ETON X LAE

LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION

In the academic year 2019-2020, Eton College and the London Academy of Excellence (LAE) launched the Eton X LAE Leadership Institute (ELLI). In total we had 16 students who took part, 8 from each school, all in Year 12. The purpose of the institute was twofold: first, to strengthen the ties between the two schools; and second, to give students the opportunity to reflect on leadership and discuss what it takes to be a good leader. Even though the cohort was very small in size and we cannot draw any major conclusions there were 4 key learnings from the pilot:

1. Leadership is a topic which students are keen to discuss and can form the basis for partnership programmes. There is extrinsic motivation since students see it as a skill which is useful for their university application and future job prospects and intrinsic motivation since manifestations of leadership affect topics which students are interested in: equality, environment, society at large. Therefore, we found it a relevant topic to base this project on. It captured students' interest and generated thought-provoking discussions.

2. Students' perceptions of leadership might not change substantially after such a short intervention but the language they use to talk about leadership can change substantially. Whereas before the programme students mentioned confidence or communication as important in a leader, alongside skills such as kindness and empathy, after the programme the students showed a more nuanced approach to their understanding and descriptions of leadership and how good leadership can be manifested in crises, such as Covid-19.

3. Having diverse voices in a forum which allows for constructive debate and dialogue is a valuable format to both challenge preconceptions but also to build on each other's knowledge. We found that even though students did not always agree with each other's definitions or ideas they challenged each other in a respectful way which allowed for ideas to be constructively debated and new arguments to develop. Giving students intellectually stimulating reading can act as a great means for such discussions to happen.

4. The geographic limitations posed by the location of the two schools (one near Windsor and the other in East London) meant that we had planned for some of the sessions to take place online prior to Covid-19 forcing schools to close and online learning becoming the norm in many schools. We drew from Professor Salmon's work on moderating discussions online, which is somewhat different to teaching online since the sessions were less about adults teaching students and more about enabling dialogue. We found that very quickly students formed friendships across the schools since they are very comfortable with using online means to connect. This led to lively discussions during the sessions but also while students were completing group tasks in preparation for the live sessions. The online format progressed from the adults helping students familiarise themselves with the online environment to them being there to facilitate the process while students felt more and more comfortable guiding the discussion and building on each other's responses. Students embraced this format of online discussion. The adults running it need little training on the materials and the move to online teaching in the last few months has familiarised more people with online technology. This makes us feel confident that the programme can run on a much bigger scale online.

Below we outline some of the key findings that came from the sessions and our data collection throughout the programme:

STUDENT MOTIVATION FOR THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN ELLI AND UNDERSTANDING OF LEADERSHIP

STUDENT MOTIVATION

Since we could only have a limited number of students be part of ELLI, we wanted to understand student motivation for their involvement. The responses illustrated why students want to deepen their understanding of leadership. For example, one student mentioned their desire to understand others' points of view:

> *I wish to explore others' priorities in life, mainly those coming from different backgrounds from mine.*

Other students saw this as an opportunity to develop confidence:

> *I would love to be involved in this programme as I believe that I have been quite reserved and that is something I would like to change. I believe that this programme will be great in allowing me to become more confident in myself and my ideas.*

The importance of self-reflection and improvement was also noted:

> *Many individuals would argue leadership and its related skills occur naturally as innate qualities of an individual, however, I believe that it is something that can be developed and grown in every respect.*'

Another student also commented on the fact that they wanted to reflect on their current understanding of leadership and be pushed to redefine what good leadership looks like, through discussions both with like-minded people and with those who think differently. Moreover, students believed that developing leadership skills and being able to talk about them would be needed while applying for university or later on for jobs.

Students also talked about the importance of this course in understanding those from different backgrounds and how they view leadership. Arguably, students from LAE and Eton tend to come from different socioeconomic and perhaps cultural backgrounds.

> *I want my view of the ideal leader to be challenged by people from distinctly different backgrounds in order to be able to get a better understanding of what a leader is.*

Other students saw the importance of the programme as lying in interacting with students from the other school.

> *Not particularly interested in becoming educated on good leadership, but it does serve as a good icebreaker for building relationships with the LAE students.*

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LEADER?

Before starting the sessions, we also asked students to tell us what good leadership looks like to them. We wanted to understand their initial reflections on leadership before starting our discussions as a group. Some of the responses were as might have been expected; for example, students mentioned communication skills, motivation, time management, teamwork, confidence and problem-solving as leadership qualities. However, their answers also featured less predictable qualities such as kindness, respect, tolerance, calmness, patience, humility, and positivity. Students also mentioned the importance of realising that any decisions a leader makes need to show respect for the fact that others trust you to be in that position. A student mentioned the importance of keeping an open mind, regardless of how big or small the decision that needed to be made, and not allowing personal biases to affect a leader's judgement. Interestingly, one student said: '*There is no formula to become a great leader, however, as with anything there will always be a recipe for disaster.*' If a leader makes poor decisions which do not consider others' opinions, and does not try to unify their team, then their leadership will flounder.

FUTURE CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP

One of the most common ways that the students believed leadership will change in the future was through the impact of technology. Instant communication with one's team will mean that leaders become more present and will be able to find out what everyone thinks. Social media will require savvy communication skills but also managing a leader's public persona so as to be able to meet expectations.

Students also believed that the old hierarchical model of leadership will not be viable in the future. The various aspects of a business or a company require multiple skills which are no longer feasible for one person to master. Moreover, young people's understanding of equality means that following one leader is not aligned to how they lead their lives and they are keener on a distributed leadership models. Leaders, they thought, will need to prioritise issues which are affecting society rather than concentrate on profits. Lastly, students thought that leaders will need to use language in a way that unifies people and move away from some of the divisive language that is used today; otherwise, some of the recent developments in equality might be reversed.

WHY DO WE NEED GOOD LEADERS?

Before commencing the programme (and before Covid-19), we wanted to see what issues they believed were facing the world that require good leaders. Students believed that leadership more broadly was in crisis and there were not many good leaders to deal with pressing issues. Climate change was mentioned as an example of something which requires urgent attention. Students referred to Greta Thunberg, the young Swedish girl and climate activist, as someone who is showing great leadership in this area. They mentioned that she shows powerful communication skills with a clear message. Leaders also need expert knowledge and to refer to the scientific advice to be able to solve issues.

Another issue which the students identified was inequality, both within the UK and abroad. They believed that strong leaders with a global vision were needed to defend minorities which are facing violence, and unite people across the globe, moving away from national and populist language. As one student put it:

> At a time when global problems seem closer than ever (such as climate change), governments seem unable to cooperate as a united front. Divisions

are as prevalent as ever and no country seems able to move beyond their own self-interest. In order to face future crises, we will need a dramatic change in global perceptions of responsibility and purpose, which will require strong leadership to be brought about.

SESSION OUTLINE

In total we held four sessions. For the first and last sessions all the students came together as a single group. In the launch, we divided them into groups of four (with two from each school) and told them that this would be their group that they would work with throughout the programme. The students, despite the distance and then Covid-19 resulting in school closures and lockdown, quickly found ways to communicate and ensure that everyone in the group was participating sufficiently. Below is a description of the four sessions.

Session 1:
For the first session, students had a pre-reading that looked at notions of leadership that could be described as outdated. Students were asked to question a view that sees leadership as a male pursuit, centres around the golden rule, and is about being confident in order to assert your leadership.

Session 2:
In this session, students looked at definitions and levels of tolerance and its importance in a good leader. They were then asked to reflect on diversity, moving from tokenistic acceptance of diversity to demanding diversity and how they can realise this as leaders.

Session 3:
Session 3 focused on integrity and students' understanding of integrity. The discussion centred around integrity in 'grey areas' and in online settings. They answered questions around what character traits can be associated with integrity and how a leader can cultivate them.

Session 4:
The last session, which took place during lockdown, asked students to give group presentations on the question, 'Understanding leadership in uncertain times: why tolerance and integrity matter now more than ever'. We also had a guest speaker, Lt Col Dennis Vincent MBE, who is the Acting Head at the Department of Communication and Applied Behavioural Science at the RMA Sandhurst Faculty for Leadership, Security, and Warfare. He spoke about leadership development in Cadets and the values approach that is adopted at Sandhurst.

EVALUATING LEADERSHIP SHOWCASED DURING COVID-19

Since the Covid-19 pandemic gave the opportunity to see leadership in action, the last session and data collection focused on leadership during Covid-19. First, students were asked to give a written response to evaluate leadership that was showcased by various leaders

Students commented on some good leadership but also some bad examples. For example, they mentioned that some leaders have not put their people's views ahead of their own and they did not show humility. This meant that people did not feel supported or were not willing to follow the rules. Other bad examples were when leaders have put party politics in front of the national unity and wellbeing, or were not truthful. The students also criticised racist comments that were targeted towards where the virus originated from.

Good examples included when leaders were honest and had clear communication which was truthful even if it had some difficult messages. Building trust was deemed as very important and students praised leaders who succeeded in that; they believed that honesty was one of the best ways to achieve this. They also commented on that the fact that ethnic and class differences meant that different groups of people experienced the pandemic differently, so leaders who understood the different support that was needed were deemed to be good leaders.

In the last session students were asked to present on the topic, 'Understanding leadership in uncertain times: why tolerance and integrity matter now more than ever'. Below are the main points covered in each presentation.

Group A.

- Uncertainty has been everywhere, in emails, letters, and communications that we send and receive. Even though the main tragedy is people suffering from the virus and have poor health, the majority are struggling from the uncertainty and this has negative implications for their mental health.

- The disparities in how virus is affecting different ethnicities has made a great impression on people. There have also been many headlines that focused on the economic problems caused which are affecting those in precarious positions and often those who tend to get more ill from the virus. Leaders need to provide support to people, deciding what they are willing to 'sacrifice' and show their priorities. This is an area where they can showcase their integrity.

- The good thing to come out of the crisis was that communities have come together and people were able to show their kindness by creating local hubs and supporting those who needed their help.

Group B.

- Tolerance in politics is manifested by people being willing to overlook differences and to compromise. It is vital in enabling different groups in society to voice their opinions about what is going on in their lives and to foster meaningful dialogue. In this case, this was around measures that are being implemented, raising concerns, or praising others (such as key workers). This was often more easily said than done because often leaders were reluctant to open constructive dialogue and compromise for the common good. We saw a culture of intransigence among many leaders. There was also political intolerance towards specific groups that has become stark by seeing certain groups are suffering more than others. This was obvious when people felt threatened and believed their resources to be running out and sometimes showed intolerance, prejudice, or bias. This was more prevalent among leaders and politicians than among the general population, however.

Group C.

- In the workplace, it is important for leaders to show balance between whether they care about profits or show people they care about them. During the current crisis this was particularly important as a lot of workers felt very vulnerable about their future.

- It is important for leaders to show integrity by recognising their flaws and being self-aware of their own limitations. This will result in them being less biased and make decisions which empower others in times of crisis. This can be done by accepting their flaws, showing their weaknesses and not trying to present the perfect façade. This will show to those who work with them that it is also fine to show weakness, especially during difficulty. This kind of integrity will give them moral satisfaction instead of focusing on profits, and it will allow others to trust them.

Group D.

- Tolerance is about discovering individual strengths and seeing the need for empathy and understanding. Tolerance is also a sign of strength even though not all leaders see it as such. In any team tolerance is vital, as otherwise there are no common goals or trust between the members of the group. This applies not only in small teams but across society as a whole.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The results of this first pilot have been encouraging and we aim to expand on this project. There are 3 aims underpinning our future direction:

1. Create further opportunities for partnership and collaboration among the two schools which will encourage healthy debate and dialogue among a much larger number of students.
2. Measure the impact of the programme, using a mixed methods approach, to understand how students view leadership and what impact this has on character development; and to understand whether such an intervention plays a role in the academic attainment of students on FSM.
3. Create materials on leadership that can be used across settings alongside training materials for teachers to be able to deliver the sessions in different schools.

This will be a 3-step process:

- In the Autumn term of 2020-2021 we will run another pilot with a new cohort of students from the two schools. We will further test out the methodology, i.e. the online provision of the programme. We also want to test out the materials to ensure both that they are intellectually challenging and stimulate discussion among students.
- LAE have secured funding from the Department for Education which will be matched by Eton for a scaled-up project both in terms of students taking part but also in terms of the activities that will be offered. Starting in January 2021, we aim to recruit a

much larger cohort of students from LAE and Eton. This will not only involve students, but also staff from who will collaboratively and develop a programme which is ambitious in aim and scope but will allow for a more comprehensive measurement of the impact of the programme.

- Once we have measured the impact of the programme and have confidence in the materials, we will train teachers in other schools to create similar leadership institutes in their schools. Our longer-term aim is for the programme run without the need for Eton or LAE to be involved; although Eton can help schools measure the impact in other schools.

REFERENCES

Salmon G. (2000). E-*moderating: the key to teaching and learning online*. London: Kogan Page.