehicle for the development of leadership capacity. **Approaches to succession planning vary along a continuum, with school interests at one end and systemic needs at the other. Schools that are most effective are able to maintain a balance between the needs of the school and the needs of the system.**

Effective schools make wide use of initiatives such as ECM as a mechanism for leadership development. Out of the five schools that were studied for this research, one had an outstanding and totally transparent system for leadership development and two were moving towards a position where they were in balance with both ends of the continuum. All three of these schools made wide use of the ECM agenda as a mechanism for developing leaders of the future. However, two schools were almost totally reliant on external provision, despite having been recommended by local authority representatives as strong supporters of succession planning. Their involvement came only through development of the headteacher, who was heavily involved in succession planning but not necessarily through the development of members of their own staff. These schools showed very little exploration of the ECM agenda as a mechanism for the development of internal leadership capacity.

Arising from this study in broad terms, there are several implications for current leaders, both at school and local authority level:

- There is currently **inequality in the availability and accessibility of leadership development**. It remains largely in the gift of the headteacher of the school and this can make access to it inequitable. Anecdotal evidence from interviews with both headteachers and staff involved points to experiences with headteachers who did not wish to develop systemic leadership and held firmly to negative views of it. It should, perhaps, be part of the role of the school improvement partner to encourage all headteachers to offer a transparent system of leadership development wherever it is required. Local authorities should look towards helping headteachers to develop such a system across their authority. The good practice model adopted in School E could be an appropriate starting point.
- Those schools which were most successful with succession planning were the ones who worked for both internal and external development – in other words, they saw **the need for school-wide as well as systemic development through the use of mechanisms such as ECM**. However, there is also still currently a place for appropriately funded external programmes in order to counteract the negative perceptions of headship held by some potential leaders and to allow them the opportunity to gain an all-round view of the role in order to be able to make a more informed choice about whether school leadership is right for them.
- **Awareness and use of the ECM toolkit for leadership skills and knowledge** (developed through involvement in an ECM initiative), combined with external programmes such as PHT or TSLS, are felt to be effective. Combined with a transparent potential career ladder, which is discussed at every individual performance management review, they can become powerful whole school leadership development mechanisms, raising expectations

across the whole school and putting leadership development on everybody's agenda. With the pressure on budgets making external courses ever more expensive as a proportion of spending, developing the leadership potential of staff through their involvement in initiatives such as ECM, which have to be undertaken by the school anyway, is a highly cost-effective way of working. It has the additional benefit that leadership development can be personalised to the needs, context and abilities of each potential leader, while simultaneously satisfying the systemic needs of the school and the wider education system.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to those headteachers, staff and local authority representatives who were prepared to be interviewed for this study. They gave of their time unstintingly and, even though they have preferred to remain anonymous, I would wish them to be assured of the contribution they have made.

Thanks also go to Alan Flintham without whose generous contributions of time and editing skill this report may not have seen the light of day.

Appendix

The following table provides contextual details of the five schools involved in this research.

<p>All schools are located in the North of England</p> <p>All schools are primary phase</p>	<p>School A Junior Roll: 235 Urban High socio-economic deprivation FSM: 38–40% EAL: 10%SEN: 20%</p> <p>Extended school: Yes</p> <p>Authority: unitary</p>	<p>School B Church of England primary Roll: 370 Urban High socio-economic deprivation FSM: 48% EAL: 99% SEN: 38%</p> <p>Extended school: No</p> <p>Authority: unitary</p>	<p>School C Catholic primary Roll: 220 Urban FSM: 10% EAL: 0%SEN: 15%</p> <p>Extended school: No</p> <p>Authority:</p>	<p>School D Primary Roll: 105 Rural Over-subscribed 50% travel in to catchment FSM: low EAL: low SEN: 30%</p> <p>Extended school: Yes</p> <p>Authority: large local</p>	<p>School E Church of England primary Roll: 400 Urban FSM: low EAL: 47% SEN: 20%+</p> <p>Extended School: Yes</p> <p>Authority: large local</p>
Candidate interview	Past candidate, now lead teacher Lead on creative curriculum development (ECM: enjoy and achieve)	Acting headteacher NPQH Now headteacher Lead on curriculum development (ECM: enjoy and achieve)	PHT candidate Still undecided about leadership No ECM role	NO PHT/TSLs candidates Office bursar and support staff developed through extended schools	Past deputy NPQH Now headteacher Lead on creative curriculum (ECM: enjoy and achieve)
Local authority interview	School improvement officer with involvement in succession planning			Succession planning consultant	School improvement officer with involvement in succession planning

Note:

FSM: free school meals

EAL: English as an additional language

SEN: special educational needs

The following is a summary of the interview schedule that was used. This was sent to interviewees in advance of the actual interview, to ensure they had sufficient time to think over their responses.

Questions
1. What have you done to promote leadership succession: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – in this school? – in the network? – in the local education authority?
2. What actions/initiatives have you undertaken to fulfil the ECM agenda?
3. What do you see as the issues surrounding the promotion of leadership succession?
4. What do you see as the role of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the school? – the local education authority? – central government?
5. What are the main factors that help to promote leadership succession?
6. What are the main factors that hinder leadership succession?
7. Looking at the leadership succession work you have done, what has been the effect on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – individuals? – the school?
8. As a school leader, do you see ways in which the promotion of the ECM agenda could be used to support leadership succession?
9. Thinking of the candidates you have supported into leadership positions, how many of them were encouraged to develop those leadership skills through the promotion of the ECM agenda?
10. Do you see ways in which initiatives like this could be used proactively by schools/local education authorities to promote leadership succession?

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