

2

The Succession Challenge: Supply and Demands

At first glance, the succession challenge that faces most jurisdictions in the western world¹ may be viewed as strictly a problem of mathematical misalignment: too many jobs and not enough qualified people to fill them. But the problem has more to do with politics and educational philosophy than with issues of supply and demand. As this chapter will argue, it has more to do with the increasing *demands* (thus the chapter title) placed on school and district leaders as a result of innovation overload and change related chaos,² the unwillingness of many educators to conform to policies that they view as unproductive or even destructive to their schools and students, and the pressure to support activities that they believe have more to do with good politics than good education.

The Supply Issue

In the early part of this decade, when we were in the midst of the *Change Over Time?* study, many alarmist reports focused policy makers' attention on the supply of qualified leaders. In 2001, the American National Association of Secondary School Principals reported that the average age of principals in the US in 1993–94 was 47.7 years, with 37.0 percent over age 50, 53.6 percent between ages 40 and 49, and 9.5 percent age 39 or under. Half of the school districts surveyed in 2000 reported that there was a shortage of qualified candidates. "This shortage occurred among rural schools (52 percent), suburban schools (45 percent), and urban schools (47 percent). These shortages of qualified secondary school principal candidates also

28 THE SUCCESSION CHALLENGE

occurred at all levels: elementary (47 percent), junior high/middle (55 percent), and senior high (55 percent).” NASSP attributed this failure to attract quality leaders to

increased job stress, inadequate school funding, balancing school management with instructional leadership, new curriculum standards, educating an increasingly diverse student population, shouldering responsibility that once belonged at home or in the community, and then facing possible termination if their schools don’t show instant results.³

Some reports at the time from the US indicated that sufficient qualified people did exist to meet that nation’s needs, but some states and districts faced serious recruitment and retention problems.⁴ For example, Kentucky and Texas reported a low applicant pool; temporary principals led many schools in New York City and Los Angeles;⁵ and 48 percent of surveyed principals in New York State intended to retire by 2006.⁶ Diane Pounder and Randall Merrill⁷ suggested that high mobility rates among school and district leaders in the US created the perception of a supply problem even though there were sufficient numbers of qualified people in the US to fill available jobs. The trends and forecasts were similar in Australia⁸ and New Zealand.⁹

In England, John Howson’s study of leadership demographics in 2005 found that severe shortages existed in some regions for some types of schools. A study of the frequency of newspaper advertisements for heads (principals) and deputies (assistant principals) concluded that the number of advertisements for headteachers was above the average for the past 10 years at 2,688 and the highest recorded for four years; and that too many schools still failed to appoint a new headteacher after the first advertisement.¹⁰

Similarly a study commissioned by the Ontario Principals’ Council (OPC) reported in 2001 that close to 60 percent of principals and 30 percent of assistant principals in elementary and secondary schools in public school boards would retire by 2005. By 2010, more than 80 percent of principals and about 50 percent of vice principals will retire. The study forecast that 1,900 Ontario schools out of about 3,200 in the English component of the public system would have a new principal by 2004. Moreover, the study reported that close to 8,000 teachers with principals’ and assistant principals’ qualifications were likely to retire by 2005, while only 715 teachers have acquired the principals’ qualifications each year on average between 1997 and 2000.¹¹

As a result of real or imagined shortages of leadership candidates, and projections of massive future retirements, nations, states, provinces, and school districts around the world have invested in leadership programs to ensure that they fill their leadership pipeline.¹²

Yet as early as 2003, doubt emerged about leadership succession as strictly a supply side issue. For example, the Wallace Foundation commissioned three studies to investigate the widespread reports of a principal shortage in the US. Its synthesis of the studies concluded that since “there is no shortage of qualified candidates for the principalship, it makes little sense to rely on strategies aimed solely at adding more candidates to the pipeline.”¹³ The report argued that:

It’s time to move beyond the pipeline, away from policies aimed solely at increasing the number of certified candidates, and focus far more attention and resources on reforming policies and practices to:

- Adjust incentives and working conditions to enable non-competitive schools and districts to attract qualified candidates;
- Bring local hiring practices into line with heightened expectations for principals’ performance; and
- Redefine the job itself in ways that allow principals to concentrate on student learning above all else.¹⁴

Also from the US, a study by Aimee Howley and her associates, summarized in an article appropriately entitled “The pain outweighs the gain: why teachers don’t want to become principals”, shows that many teacher leaders are qualified to go forward, but they just don’t want to make the big step to principalship.¹⁵ In a similar vein, a study at the University of Arkansas reported that a survey of superintendents concluded that while there was a sufficient number of qualified applicants for leadership roles, fewer than 40 percent met the interview criteria.¹⁶ In yet another study involving 200 interviews of American principals from across the United States, Sheryl Boris-Schacter concluded:

The principals in our study were remarkably consistent in their assertion that they entered the principalship in order to be instructional leaders, and lamented that they spent the vast majority of their time dousing fires, fixing school facilities, attending meetings, and completing paperwork driven by state and federal mandates. Although they wanted to be reflective and playful, they found themselves being primarily reactive to non-instructional activities. This is precisely what prevents many credentialed and experienced teachers from transitioning from the classroom to the office and has, I think, contributed to the principal shortage.¹⁷

The Demands Side of the Equation

In England, the National College for School Leadership¹⁸ indicated that 55 percent of school leaders are eligible to retire by 2012. As disturbing as

30 THE SUCCESSION CHALLENGE

this may seem, the source of the problem doesn't appear to be the number of qualified people available for promotion to replace the potential retirees. Howson's 2008 assessment of the state of the leadership supply in England based on applications for headships indicates an improving situation and only pockets of difficulty in recruitment.¹⁹ In fact, the UK government plans to halve the number of candidates taking the NPQH²⁰ headship qualification program over the next few years because "too many don't bother applying for the top job."²¹ Rather than a supply problem in England, the real dilemma seems to be the unwillingness of deputy heads, middle leaders, and teacher leaders to aspire to and seek headships.²² A PricewaterhouseCoopers study of the state of British headship found that "43 percent of deputy heads and 70 percent of middle managers say they do not aspire to headships ... Only 10 percent of all middle level leaders go on to become headteachers."²³ Anecdotal accounts in the popular press in England and in Scotland reinforce these findings.²⁴ A head in my *Three Countries* study succinctly captured the deputy's dilemma:

There are many deputies and potential deputies who have leadership potential who are put off from being a head because there are too many time constraints on heads. Most heads and deputies are interested and passionate about teaching and learning but end up dealing with unrelated issues. This gives rise in some cases to a public relations nightmare – who would want to take a job that many of the current post-holders do not enjoy? This then means that people become career deputies which holds up the process for other younger staff to take deputy positions and so on.

An Ontario study conducted by The Learning Partnership that builds on Tom Williams's influential 2001 work,²⁵ both sponsored by the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC), shows that the pipeline has filled up; there are plenty of people with principals' qualifications in the province. The Ontario Teachers' Council reported that the number of its members with principal qualifications has increased each year from 16,357 in 2003 to 17,335 in 2007, and approximately 44 percent of the 2007 figure was under 44 years of age.²⁶ That's the good news. The bad news is that the motivation for potential candidates to apply for school and system leadership positions also appears to be diminishing. Salary differences between teaching and administrative roles are becoming less of a motivator. For example, in the *Three Countries* study, 60 percent in Ontario saw inadequate salary as an inhibitor. Respondents in the same study indicated that potential leaders considered the salary differential between a senior teacher or especially a department head in a secondary school and a vice principal in Ontario was insufficient to compensate for the increased

pressure and accountability, and the loss of holiday time, evenings, and family time, that would come with a promotion. This pattern was evident in both the British and the American school districts that were part of the study. In the UK particularly, 60 percent of the respondents considered that salaries were insufficiently attractive to interest new applicants in leadership roles.

Perceptions of the nature of administrative positions in Ontario are also becoming more negative. As one of the Ontario secondary principals in my *Three Countries* study explained,

there is a perception that we are working all the time and they are looking at life-work balance and asking why should I do that? The problem is partially our responsibility, sometimes we look busier than we need to be; there are some things we don't need to do. They also see we are under increased pressure around liability and legalities, and staff say why would I put myself in that position?

In his six years as principal, this respondent has been named in two lawsuits. While both were never acted on, he admitted that the increasingly litigious nature of Canadian society has become very worrying.

Interestingly over 70 percent of vice principals²⁷ in Ontario aspire to principalship, according to the 2008 OPC study, which suggests a different dynamic in Ontario. Ever since the Ontario government forced principals and vice principals out of the teachers' unions in the late 1990s, the unions have made it difficult for a principal or vice principal to return to the teaching ranks in most school boards in Ontario. The key decision point in Ontario, therefore, is to leave the teaching ranks and security of union membership and become a vice (assistant) principal, rather than the decision to go on to become a principal. For this reason, 25 percent of principals in the Ontario school board identified this decision as a sticking point for some potential school leaders. This statistic compares to only 2 percent from the survey of British school leaders. The fact that there are fewer principals' jobs in Ontario than vice principals' jobs could mean that the leadership pipeline may well become plugged with unfulfilled career vice principals. In addition, in Ontario, the conventional route to gain leadership experience at the secondary level, the department headship, has fallen on hard times. As a result of reduced funds for leadership roles from the government, these preparatory roles have become increasingly unattractive to potential school leaders. The job of department head has broadened beyond leadership in a subject area in many districts to include cross-school leadership while providing very little, if any, time for heads to provide this leadership.

32 THE SUCCESSION CHALLENGE

This theme of diminishing interest in formal leadership roles in education is widespread. In Australia, Karen Barty and her colleagues reported that based on the best available data there is no shortage of qualified potential leaders in Australia, but “consistent evidence that significant numbers of teachers are deterred by the modern principalship with its emphasis on management rather than educational leadership, does ... point strongly to the need for coherent and robust efforts to redesign this critical educational work.”²⁸ Similarly, a recent OECD look at education in New Zealand identified

a shortage of suitably qualified teachers applying for such positions. Typically, the reason cited for not applying is that the requirements of the job have grown to the point where they seem unmanageable. As workload increases, there is no corresponding reduction in ancillary functions which are unrelated to the professional role. There are issues around the relative remuneration and/or the “do-ability” of the job.²⁹

It would appear then that in most educational jurisdictions there are sufficient qualified and capable people to assume future leadership jobs, but the demands placed on incumbent leaders have made the jobs so unattractive to future prospects that the pipeline has stopped flowing.

It is instructive to survey a few of the many reports that attempt to come to grips with this “demands” issue. In the previously mentioned Arkansas report, the authors summarize the deterrents to advancement under five headings:

- The pressures of testing and accountability are considerable.
- The job is generally too stressful.
- The job is too big and requires too much time.
- Societal problems make it difficult to be an instructional leader.
- It is difficult to satisfy the demands of parents and the community.³⁰

In the OPC’s Ontario study in 2008,³¹ the researchers asked vice principals, principals, and superintendents to review a list of reasons that some people have given for not applying for vice (assistant) principal or principal positions and to select the reasons most descriptive of the situation in their boards. Among the reasons provided included:

- The job is viewed as very stressful.
- The time required to fulfill job responsibilities has increased substantially, making it difficult to balance family and school demands.
- It is difficult to satisfy the many demands of parents and the community.

The Succession Challenge: Supply and Demands 33

- The issues related to poverty, lack of family supports, and other societal problems take time away from focusing on instructional issues.
- The funding and resources available are insufficient to do the job.
- The salary and compensation are inadequate.
- There is not enough autonomy in the role.
- There is an increase in violence in schools.
- The recruitment, training, and induction processes are inadequate.
- The role of the principal is primarily managerial and not educational.
- There is potential for not being able to return to the teaching ranks if required.
- The costs associated with acquiring the qualifications necessary for administrative positions are substantial.
- Management–union relationships are of concern.

Pat Thomson, in her thorough dissection of the frustrating nature of the British headship, captures the underlying contradiction in modern leadership between the requirement for leaders to be visionary, creative, and entrepreneurial, and the policy realities they live with, when she asks: “[how is it] actually possible for school leaders to develop a vision for education in situations where much of what they do is prescribed and delimited, and where there can be harsh consequences for going against policy, or simply failing to live up to it?”³²

An additional factor that came up often in my interviews in the *Three Countries* study was the sheer weight of information overload produced by the use, and perhaps more importantly the misuse, of modern communications technology. As one experienced Ontario principal explained: “we get more and more information. A few years ago I would check my e-mail once or twice a day and have only a few messages; now I have 30 or 40. We must process lots of information, but not all of it is useful or helpful and this has made my workload greater.” He particularly mentioned people who seem to think everyone should know what they are doing and copy their every utterance to the principal. Information of course goes two ways and virtually every principal or head in each of the three countries mentioned the paper blizzard required by the accountability agenda. There was a feeling that people above them were covering their backsides by expecting the schools to provide this piece of data or that report or to submit to various inspectional regimens. An American principal captured this frustration:

And the pape I didn’t even talk about that. I mean – I was already drowning in paper. Now I’m really drowning in it, as well as the vice principal because I had to share it, and also the secretary. We’re drowning in the sheer number of documents that we have to bubble in, check off, send to the state.

34 THE SUCCESSION CHALLENGE

A well-respected British head of a large primary school responded to the question on what was the biggest change for heads:

Obviously more paperwork – I’m now an office manager. I used to believe the people that said the business people could run the schools were “barking” and that would never happen. The longer time goes on and the job changes, I could have anyone who knows about business and organizations and running businesses [and they] could run the school.

I now shuffle paperwork. That’s what I do. I shuffle paper. I answer e-mails and answer phone calls. I still do see a lot of the children, and I still do observe teachers, and I still do monitor, and I still see parents, but I have to work three hours virtually every night to enable me to do that because if I did all my paperwork at school I would never see a teacher or a child.

Similarly, in my interviews in Ontario the word “compliance” came up time and again when I asked principals the same question about what has changed over time in the role of the principal. A second-year principal in Ontario admitted that the “whole compliance thing is huge.” A long-serving principal who had been principal of three different schools in the district stated that:

when I first got the job it was much more of an entrepreneurial job – now it is much more structured – now you have to fit school interests within a certain framework of provincial and board requirements. While some of these are based on solid work, I see my role as much less entrepreneurial and a great deal more pressured to comply. But after 13 years I’m more conscious of what is going to cost me my pension and what is going to send me to jail, so after I consider those factors, I am confident of what my school needs and proceed ahead, so I guess I become passively subversive to those things that are imposed.

For an experienced and well-regarded elementary principal in the same jurisdiction, her response to external pressures is more overt:

I don’t think I’ve ever met a guideline or a timeline. I know if it is really important somebody will tell me. I mean, some of the stuff that is asked of me, I mean, I have just said to my superintendent, well I don’t believe in that and that’s not a good use of my time so I’m not going to do that. I’m up front about it. I’m not trying to hide it. But, you know, school effectiveness plans and following a simple template from the board, that’s a waste of my time to write it like that. If you want to know what I’m doing in my school, I have a portfolio, I’ve collected the data, come in and see it. Don’t ask me to put it on paper. Other people would spend hours making it look pretty. That doesn’t really work. So I think some of that stuff comes with a bit of confidence.

Overburdened, Overworked, and Overwhelmed

To survive, leading has become a subversive activity in all three jurisdictions and elsewhere, a game which most experienced school leaders know how to play. They have learned how to gatekeep in the interests of their students, teachers, and schools. Over time they have acquired the skills necessary to choose what to endorse, what to block, and what to subvert. In England, some heads have become quite proficient at “target gaming” through strategies such as “ratchet effects” (negotiating undemanding targets) or “threshold effects” (concentrating on children on the bubble and boosting their scores above the desired threshold).³³

Newer recruits who have never learned these tactics feel they must respond to every requirement and end up feeling overwhelmed or burned out. As Phil, a 38-year-old second-year Ontario primary principal stated, “it has become a role that has become unmanageable. That is what is perceived by staff and by the community.” His vice (assistant) principal, described by her principal as “incredible,” has decided to revert to a teaching position to try to return to a more balanced lifestyle. Potential leaders seeing the travails of leaders like Phil, whom the system considers “very successful” but who face multiple and often conflicting requirements, have decided in increasing numbers that their life involves more than work and that the disadvantages of leadership outweigh any advantages such as higher pay and the increased influence that a leadership role would bring.

Similarly, in the US increasing accountability demands on principals appear to be undermining the morale of existing leaders and deterring potential leaders from aspiring to lead.³⁴ In the Eastern School District in the US, a mid-career female principal, described by her supervisor as “wonderful,” commented that she was “miserable” and “frustrated” by

this whole thing with No Child Left Behind, accountability, data, the amount of paper and less time for the work I love to do which is coaching teachers, creating a vision for the school, being passionate in getting to know the kids. Doing this kind of work I think has made my school very special ... It is in many ways the school I had envisaged. The piece I am frustrated about is how do we get better if we are so busy spending time with the paper things we are doing, and we are losing the passion and the creativity. I feel that so much of what we do is about aligning documents, making up paper plans, but for me, the job is creating the story, somehow the passion is lost.

One of her equally experienced colleagues claimed that he still enjoyed the job but at times had the feeling that he was “overwhelmed,

36 THE SUCCESSION CHALLENGE

drowning, and buried alive." Those above him were always "adding, never subtracting." Interestingly, a British head used similar words to explain his context: "Nothing ever seems to be taken away, just added. That's the difficulty." An experienced female principal of a large diverse primary school in the US, recently identified for not making adequate yearly progress after a number of successful years, declared that this is a "terrible way for a principal to end up." The process was all pressure and little support, and it "feels punitive" and "short-sighted" and promotes "divisiveness" in the district between schools that supposedly meet their targets and those that don't. She explained that the process was plagued with unfairness. If a school has 40 or more of a racial subgroup that fails to make expected progress then that school experiences pressure to improve test results, whereas a school with 39 of the same type of students is ignored. Interestingly the schools in this district that failed to meet targets just happen to serve the publicly supported housing area of the district. The attitude of policy makers, she suggested, seems to be "not how can we help you but how can we punish you." Fortunately, the Eastern District is an example of the benefits enjoyed by certain places, as I outline in the next chapter. It is a very desirable place to live and work, so it has little trouble drawing principal candidates from other less attractive school districts and feels little pressure to "grow its own." For example, the system had 40 applicants to replace a recently retired principal. The vast majority of these applicants were from surrounding less advantaged school districts.

The theme of unfairness plays out in England as well. A successful school head, who works with a less successful school in another authority, stated:

They're [inspections] not equal. That's the thing that is so unfair. I could tell you about the schools near [a large neighboring city] where schools that have got worse results than others have got better grades, because they have an inspector that's understood where they're coming from. Everyone would recognize the most difficult school in [the neighboring city], I mean, only somebody who is mentally deranged would want to be the headteacher at that school, and the head is phenomenal. The woman that runs that school had to fight for two days to get a satisfactory rating. That school should be given outstanding because of what they achieve. If they can get the children into school ready to learn each day that is an outstanding achievement but they had to fight to get satisfactory.

A secondary head of a very successful, middle-class school from the same authority, who is a school improvement partner³⁵ for a large industrial city in the British midlands, commented:

The Succession Challenge: Supply and Demands 37

I think that too many times simplistic notions of effectiveness are thrown into the system by the central government which makes the accountability agenda very difficult to deal with. Life's not as simple as that. The obvious example is the decision by the national government 12 months ago that schools that had not got 30 percent of the students to achieve five A to C grades [GCSEs]³⁶ were nationally challenged schools³⁷ purely on the basis that they hadn't achieved the 30 percent. I work as a school improvement partner, which is part of the government's accountability agenda. I work in [name of city] which is an interesting contrast to the [midlands authority]. One of my schools was below 30 percent but in every other aspect it was an excellent school and OFSTED³⁸ said it was an excellent school. And it was in one of the most deprived areas of England, let alone in [name of city]. It was a purely arbitrary benchmark. It was a simplistic response to what is actually a very complex issue.

British heads, perhaps more than leaders in the other settings that I looked at in the *Three Countries* study, felt disrespected by government and society in general. As one head wrote:

I love being a headteacher. I find it a most rewarding role as well as a privilege. It is not without its challenges. I feel that it is becoming a role without respect from parents and society. It seems to be acceptable that we are berated by the media for every aspect of childhood where in actual fact we spend our days trying to make the lives of our pupils rewarding and fulfilled. Perception and reality are wide apart. Teachers see this and wonder why we do the job as the buck always stops with us!

Another wrote on my questionnaire:

There are too many government initiatives brought out in one school year. My staff looks at me and says no thanks. Being a head is actually not worth aspiring to in a small school with small salary and HUGE³⁹ responsibilities as there are not enough staff members to carry them out. Salaries should be addressed; new initiatives; heads given time to research and look at their school instead of throwing a cold cup a soup down your neck in 3 minutes at lunchtime whilst being asked to make life changing decisions! Give heads some respect back – who is in charge?

School heads in England face the twin pressures of ensuring ever improving examination results and satisfying government officials who keep moving the "expectations goalposts." Peter Gronn has described the British approach to educational change as a "war on schools." He argues that while schools and schooling have always been "battlegrounds" among various interest groups, education has now become a media "blood sport" with government collusion:

The ante is upped considerably when the state's strategy hardens into one of rounding on its own schools, especially the people in charge of them, not

38 THE SUCCESSION CHALLENGE

merely by means of the compliance afforded by a vast regime of audit and surveillance, but ... [by] resort to public humiliation and demonisation ... [which] has now become a weapon of first resort in this war. Indeed so far have their rules of engagement shifted that government spokespersons often combine forces with media to chase down instances of feral leadership in order to publicly purge them. Is it any wonder that such experiences spawn a culture of complaint and lament among heads and principals' associations?⁴⁰

A study by Alan Smithers and Pamela Robinson of the Centre for Education and Employment at Buckingham University concluded that there

is evidence of an impending shortfall in the recruitment of headteachers in the maintained sector⁴¹ ... three quarters of the [primary] schools reported having teachers with the qualities to become a headteacher but who did not want to move up. Nearly two thirds of the primary headteachers thought that this was because the pay differential was not sufficient incentive ... Overall, workload was the reason the heads thought there were recruitment difficulties, with accountability a close second, particularly with the vulnerability of heads to sacking in light of a bad OFSTED report.⁴²

Elsewhere Smithers commented that the reluctance of classroom teachers to become heads was an important factor in the rise in the number of failing British primary schools. He contended that "heads are being held responsible for their schools in the way football managers are being held responsible for their team's performance."⁴³ The aspiring head is likely to go for a top performing school in the same way as football managers want a high-flying club rather than the Macclesfields⁴⁴ of this world."⁴⁵ Like the manager of a sports team, principals can often feel very lonely, especially in a crisis. "Schools are not shut off from what happens outside the school gates and they must often work through highly complex and emotive issues. The loneliness of leadership is palpable when heads talk about what this actually means in practice."⁴⁶ While it is difficult to quantify, British heads seem far more vulnerable and pressured than their Canadian and American counterparts. A crucial difference would seem to be the role of OFSTED.⁴⁷ A recent study of attitudes of existing headteachers and deputies in England, sponsored by the National Association of Headteachers, stated: "Almost 9 out of 10 (86.2 percent) said current inspection arrangements make it 'somewhat' or 'very much' less likely that potential candidates will be willing to apply for Headships. Around 6 in 10 (62.5 percent) of deputies said current inspection arrangements made them 'less willing' to apply for Headships."⁴⁸

Even in Scotland with a less intrusive inspectoral regimen than England, a survey of 119 headteachers by University of Edinburgh researchers found that almost half of them work 60 hours a week or more – the equivalent of working from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day, except Sunday, without a lunch break. Only a few of the 100 deputies, who also took part, said they were keen for the top job. More than two-thirds (68) agreed with the proposition that going for a headship was not “an attractive proposition.” According to the researchers, “Since this corps of people is where the next generation of headteachers will come from, it must be a matter of some concern that the headteacher post is perceived in this way by so many deputy heads.” In an echo of warnings already sounded by headteacher organizations over problems with succession planning, the researchers concluded that “recruitment to these senior posts in future may be problematic.”⁴⁹

In fairness, some jurisdictions have made serious efforts to reduce the pressure on school leaders. For example the British government added resources to schools to reduce the workload produced by its rigorous accountability agenda through its “workload remodelling programme”⁵⁰ which provides resources to add teachers’ assistants, and support staff to reduce the non-teaching jobs historically executed by qualified teachers. On the surface this appears to be an enlightened policy. However, as Helen Gunter explains, behind the rhetoric and spin the policy views teachers as the problem in education, so it is

based on shifting the work from teachers to other adults rather than a conceptualization of who teachers are and what teaching is about, and it does not give recognition to the moral dimensions of teaching and teachers’ work, and how their identity is located in curriculum innovation, designing learning, enabling progress and praxis.⁵¹

Heads (principals) feel pressured to ensure that all the pieces fit together and the policy works as intended. For school heads, the additional resources have only added to their workload and the pressure of the job, particularly from teachers’ unions that demand compliance with the “letter” of the law when local circumstances often make conformity difficult.⁵² Site-based management⁵³ is far more prevalent in England than in Canada and most US states. When one looks at the responsibilities of British heads compared to American and Canadian principals in my study, site-based management adds to school leaders’ managerial and administrative workload and limits involvement with teaching and learning. With notable exceptions, school boards in Canada and school districts in the US play a much more active role in making sure the buses run on time, the toilets flush, and the roofs of schools don’t leak. A study by

40 THE SUCCESSION CHALLENGE

Michael Bristow and his colleagues for the British National College for School Leadership determined that the heads spent 39 percent of their time on management and administration, 17 percent dealing with external stakeholders, and only 7 percent on strategic leadership activities such as classroom observations, leadership development, and school improvement planning.⁵⁴ In this same study, 41 percent targeted accountability, bureaucracy, and external demands as major ingredients in making the job so time consuming.⁵⁵ As Pat Thomson has pointed out with reference to British school heads, their dissatisfaction arises from the disconnect between the job, defined in terms of the moral purposes of the profession, and the work, the reality of what they had to do on a day-to-day basis.⁵⁶

In addition to augmenting resources, some school jurisdictions have responded to concerns about the demands placed on school leaders by experimenting with alternative ways to organize School leadership. For example, the American Eastern School District that I report on in Chapter 5 describes itself as having 10 schools: one secondary school, eight pre-kindergarten to grade eight elementary schools, and one early education school. As the principal explained:

I am the principal of ages three to six. Once the children go to kindergarten I'm partnered with each elementary principal to supervise the kindergarten teachers, support professional development and to consult around children and curriculum. I evaluate every kindergarten teacher in Eastern, which is a daunting task.

This example is a type of what David Hopkins has called "executive leadership"⁵⁷ and reflects the system's recognition of the importance of early years education and the unique qualifications and talents of the principal of the early years school. It requires considerable liaison between the early years principals and the in-school principals and a negotiated distribution of tasks. There is some doubt whether this plan actually reduces the workload, but all principals agreed that it does help the system to focus on its early years priority.

In what appears to be the last gasp of a dying government, the British "New" Labour Party has gone even further in creating executive headships by opening the door for heads in government certified excellent schools to assume overall supervision of less successful schools.⁵⁸ Marion Court summarizes similar shared arrangements internationally, and she describes five distinct patterns:⁵⁹

- Full-time task specialized co-principals in which two people working together divide up the various leadership jobs based on their strengths and interests and the workload. This approach assumes that

The Succession Challenge: Supply and Demands 41

tasks can be easily divided and overlooks the fact that most aspects of school are integrated holistically and not easily separated into job descriptions.

- Full-time supported dual leadership in which two people working side by side in a supportive and collaborative way attend to the leadership needs of the school based on the premise that “two heads are better than one.” Court reports that schools that have tried it find that this can be a powerful approach to school leadership, but requires extraordinary harmony and mutual support between the co-leaders.
- Part-time job sharing in which time is divided between two people so that one for example might work mornings and the other afternoons or on alternate days. Once again this system can work well if the partners are collaborative, mutually supportive, and organized.
- Integrative co-headships in which co-leaders and other staff leaders collaborate to create leadership by committee.
- Teacher leadership collectives, in which a committee of teachers acting in concert completely replaces the principal’s or head’s position.

Norton Grubb and Joseph Flessa contend that the impossibility of traditional one-person principalships in the present policy context, and the need to address so many diverse issues, necessitate looking at joint or collaborative structures. They suggest that such arrangements employ the strengths of two or more leaders, ensure that someone is always on site, always provide someone teachers can go to with difficulties, distribute the emergent problems and annoying administrative tasks, free up leaders to work directly in classrooms, and give leaders themselves someone they trust with whom they can work through issues.⁶⁰ The challenges for such arrangements are considerable. Ronald McQuaid’s⁶¹ survey of leadership partnerships in the UK public sector lists a few of the more common difficulties: unclear goals, resource costs, unequal power, cliques usurping power, impacts upon other mainstream services, differences in philosophy between partners, organizational problems.⁶² After surveying the field of alternative leadership structures Ron Glatter and Janet Harvey, in their report to the National College for School Leadership, urged caution before leaping into such arrangements and concluded that:

- There is not sufficient evidence to suggest that any of the models of shared headship we explored could work in all schools.
- There is no one model to suit all circumstances.
- Job redesign should be part of a larger educational vision, not simply an expedient to deal with a current problem.

42 THE SUCCESSION CHALLENGE

- With unconventional models of headship, it is particularly important to secure the maximum support of all stakeholder groups including staff, students, families and the wider local community.
- Research into introducing new models of headship should focus as much on governance – including local authorities – as on school leaders and should look closely at the interaction between them.⁶³

There is a burgeoning literature on alternative leadership structures and some modest attempts internationally to create different leadership patterns to help leaders cope with the demands placed on schools. But few authors have had the temerity to question current educational policies and argue for the change in the very nature of school and district leadership that would make the jobs doable. Few jurisdictions have seriously addressed the question of restructuring leadership roles so that the requirements on individuals and schools can be reduced while enabling leaders to provide the kind of leadership necessary to respond to the educational issues of a knowledge society. Second Way and Third Way policies and practices have placed schools, school districts, and their leaders under intense pressure to implement numerous, often conflicting and shifting reform policies, some supported by resources, others requiring more for less.⁶⁴ “As a consequence efforts to implement and integrate different initiatives face a basic paradox – creating new incentives for improvement and aligning some policies may motivate or smooth the way for some school reform effort, but it takes capacity to build capacity at the school level.”⁶⁴ New initiatives, regardless of purpose and degree of support, require schools and districts to weigh the possible benefits of the program, the availability of resources, and the positive publicity that may result against the costs in terms of people’s time, energy, and commitment. A principal in a study by Tom Hatch put it very simply: “It reaches a point where it doesn’t make any difference how much money there is. You don’t have the time and energy.”⁶⁵ Hatch’s work adds an important dimension to understanding capacity building in leadership. Many systemic change theorists in education stress that sustainable improvement needs to invest not only in exerting pressure on educators but also in providing support or capacity building for them in terms of money, materials, training, and time to think and plan.⁶⁶ For Hatch, though, human capacity has some parallels with water capacity. You can increase capacity by increasing supply – providing more water in the first case, or resources and training in the second. But you can and should also increase capacity by reducing unnecessary demand – washing the car or watering the lawn less often, or, in educational terms, limiting the number and pace of external initiatives. This is the

demands side of leadership capacity. When leadership turns into management of innumerable imposed initiatives, exposure to endless and unwanted interventions, and evaluation according to unfair and inappropriate forms of accountability, the demands on leaders become unreasonable and few people are called to lead anymore. There is an underlying current throughout the change literature that human energy, motivation, and initiative are infinitely exploitable, but like all resources this too has its limits.

In the balance between design and emergence, incumbent and potential leaders in most western countries sense that the pendulum has swung too far towards design and compliance to “Second and Third Way”⁶⁷ mandates and left little room for emergence, creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurialism. For example, in virtually every interview in my *Three Countries* research, mid- and late-career principals continued to express enthusiasm for the job and a commitment to making a difference for all children, and welcomed the increased policy emphasis on instructional leadership. However, they also commented on how the seemingly unending imposition of time-consuming managerial requirements from building issues, to health and safety mandates, to signing off on all expenditures, large or small, frustrated their efforts to focus on supporting teaching and learning. With younger principals, the phrase “overwhelming” recurred and, while they declared their enthusiasm for the job, they admitted that they coped by working harder and harder to meet all the varied expectations. They leaned heavily on mentors such as former colleagues for advice. A number of newer principals and heads indicated that their initial instinct was to clear their desks every day and sort out any problems before they went home. As a result they acted precipitously on some issues and felt that their biggest learning was to determine what had to be acted on immediately and what could go on the “back burner.” When asked why younger people seemed reticent to step forward, three first- or second-year principals indicated that they had tried to encourage new applicants but admitted that “we’re bad examples” because they survived by overworking. Many principals and heads, old and new, quoted a staff member as saying “I wouldn’t want your job.” This overwork is what Peter Gronn has called “greedy work.” These leaders “are addicted to what they do and are unwilling to manage or incapable of managing their time and energy. The more they complain the harder they work, just to try to prove to themselves and others that they are super or exceptional.”⁶⁸ This was particularly true at the elementary (primary) level where principals have limited leadership support when compared to most secondary schools in the regions in which I conducted

44 THE SUCCESSION CHALLENGE

my research. Secondary schools are larger and more complex: most have department heads, and some have business managers or bursars.

As this chapter has indicated, the role of school leaders and particularly principals and school headteachers is changing, and well it should to meet the issues of a knowledge society. However, 'Second Way and Third Way changes have leaned more heavily on centralized mandates, micro-management, educational frameworks more suited to an industrial age, and "designer leadership"⁶⁹ – all strategies that have proven to be unsustainable.⁷⁰ A recent OECD study of education in five OECD countries conducted by renowned international researchers⁷¹ succinctly summarizes the leadership supply and demands challenge this way:

there are concerns across countries that the role of principal as conceived for needs of the past is no longer appropriate. In many countries, principals have heavy workloads; many are reaching retirement, and it is getting harder to replace them. Potential candidates often hesitate to apply, because of overburdened roles, insufficient preparation and training, limited career prospects and inadequate support.

To this end they recommend that policy makers need to:

- *Provide higher degrees of autonomy with appropriate support.* School leaders need time, capacity and support to focus on the practices most likely to improve learning. Greater degrees of autonomy should be coupled with new models of distributed leadership, new types of accountability, and training and development for school leadership.
- *Redefine school leadership responsibilities for improved student learning.* Policy makers and practitioners need to ensure that the roles and responsibilities associated with improved learning outcomes are at the core of school leadership practice.
- *Develop school leadership frameworks for improved policy and practice.* School leadership frameworks can help provide guidance on the main characteristics, tasks and responsibilities of effective school leaders and signal the essential character of school leadership as leadership for learning.⁷²

Ironically, while offering these solutions, the OECD is part of the problem. It has contributed to the succession challenge by turning education into a global rat-race through PISA⁷³ and similar international competitive league tables in which a nation's position becomes a matter of national pride or disgrace, and a source of government pressure for ever improving results on heads and principals.

In subsequent chapters I attempt to suggest solutions to the succession challenge, but before doing so there are two aspects of

this issue that most studies ignore. These are issues of time and space: the need to address conflicting generational views of life, work, and leadership; and the need to come to grips with the fact that the world is not flat and not equitable, and place or location plays a large role in determining educational outcomes and leadership succession.

Notes

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48 THE SUCCESSION CHALLENGE

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