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Entrepreneurial Leadership: A Theoretical and Practical Basis for Learning about Future-Fit Leadership in Schools

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Abstract:

Schools in the 21st century are in dire need of future-fit leaders who are required to conform to the rapidly changing world of technology and innovation. Attributes of such leaders include proactiveness, innovativeness and willingness to take risks. These are some of the hallmarks of entrepreneurial leadership. This paper first picks up some relevant scholastic definitions of entrepreneurialism and, more specifically, entrepreneurial school leadership from a myriad of definitions found in evidence-based literature. Second, it analyses some of the key themes I have garnered about future-fit leadership in a semi-structured interview I conducted with a future-fit leader and the inputs he provided. The interviewee is a business entrepreneur whose ideas about future-fit leaders can be adapted and applied to the educational sector to develop future-fit leaders in schools. Thirdly, case studies of schools in Gauteng, South Africa province, are used as examples of best practices to emulate for effective entrepreneurial leadership in school (Xaba & Malindi, 2010)

Keywords: Proactiveness, innovativeness, entrepreneurial leadership, future-fit leaders

1. Introduction

The education landscape has become dynamic, particularly in poverty-stricken regions of the world. This landscape requires innovative leadership approaches from future-fit leaders who would be able to align with the rapid changes of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). This paper explores the concept of entrepreneurial leadership as a transformative model for future-fit school leaders. This study underscores the applicability of entrepreneurial strategy from the business sector to education by integrating the evidence-based literature and insights from a forward-thinking business/entrepreneur leader.

To drive a pragmatic approach pertaining to practices of entrepreneurial leadership in schools, the findings of the entrepreneurial ventures that were undertaken by the three historically disadvantaged schools which were studied in the Gauteng province - South Africa, are also brought to light (Xaba & Malindi, 2010). Those ventures undertaken by the leaders at those schools complement, to a certain degree, some of the entrepreneurial customs that I have also observed in my niche area in a school with a different context in China. I advance a view that such practices also need to be indigenized and applied in other schools with similar contexts around the world. I present those ventures as the models of how future-fit school leaders should deal with a future linked to the *VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous)* world of the fourth industrial revolution, henceforth referred to as 4IR. To conclude, I argue that although entrepreneurial school leadership is expedient in this era of creativity and innovation, it should not be an end in itself. Instead, I surmise that future-fit school leaders should pursue multi-disciplinary skills and become life-long learners.

2. Literature Review

Literature and dictionaries are flooded with a plethora of definitions of entrepreneurship as a broad concept. In an attempt to clarify what entrepreneurship entails in the context of this paper on entrepreneurial school leadership, Woods, Woods, and Gunter (2007, 2009) identify four different types of *entrepreneurship*. Figure 1 below illustrates the types and expounds on each:

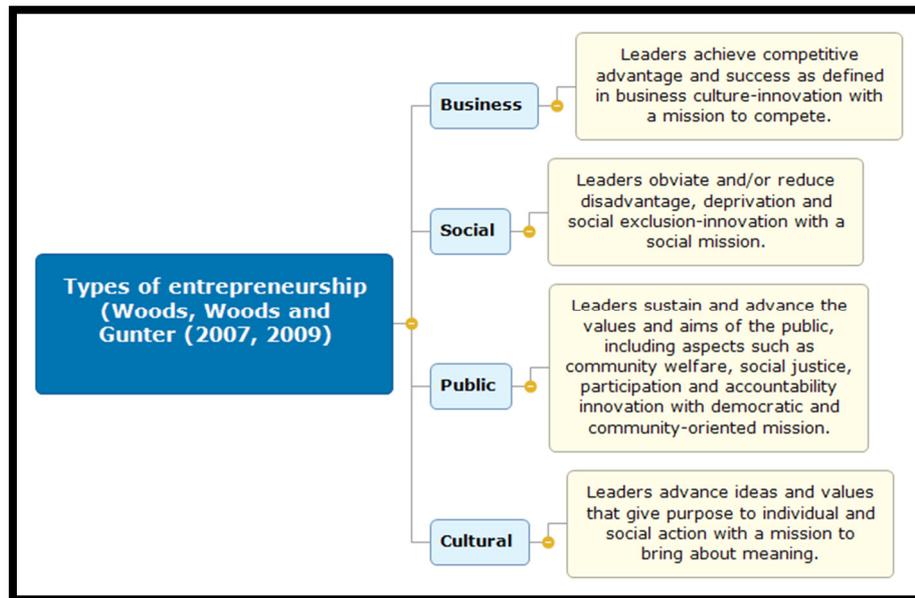


Figure 1: Types of Entrepreneurship
Source: Own Construction

Woods et al. (2007, 2009) further expound that the typology delineated above about entrepreneurship emphasizes the many roles that entrepreneurial school leaders have to assume as well as the tensions that they may be faced with in their endeavours to reconcile the missions alluded to above (i.e. business, social, public and culture). Pashiardis and Savvides (2011:415) identify tensions among the four types of entrepreneurship but admonish that in order to ease off those tensions, different entrepreneurial schools leaders should deliver on their schools' mission and vision by using external networks and resources. The use of external networks and resources by entrepreneurial school leaders is aligned with Xaba and Malindi's (2010:81-84) view that some of the entrepreneurial practices and innovative ventures that the principals in three township schools in the Gauteng province – South Africa, collectively took to see to it that they succeed in attaining the mission and vision of their respective schools. Later, in this reflection, I will revert back to this venture and point them as part of the recommendations as to how those entrepreneurial orientations and practices are imperative for the future-fit leader to embrace within the 4IR space going forward.

Apart from Woods et al. (2007,2009) typology of entrepreneurialism, I am also enthralled by Czariawska-Joerges and Wolff's (1991) definition of entrepreneurship, wherein they aver that entrepreneurship mainly fits contexts which are new and cannot be dealt with by means of experience or routine. Czariawska-Joerges and Wolff (1991) qualify this view by characterizing entrepreneurship as leadership in exceptional circumstances. Hentschke and Cadwell (2007:146) concur with this exceptionality by making another convincing case that any discussion on entrepreneurial leadership borders on an assumption that it can be differentiated from other forms of leadership. Another notable definition of entrepreneurial school leadership is postulated by Woods et al (2007: 237) as the predisposition to and practice of achieving valued ends by creating, taking or pursuing opportunities for change and innovation and finding new resources or utilizing new ways existing resources. Xaba and Malindi (2010:77) provide a more contextual definition by pointing out that entrepreneurship in the school organizational sense means entrepreneurial orientation, which relates to seeking out opportunities that improve both the material and instructional conditions.

2.1. Insights Gained from the Literature and How It Relates to Future-Fit School Leadership

The literature review provides a comprehensive exploration of entrepreneurial leadership within the school educational context. Here are some key insights gained from the review: The four types of entrepreneurialism were elucidated extensively, namely: Business Entrepreneurialism, Social Entrepreneurialism, Public Entrepreneurialism and Cultural Entrepreneurialism. Woods and Gunter (2007, 2009) highlight the multiple roles and tensions entrepreneurial school leaders face in balancing these different missions. Pashiardis and Savvides (2011) suggest that utilizing external networks and resources can help ease off those tensions and support school leaders to attain success in the delivery of schools' missions and visions. Czarniawska-Joerges and Wolff (1991) define entrepreneurship as particularly fitting in new contexts that cannot be managed through experience or routine, emphasizing leadership in exceptional circumstances. This highlights the adaptability and innovation required of entrepreneurial school leaders. (*infra: 1*)

Two definitions of entrepreneurial leadership were explored in the review of the literature. One is characterized by the propensity to achieve valued outcomes by Woods et al. (2007). This definition underscores the proactive and opportunity-seeking nature of entrepreneurial leaders. Another one is highly contextual, as Xaba and Malindi (2010) emphasize entrepreneurial orientation in school leadership as seeking opportunities to improve both material and instructional conditions. This definition reflects the practical application of entrepreneurial principles to enhance educational environments.

Overall, the literature review suggests that entrepreneurial leadership in schools involves a multifaceted approach that combines business acumen, social responsibility, public accountability, and cultural awareness. It highlights the importance of innovation, adaptability, and the strategic use of resources to create meaningful change and prepare schools for future challenges. The review also points to the need for school leaders to embrace these entrepreneurial orientations to navigate the complexities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) effectively.

2.2. Biographical Details of the Transformative Leader

The male transformative leader and a business entrepreneur lives with his family (i.e. wife and three daughters) in Nairobi, Kenya. He holds an MBA from the Stanford University Graduate School of Business. He is an ardent African enthusiast who drives an advocacy that the private sector and not the government is best placed to push the frontiers of poverty. For the past 25 years, he has been involved in Shipping and Logistics. He worked with leading shipping companies - Maersk and Mediterranean before founding Intraline Shipping and Logistics in 2005. His other entrepreneurial pursuits include Real Estate, Commercial Forestry, Media, and e-commerce. He is also the Africa Regional Director for the Transformational Business Network a global movement with more than 2000-member network across seven countries. Its mission is to impact investors and entrepreneurs who are using business to transform lives.

Transformational Business Network has, in the past 15 years, managed to leverage its members to scale the capacity of small entrepreneurs and to provide access to impact investment capital. Jacob, has also served on the board of Hiinga Inc, a nonprofit faith-driven organization that is focused on impact investing fund.

3. Methods Used to Collect Data

Data collection is a technique used by the researcher to collect data about the social realities of individuals, groups or artefacts (Maree, 2019). This definition fits the purpose because I used semi-structured interviews with one individual to collect data about his social realities as a business entrepreneur. According to Brown and Danaher (2019), semi-structured interviews are characterized by the interviewer preparing a list of questions to ask and follow up during the interview while still ensuring that the questions generate open-ended responses and also allowing lines of dialogue to come out in ways which were not anticipated. I made use of the following open-ended questions to give the interviewee to respond to the questions in as much detail as possible (Connor, Desai & Reimers, 2018). The following list of six (6) questions was crafted and made available *to the* interviewee to ponder about the responses prior to the interview:

- How do you define entrepreneurial leadership, and why do you believe it's essential for future-fit schools?
- What specific business models do you think can be adapted for educational leadership, and how?
- Can you provide an example of a successful implementation method of entrepreneurial principles in a school setting?
- How can entrepreneurial leadership address the challenges schools face today?
- What role does technology play in fostering entrepreneurial leadership in schools?
- What advice would you give to educators and school leaders who want to incorporate entrepreneurial principles into their leadership style?

The transcript of the full interview is attached *herein the Appendix*.

3.1. Interpretations and Insights Gained from the Interview

Some of the key themes that I took away from the interview I held with my future-fit leader include the insinuation he made that the best forms of entrepreneurial leadership are practised when projects are performed innately from the heart, with passion and as a gift to one's community. This view also finds resonance and expression in Soto's (2010:309) assertion that projects from the heart are capable of leading to social justice, thus drifting the modus operandi away from the oppressive way of doing things and towards the attainment of freedoms. I was also enthralled by how the future-fit leader elaborated on the lean startup model and how the principles thereof can be adapted, indigenized and applied to the education sector.

He is also acutely aware of the inevitability of the 4IR as he alluded to the fact that future-fit leaders cannot afford to ignore technology and have to adapt and live up to the rapid rate at which technology evolves, thus changing the world. This view is affirmed by Schwab's (2016:1) statement as cited in Carrim (2022:11), where he avers that relatively compared with other previous industrial revolutions that came before, the 4IR is evolving at an exponential rate in contrast to others that evolved at a linear pace.

Moreover, when I quizzed my future-fit leader during the interview about whether machines and/or technology can replace human beings in the future, he responded by pointing out that every revolution, past, present and future, could not have materialized without the human factor. I found his insights about the need for future-fit leaders to make themselves more efficient and productive in controlling machines and/or technology in the future fascinating. His ideas on this question resonate with Marwala's (2020) assertions that contrary to the fallacy that machines will take human beings' jobs in the future, those machines require human beings to operate them, and that makes human beings irreplaceable machines. The last significant takeaway I drew from the interview was my future-fit leader's insightful opinions on how we need to abandon the traditional methods of leadership and adopt the new trends. He explicitly emphasized the need for future-fit leaders to be agile, open-minded and receptive to new ideas. He cautioned against propensities to be stuck in the same old ways of doing things. That attested to my future-fit leader's innovative attributes as an entrepreneur.

Kamper (2008:2) provides an in-depth description of the *historically disadvantaged* schools in South Africa by asserting that they are characterized by unkept premises, rundown buildings, damaged and insufficient furniture, poor waste management and ablution facilities and physically dangerous areas. Xaba and Malindi (2010:75) posit that these

schools often face the challenges of devising innovative and creative ventures to acquire much-needed resources to deliver education to their communities. They refer to such ventures as entrepreneurial orientations and practices of entrepreneurial customs. One entrepreneurial venture was to spot an opportunity that other schools were not using and creatively find ways to turn it to their schools' advantage. The venture in question had to do with the three schools running a *Collect-A-Can* competition and collecting empty cans with the help of the community members to recycle them for a fee. Another entrepreneurial venture was to buy a machine that makes toilet paper from the proceeds generated from collecting cans and selling toilet paper to neighbouring schools for profit. Other ventures included using community members and parents who know and are familiar with the right channels to negotiate with big donor companies on the schools' behalf for donations. One other noteworthy entrepreneurial venture was to save money by utilizing the skills of unemployed parents to further their ventures (Xaba & Malindi, 2010:87). All those examples of the entrepreneurial ventures undertaken by the *historically disadvantaged* schools in South Africa, I have also witnessed them being applied here in many communities across the lengths and breaths of China. Most communities here take great ownership of their schools, and they are actively involved in fundraising activities. They often volunteer to provide services to the schools where their own children attend, irrespective of their socio-economic status or whether the school is private or public.

All the ventures that the leaders of the three schools undertook indicate innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking, which are attributes related to entrepreneurship. One innovative idea the schools implemented was the creativity of having parents and community members do some jobs for the schools without being paid a huge salary. These are attributes of entrepreneurial leadership that would be crucial for future-fit leadership in South African schools and other schools around the world. Mathematicians, engineers and scientists within communities can be recruited to offer support to the mathematics and science teachers in the townships without expecting to be remunerated. The three schools also indicate an entrepreneurial orientation of proactiveness by not just focusing much on receiving resources from donors only but also exploiting other opportunities to attract resources for their respective schools. For all three schools, entrepreneurial pursuits were not only focused on getting funding or resources. According to Xaba and Malindi (2010:85-86), in all three schools in the case study, there was strong evidence of proactiveness and innovative pursuits in teaching and learning. For example, effective teaching and learning were also used as a marketing strategy to lure resources. Another entrepreneurial element that comes out of the ventures undertaken by the three schools is risk-taking. The three schools relentlessly pursued the projects they undertook without fear of failure whilst taking calculated risks. Risk-taking would, therefore, be considered as another attribute that a future-fit school leader should possess in order to survive the *VUCA* world that is brought along by the 4IR.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has been successful in advocating for entrepreneurial leadership as a relevant model to adopt for future-fit school leaders, especially in poverty-stricken schools around the world. This is based on evidence-based academic literature discussed and the insights gained from an interview with a future-fit business leader who opined that best practices from business entrepreneurs can be indigenized, adapted and applied to support entrepreneurial leadership in schools with typical contexts. The information garnered through a semi-structured interview with a future-fit business leader from the business sector was meticulously selected to suit the educational school context. The three South African schools used in this paper as examples of good practice for entrepreneurial school leadership are aptly relevant to be modelled by other schools with similar contexts. I surmise that most of the ventures that were undertaken by those schools are aligned with the insights gained from the interview and, as such, need to be encouraged and adopted.

Lastly, it was argued in this paper that entrepreneurial school leadership should not be an end in itself; future-fit leaders in the 4IR space should have multi-disciplinary leadership skills. There is so much more involved in this revolution than what has been experienced before. Moreover, the pace of technological advancement is moving too fast. It, therefore, behoves future-fit leaders to be well prepared, adapt and learn fast so that no school leader is left behind.

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Appendix

Transcript of the Semi-Structured Interview

The interviewer's name is abbreviated SM and the interviewee's pseudo name is ZIK.

SM: I really appreciate the time you took out of your busy schedule to do this interview on entrepreneurial leadership and its application to schools. I am glad that you are giving me this opportunity. Let's cut to chase... How do you define entrepreneurial leadership, and why do you believe it's essential for future-fit schools?

ZIK: Entrepreneurial leadership involves leaders being innovative, adaptable, and forward-thinking. It's about recognizing opportunities and taking calculated risks to achieve organizational goals. In schools, entrepreneurial leadership implies encouraging a culture of innovation and preparing students for a rapidly changing world. Future-fit schools need leaders who can navigate uncertainties and inspire students to think creatively and critically.

SM: What specific business models do you think can be adapted for educational leadership, and how?

ZIK: One model that stands out is the lean startup approach, which emphasizes rapid iteration and feedback. School Management Teams (SMTs) can use five key principles of this model: Entrepreneurs are everywhere, Entrepreneurship is management, Entrepreneurship is validated learning, Entrepreneurship is innovation accounting, and Entrepreneurship builds measured learning. Additionally, the collaborative structures seen in tech- companies, like cross-functional teams, can be applied to encourage interdisciplinary learning and teamwork among students.

SM: Can you provide an example of a successful implementation of an entrepreneurial approach in a school setting?

ZIK: A great example is the design thinking model to solve real-world problems. Schools can use the design thinking model to engage students in community projects, thus helping them develop critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

SM: How can entrepreneurial leadership address the challenges schools face today?

ZIK: Entrepreneurial leadership can tackle challenges like outdated curricula, disengaged students, and rigid structures by fostering an environment that values creativity, innovation, and adaptability. School leaders can implement project-based learning and encourage partnerships with businesses and communities to provide real-world experiences that make learning relevant, vibrant and exciting.

SM: What role does technology play in fostering entrepreneurial leadership in schools?

ZIK: Technology cannot replace teachers. Learning requires a human touch. Technology is just a catalyst for change and innovation. It enables personalized learning, access to global resources, and collaboration beyond classroom walls. Schools that embrace technology can create more engaging and flexible learning environments, preparing students for the digital economy and teaching them to use technology responsibly and creatively.

SM: What advice would you give to educators and school leaders who want to incorporate entrepreneurial principles into their leadership style?

ZIK: Start by cultivating a growth mindset among staff and students, encouraging them to view challenges as opportunities for learning. Embrace experimentation and learn from failures and setbacks. Build a network of mentors and collaborators from the business world to bring fresh perspectives and real-world insights into the school's classroom. Most importantly, create a supportive environment where everyone feels empowered to take risks and innovate.

INVITATION LETTER AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about my involvement in this research.

I have also received, read (or had it read to me) and understood the above written information regarding the study.

I understand that what I say will be written down and / or recorded on tape.

I also agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a protected computerized system.

I may at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation. I am not required to give a reason for withdrawal.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate.

SIGNATURES:

[Note: that there are some instances where signed consent may be substituted with verbal consent; the researcher will sign the form on behalf of the participant after having received verbal consent]

I have read this consent form (or had it read and explained to me), and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. My signature below confirms that:

I agree to participate in the study

Signature of participant:
Signature: _____ Date: 26/08/2024

Researcher Signature: _____

Permission to Audio Record

My signature below confirms that:

I DO NOT give the research staff permission to audio-record my interview
 I give the research staff permission to audio-record my interview

Participant Signature: _____ Date: 26/08/2024

Figure 2: Consent Form to Conduct an Interview