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Title: Developing Leaders in Public Service: The Case of Jamaica as a Developing State

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Abstract

The literature regarding public service leadership in non-Western contexts is scarce and has been long subject to on-going calls for attention. Taking a qualitative single case study approach, the research that informs this paper seeks to examine local perspectives on how existing leaders in public service in a non-Western context are developed to respond to local public service transformation imperatives. This developmental paper presents on-going research into leadership development efforts in the public sector in Jamaica as the case unit of analysis. As a work in progress, the paper seeks to share some early preliminary insights emerging from the results of 12 semi-structured elite interviews with leadership development programme stakeholders. Based on the interviews, the paper seeks to identify how themes are being identified through a coding process, and highlights two themes emerging as examples; the themes of organisational culture and personal programme impact.

Keywords: Non-Western contexts; Public Service Leadership Development; Qualitative Case study; Jamaica; Organisational Culture and Individual Participant Impact.

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Background

In the 21st century, the role of leadership in driving Public Service transformation and reform is receiving increasing attention across the globe (Newman 2005; Morse et al 2015; OECD 2001). In developing countries, the particular challenge of public sector reform is its relationship and contribution to the transition towards developed world status, seen as a critical contributor to poverty reduction, economic prosperity, peace, sustainability and to achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), a global imperative (Bangura and Larbi 2006, Binkerhoff, D.W. with P. Morgan 2010, World Bank 2012, Heidenhof et al (2007). Public Sector reform aligns to SDG 16, '*Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*' and its subset SDG 16.6; '*Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels*' (United Nations). In the context of this paper, public sector reform is conceptualised as efforts to improve the effectiveness (of which transparency is an aspect) of public services institutions administered by the state. The unit of analysis is the Public Sector Senior Leadership Development Programme (PSSLDP) in Jamaica.

Research rationale.

The literature on leadership development has increasingly called for research into leadership development in non-Western contexts and for greater attention to be paid to culture. This is as a result of the dominance of Western perspectives in the canon of research into leadership and leadership development that is essentially but not exclusively from the USA and the UK. Hitherto, leadership development in public services in the Caribbean region in particular as well as other developing economies receives little if any attention. Engaging an approach consistent with that developed by Tranfield et al (2003), a systematic literature review was undertaken using six (6) online databases; *ProQuest*; *Sage Journals*; *Emerald Insight*; *Science Direct (Elsevier)*; *Psych Info and Academic Source Complete*. Apart from Academic Source Complete, which is the world's most comprehensive multi-disciplinary full-text database and Psych Info, the other four databases specialise in social sciences in general and management in particular. The two terms searched were: '*Leadership Development and Public Service*' and '*Public Service Leader Development*.' Three inclusion criteria were adopted: i) only full text peer-reviewed academic articles written in English were accessed; ii) only articles relating to the public sector were accepted (empirical research and concept papers); and iii) only articles published between 2000-2017 were included. Of the 80 papers accepted that met the inclusion criteria, only nine (9) related to non-Western contexts with none relating to the Caribbean.

Dorfman et al (2012, 508) acknowledge the dominance of Western models, and that to date, very few studies pre the GLOBE study in 2004 have investigated effective leadership prototypes from the Middle Eastern and African regions, although they do not go on to provide any rationale or understanding about why this might be. The development of a conceptual framework of leadership development in understudied regions of the world, expressly to counterbalance the perceived dominance of Western models was a critical outcome of the qualitative research undertaken in Asia by Tirmizi (2002).

What is clear is the imbalance between leadership development efforts that are underpinned, designed and evaluated through a Western, Developed World cultural prism that dominates the research canon, and research that pays due regard to the experience, context and practice in developing states in explicit terms, of which there is a paucity in the literature.

This paper intends to examine some of the background context and early preliminary results from a case study into developing senior leaders in public service in Jamaica, a non-Western Caribbean island state.

What is leadership development?

Day et al (2014, p63) contend that leadership development has a focus upon developing leadership capacity wider than the leadership title holder her or himself, typically leadership capacity throughout an organisation; while 'leader development' is much more of an interpersonal process focused upon the leader as an individual. It can also be conceptualised as concerned with enhancing leadership roles and processes of individuals to build collective capacity for leadership effectiveness, and on-going individual skill acquisition and development (McCauley et al., 1998; Lord and Hall 2005). Allen (2008, p101) too gives emphasis to the intentionality of leadership development as a process enabling the individual to become 'self-aware and change behaviour'. Notwithstanding contentions regarding the difference between 'leader development' and 'leadership development' (Day et al 2014) this paper is primarily concerned with leadership development as a focus upon the individual leader.

Case Study Background:

Jamaica and The Public Service Senior Leadership Development Programme

The Caribbean island state of Jamaica

The largest island in the English-speaking Caribbean, Jamaica is an upper middle-income economy and has a population of almost 3 million people (World Bank). Prior to independence from Britain in 1962, Jamaica had been a “*slave-fuelled plantation economy*” (Maloney & Hyo-Youn Chu 2016 : 438) and post-independence, its governance and civil service has been based upon the Westminster model. Since independence, it has continued to experience a debilitating triad of significant challenges of high public debt, low growth and high exposure to external shocks, such as natural weather phenomenon such as hurricanes. As a result, Jamaica does not enjoy the growth one might expect. Its economy has grown at a very low average rate (less than 1.4% per year) between 1990-2005 (Thomas, D., & Serju, P. (2009) and as a result, poverty eradication has remained a significant and consistent challenge.

Following the global financial downturn in 2009/2010, a significant programme of public service reform was initiated in 2013, supported by the World Bank in order to further re-dress the challenges with public debt and growth as the means to a more prosperous society (World Bank). Since independence, Jamaica has initiated a number of significant public sector reform programmes from the 1970's onwards, with the 7th phase launched in 2002 (Tindigarukayo 2004). Increasingly, reform has sought to empower managers and give them greater autonomy in the four central areas of responsibility of: management, personnel, finance, and operations (Tindigukayo 2004: 15). Throughout the ongoing reform efforts, there has been consistent emphasis upon the importance of human resources and human capital, often suggesting it as the most important aspect for public service reform and development (Sutton 2008). As plans for public service reform evolved, leadership for reform gained prominence as a vital plank required in transformation efforts (Tarrallo et al 2009).

Subsequently, the Public Service Leadership Development Programme (PSSLDP) sits within the Strategic Public Sector Transformation Project as one key strand of the Government of Jamaica's Strategic 'Vision 2030' National Development Plan that seeks to “to guide the country to achieve its goals of sustainable development and prosperity by 2030 (Jamaica Information Service (JIS)”. The programme the Plan (MIND 2018). At a macro level, the aim of the programme is to: ‘create a cadre of senior executives capable of leading public sector modernisation and transformation’ (MIND 2018: 4), whilst also seeking to make an impact at the individual level by enriching public service senior leaders themselves (MIND 2018).

Research Methodology

The overarching research question is;

Is the Public Service Senior Leadership Development Programme in Jamaica able to change leaders' behaviours and attitudes, in order to transform public service?

The research is informed by social constructivism as an underpinning philosophy. Such a philosophy provides the opportunity to explore how meaning is constructed in this leadership development context and what meaning is given to shared experiences (Bryman 2012). For example, do all programme participants share the same construct of what leadership development is, or have the same understanding of the public service reformation rationale?

A mixed epistemology of interpretivism and constructivism is chosen informed by the need for emphasis upon social constructs and meanings of reality and allows for identification of causal-explanatory accounts (E.g. why / how certain aspects of the programme impacted future practice) where they may exist (Walliman 2011, Bryman and Bell 2007).

As an approach, an inductive qualitative single case study is used utilising in-depth elite interviews as the data collection instrument.

Planning and Developing Instruments

Two distinct groups of stakeholders were identified, namely programme stakeholders (non-participatory) and programme participants. Non-programme participant stakeholders were selected who had diverse stakes in the leadership development programme to ensure holistic rather than mono perspectives were gathered.

Twelve (12) open-ended in-depth interview questions were constructed around four broad areas of focus namely: i) perceptions/interpretations of the public-sector transformation context in which the leadership development programme was taking place, ii) the resultant leadership development programme pedagogy and content vis-à-vis responding to the change intentions iii) how success might be measured / evaluated and what success will look like and iv) transferability. Question sequencing was considered important and as a result, questions were deliberately ordered so that there would be a natural flow from one broad theme to the next, as if a story were being told. .

Qualitative Data Analysis.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and the thematic qualitative analysis work of Braun and Clarke (2006) was chosen as most relevant for analysis of transcription data collected from the elite interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006:83) assert that the aim of thematic analysis is for the entire data set to be subject to rich overall description' before going on to describe six (6) key phases of the process, from early coding of interesting material to the identification of themes.

Approach to Coding.

The process and practice of coding are always going to be contextual, dependent upon research ontological decisions and intentions. At the early familiarisation stage, interview transcripts from stakeholder interviews were read repeatedly and initial notes were made on the printed transcripts. Consistent with an inductive approach, as sections of text revealed content that seemed important in answering the research questions and were recurring in one sense or another, they were highlighted and listed as an initial code. Initial codes were then refined even further leading to the identification of a theme emerging. Such an approach is indicative of what Braun and Clarke (2006) consider as open coding at a semantic level where what is said is taken at face value as it were, with the researcher not seeking to identify or engage with assumptions or interpretations of what has been expressed. Open coding develops and is modified throughout the coding process as opposed to codes being pre-determined (Braun and Clarke 2006; Maguire and Delahunt (2017).

Early Preliminary results

Emerging from the data, as a strategy, a codebook using open-coding is being developed (on-going) as an essential element of the process of thematic analysis. This facilitates the data gathered through the twelve (1)2 semi-structured elite interviews completed so far, of which four have been coded, to be analysed at a deeper level in all their richness in the process of sense-making following immersion in the data (Braun & Clarke 2006, Basit 2003). The opening coding approach also allows

for further development and modification of codes as further interviews are transcribed and the coding process continues (Maguire and Delahunt 2017)

Some of the preliminary codes emerging are of the following: the public sector construct; transformation purpose; organisational inflexibility; changing people v changing processes; Necessary leader skills; Personal change and Jamaican culture.

Consistent with Braun and Clarke’s stepped approach, these higher-level codes emerged as a result of refined analysis of initial level coding. It is these higher-level codes that informed theme identification. Arrival at this point in the analysis process was consistent with stage three of the Braun and Clarke (2006) framework, the stage where having become familiar with the data (step1) initial codes are generated (step 2) and a search for themes takes place (step 3).

Table 1 below illustrates a summary of this process leading to identification of the themes ‘Organisational Culture’ and ‘Individual Level Programme Impact.’

Table 1. Organisational Culture and Individual Level Programme Impact Theme Identification

Initial L1 Codes	Level 2 Codes	Theme Identified and Definition of Term/s	Example from Participants
Public service hierarchy and rigidity Public service (ill)fit for contemporary purpose' Public service construct (modelled on former colonial ruler) Public servant mentality (inflexibility/reluctance to change/obedient and unquestioning) Greater focus upon managing and changing systems and processes rather than change in leading people Rigidity of practice impacts creativity and innovation Immunity to change Public servant lack of resilience Power as an aim in itself	Inflexibility of practice Fitness for purpose Maintenance of the status quo Process change prioritised Resistance to change Power motivation	Theme: Organisational Culture Definition: ‘A pattern of shared common assumptions learned by [an organisation] as it solves its problems of external adaption and internal integration, which worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.’ Shein 2010, p18).	Participant 1. “Everything is about rules, compliance. Its almost a contradiction where you are asking people to lead, to be innovative and creative in an environment that does not allow you to take risks, in an environment that requires you to just follow the rules and when something falls array, you just make two more rules.” Participant 2 “It is really a power game. The Jamaican Public Service, like any other public sector is a power structured organisation where everybody is trying to win power and to utilise and to practice power. It is really a power game

			that created quite a bit of obstacle to people emerging as leaders..."
Concern for the growth of others	People facilitation prioritised	Theme: Individual Level Programme Impact.	Participant 3
Enhanced sensitivity to staff needs	Cognitive growth	Definition of the term 'Impact': "A marked effect or influence" Oxford English Dictionary	"I have in the past been reluctant, hesitant and would put off attending to some of the more difficult things but having gone through the course I have been taught how to tame the tiger and so I have been using that."
Greater conceptual scrutiny of holistic work plans	Behaviour change		
Greater critical thinking	Greater leadership less management		
Deeper appreciation of own impact (actual and potential)	Trust		Participant 4
Trusting self, leading to trusting others			"I have more courage about doing, about being involved or concerned with employee relations...courage to say 'Yes this is me and I lead differently'.
Self-reflection as a core habit			
Challenges faced with confidence			

Organisational Culture

Multiple participants gave emphasis to organisational culture in terms of perceptions of the public service in Jamaica being hierarchical in nature, inflexible and power based. Jamaica's colonial legacy was consistency referred to as a backdrop to this culture with many stating that the how the public sector was structured pre-independence is no longer fit for purpose and that a rules-based culture stifles the required transformation and leadership behaviours.

Organisational inflexibility as an aspect of organisational culture receives attention that can be seen through this participant perspective:

People who come to the public sector come trained, certified in an area of expertise. We employ them because we want them to bring these things [innovative, creativity and bring new ideas] but when they come, we tell them 'this is how we do things around here'. (Participant 2)

Such a culture has resultant implications for leadership development design, transferability and application of leadership development learning. Indeed, Gilpin & Bushe (2007) for example conclude that the breaking of cultural norms is the greatest barrier to leadership learning transfer.

Individual Participant Programme Impact

From the transcripts one can see that the programme had an impact upon participants in a number of important ways. The issue of engagement with challenges emerged with participants having a greater sense of self-efficacy in responding to challenges, that hitherto they may have avoided or felt unprepared to tackle. A sense of this can be seen through this perspective from a participant.

I think I am more structured in my approach to dealing with challenges. I had challenges with a particular individual.....I had interaction with the person and my engagement was different you know and the opportunity, I worked with that person, there would have been a time when I would not have been that engaging as I needed to be. Even though the outcome was not what we wanted, but we could manage it in a professional way. (Participant 4)

Enhanced self-efficacy as an impact could also be seen with some participants reflecting upon their understanding of self on a deep level prior to and post programme participation. For example, one participant shared that prior to programme participation, they rated their leadership skills and competence at two (2) out of six (6).

I think about a 2 [of out 6 on a self-rating scale] because I would do some things and I would feel like, I would get pushed back and I would feel like maybe I should be doing things, maybe I should be doing this and I shouldn't be doing that, so one of the things the programme did for me was just to affirm that I wasn't going crazy doing some of these things and I should do some of them. I was expected to manage not to lead. (Participant 3)

Enhanced self-efficacy can also be seen in the outcomes-based evaluation conducted by Packard and Jones (2015: 153) where they found enhanced self-efficacy enhancement amongst participants as well as "improved on the job performance."

The participant goes on to discuss when they became conscious that a change had taken place, a question that clearly has implications for overall programme evaluation of not only what is achieved but when. For example, the participant goes on to say that:

I think about 3 months into the programme when I started saying to myself 'Yes, I can go back and do that', you know its not strange, its not weird, leaders do that. You know it was about like 3 months in that I started saying 'Yes, and I don't need to apologies for doing that either... I need to trust my own judgement as far as that is concerned.

This consciousness of impact was a consistent thread through the interviews where participants were asked explicitly if they could identify a point where personal change occurred and what that 'lightbulb' moment was, if any. Clearly this implies an assumption that the programme will have an impact, but understanding what has changed for participants, why and how, will have important implications for overall evaluation of the programme and questions of how such impacts are part-informed if at all by the non-Western context.

From the literature, we see a call for an approach to evaluation that is both research and a contribution in its own right to the process of development (Jarvis et al 2013: 29) and a more expansive approach such as that asserted by Burns (2009). The expansion Burns (2009:6) calls for is one that goes beyond evaluation of causal relationships that identify the 'what' to greater attention to why things happen and how.

Summary

This paper has sought to present the early preliminary findings of research into developing leaders in public service in Jamaica, a middle-income developing state in the Caribbean. The paper has outlined the research approach and sought to share the process for analysing rich data emanating from elite interviews leading to the identification of emergent themes. At this early stage, the paper shares the process for arriving at two themes, the themes of 'organisational culture' and 'individual participant impact' both important themes in answering the overarching research question. These diverse findings suggest programme impact at some level but are too early in nature to reach firm conclusions. There is much more work to be done in terms of reviewing codes and identifying overlap, duplications etc. The analysis process is on-going and emergent, and will change as further interviews are completed, transcribed and analysed leading to the identification of further important themes.

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