UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Middlesex University London

BIRMINGHAM BUSINESS SCHOOL

Smart Leadership for Smart Cities

Leadership Foundations for Smart City Practitioners

Background and Context

Advocates of the Smart Cities movement argue that important advantages for cities can be secured through a digitally-enabled integration of their physical, social and other technological assets. At the same time, knowledge-oriented leadership approaches are influencing the design and delivery of urban policy innovations.

Many 'smart' projects aspire to generate new knowledge and exploit and spread knowledge across cities for improved local economic development, social and environmental outcomes.

Aiming to fill some gaps in our understanding of how Smart Cities can work to their full potential - our research has examined the leadership dynamics in four cities in England - and has surfaced fresh learning about the ways in which effective knowledge-oriented leadership is enacted in these places.

About the Research

- Our research into Smart City leadership was jointly funded by the University of Birmingham Business School and Middlesex University Business School;
- The project has examined leadership in action in four Smart Cities in England; we interviewed forty key individuals who were involved in the design and delivery of Smart City projects, and gathered their experience of local knowledge generation, sharing and spread;
- The cities were selected based on their declared intention to develop Smart Cities initiatives, their urban scale and geographical coverage;
- Based on analysis of the findings and by using an analytical device known as ideal types, we have identified fresh leadership learning about the variety of approaches being adopted across these cities.

The Case Studies

The four Smart Cities and the local smart initiatives we examined were:

- Birmingham – the Birmingham Smart City Vision has stimulated a radical re-think around the provision of smart health and social care in the context of public service budget reductions and the demands this is placing on the delivery of quality health care, community and other related local services.
- Manchester - the Manchester Smart-ip project is testing smart working around mobility, engagement and the environment. By developing a web app to enable 'community reporting' and a crowd-sourcing device called 'green energy watch', the project is now allowing members of the public to share feedback on their experience of new energy saving devices.
- Bristol – the Sola Bristol project involves the application of new digitally integrated energy management technologies that are being developed by the private sector in partnership with social housing residents and local regeneration organisations and schools.
- Peterborough - the Peterborough DNA project brings together innovation, skills and environmental resources from across the city to take advantage of new 'green markets' and to develop and grow new and more environmentally sustainable local businesses.

The four case studies represent very different types of active Smart City projects. Whilst each case city is unique - in terms of urban scale and economy, local social mix, organisational arrangements, technology mix and strategic aspirations - taken together their experiences nevertheless reveal a number of foundational leadership insights.

Key Leadership Learning

The 'good practice' learning we have gathered from the four case cities suggests that knowledge-oriented leadership appears to work best where there is evidence of:

- **Blending** – where it is understood that solutions to complex economic, social and technological challenges in Smart Cities require knowledge, expertise and experience to be gathered and combined from across the public, private and third sector;

- **Expertise** – where those in leadership roles are digitally-literate and have a sound understanding of the specific technologies and processes involved and how new digitally-integrated business models and markets are working at the local, national and international scale;
- **Social literacy** – leadership that has a good understanding of the implications and impacts that these new smart technologies and processes will have on the working lives, developmental opportunities and general well-being of local people;
- **Relational worldview** - rather than positional – this means leadership approaches and behaviours that are capable of stimulating, exploiting and disseminating learning - and that create a positive atmosphere that supports the creation and exchange of knowledge, especially knowledge which is more intuitive, tacit and emergent over time;
- **Long-range thinking** – thinking beyond the immediate project – a leadership approach that is concerned with securing and improving economic, social and environmental outcomes for local businesses and residents over the long term;
- **Light-touch** - in the context of diverse urban spaces, leadership that encourages ideas and innovation to bubble up from the grass-roots – and where priorities on smart projects are co-determined by the full range of local agencies and residents;
- **Ability to tap into and mobilise tacit knowledge** – a non-prejudicial approach to gathering knowledge which is embedded in very fluid and transient local networks, organisations of all types and from the everyday experiences of local residents;
- **Whole team and including approaches** - where leadership is conceived and enacted as a shared activity appropriate for tasks that are highly interdependent, complex and requiring high levels of creativity.

Some Concluding Observations – A Question of Balance?

- There are new and more technologically-intense challenges at all scales in Smart Cities;
- This is one important reason why the quality of local leadership matters - and where local leadership can play a pivotal enabling role;
- The everyday 'good practice' experience in our four Smart Cities underlines that it is important to gather, develop and deploy the combined expertise, assets and other resources of the private sector, local authorities, the third sector and local residents – in order to find, share and deliver creative solutions to complex problems at both the strategic and operational level;
- Working across a host of institutions, firms and communities with very different needs, capabilities and cultures, Smart City leadership teams are required to be highly adaptive and to master a range of everyday leadership skills including communication, defining priorities, negotiation, conflict resolution, building consensus, securing resources and so on;
- At the same time, they have to work continuously to ensure they remain up to date with the implications of (and the opportunities afforded by) rapidly emerging digital business models, local, national and international markets and processes – and whilst taking on board changing community needs and capacities;
- However, whilst this 'menu' of conventional everyday leadership skills is very important – it is critical that Smart City leadership approaches are underpinned and informed by a clear sense of long range social purpose;
- In order to maximise the full economic, social and environmental potential of a smart urban development agenda, we suggest that Smart Leadership is about: understanding the close interdependence of businesses and communities in cities and that success involves creating and maintaining balanced and mutually beneficial relationships across business and community needs in the digital era;
- This means continuing investment of leadership time, energy and resources into helping both local firms and local people to connect to, and benefit from, the opportunities afforded by new forms of digitally-enabled economic prosperity and employment;
- Leadership that promotes and enables collaborative approaches to knowledge creation, knowledge sharing and knowledge dissemination across a whole Smart City partnership is an important local attribute.

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