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Boundary Crossing in School Governing Bodies: Perspectives from the Business Community

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Introduction

Policy changes to school governance in England over the last two decades have seen schools being run as businesses (Wilkins, 2015), with an emphasis upon Governing Bodies (GBs) having the right skill-set, which now include skills relating to business, finance, the law and process management. Research into these changes has tended to be quite negative, with a view that a shift towards skills threatens the stakeholder model (Connolly et al., 2017) and marginalises 'lay' knowledge through privileging 'managerial' knowledge (Young, 2017). There is no research, however, into the experiences of new governors primarily recruited for their business expertise in terms of the development they undertake in order to participate effectively in the educational landscape of school GBs.

In this paper we focus on the perspectives and experiences of members of the business community as they develop and cross boundaries of practice in taking on the role of a school governor. The paper is drawn from a wider evaluation project (Author 1 et al., 2018) commissioned by Lloyds Banking Group (LBG) to evaluate the company's pilot school governance initiative known as the StandingOut (SO) programme. The evaluation was run by researchers in a post-1992 University in the North of England and focused on the experiences of new independent, external, business-based governors (IEB governors) in the Yorkshire and Humberside region from September 2016 until the end of January 2018. LBG based the need for an evaluation on two broad assumptions: that better governance and stronger financial business practices in schools can lead to better educational outcomes; and that the business sector can offer skills to strengthen school GBs in a context of academisation. The SO programme had a number of strands but the main one comprised of two different types of school governors- full governors (FGs), appointed by a school GB through School Governors' One-Stop Shop (Sgoss) and e-governors (e-govs), intended to work with schools remotely - as well as non-Executive Directors (NEDs), attached to a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) specifically to assist with academy leadership.

We interviewed 18 IEB governors employed by LBG and recruited through the SO Programmes four times over twelve months in order to capture their experiences as they settled into their roles. At the end of the twelve months, key school stakeholder perspectives (e.g. Headteachers, Chairs of governors) on IEB governors' were captured. In contrast to Connolly et al. (2017) and Young (2017), the perspectives we present suggest ways in which the business sector can make a positive contribution to school governance. Central to this is how IEB governors engaged in development, crossing boundaries to acquire educational knowledge – a manoeuvre which often altered their professional knowledge, 'transforming' the nature of their participation for the benefit of both the school and the company alike (Clark et al., 2017). By exploring how volunteers from business transform their practice to become governors, our research indicates the need for further research into GBs as well as how the business sector might engage with school governance.

Policy context

In recent years education in England has experienced a shift in how the school system operates, especially in terms of how it is governed and made accountable. The process of change, which began in 2001 when New Labour introduced the first academisation of schools programme for failing schools, continues with the current Conservative government's plans to convert all schools into MATs or free schools, as outlined in their White Paper 'Education Excellence Everywhere' (DfE, 2016). This is seen as giving schools financial independence, meaning that schools are required to have not just 'good governance' but also a professionalised GB that ensures they meet professional

standards, offer technical expertise and secure performance evaluation as mechanisms for improving public service delivery (Wilkins, 2015: 182). At the same time, however, the 2017 annual National Governance Association (NGA) and TES survey demonstrates that this change may not be so far reaching as four out of five school governors in England, '…are, or used to be, managers, directors, senior officials or professionals, and this applies to elected parents as much as any others' (Holland, 2017: 3).

Since the 1988 Education Reform Act assigned responsibility for a school's strategic planning to its GB (James et al., 2013), the importance of school governance has grown. A GB is no longer positioned simply as a 'critical friend', supporting the Headteacher's decisions but is responsible for the three core functions (DfE, 2015: 7): ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction; holding the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school, its pupils and staff; and overseeing the financial performance of the school, making sure money is well spent. In 2013, Ofsted significantly raised the 'inspection bar' in terms of GBs (James et al., 2013) and the latest Ofsted inspection handbook (2018: 29) highlights the importance of a high performing GB: 'the contribution of governors to the school's performance is evaluated as part of the judgement on the effectiveness of leadership and management.' A school cannot be awarded 'outstanding' if its GB falls short on any of criteria against which it is assessed.

School GBs should include individuals with business expertise and the following skill-sets: knowledge of the legal sector in a number of different areas; the ability to manage processes; the experience and knowledge of running a business; and finance and leadership. Such skill-sets are often associated with the private sector. Running a school, as Lord Nash pointed out in 2013, is now akin to running a business (Wilkins, 2015: 188). The White Paper (DfE, 2016) states:

> High quality governance is vital as we devolve more power from local and national government to schools. GBs need to be skills-based and focused on the strategic functions of setting a vision and holding school leaders to account for the educational and financial performance of their schools.

The two skill-sets of leadership and finance formed the main focus as to why LBG first became involved in schools as well as the evaluation on which this paper is based.

The local context

In June 2014, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, launched the 'Northern Powerhouse' agenda. He believed that the North was significantly underperforming economically and that promoting investment and offering devolution to its major cities would serve to rebalance the UK economy as a whole (Clifton et al., 2016: 7). Initially the focus was centred on transport and connectivity but then incorporated education, training and skills. A report from the Institute for Public Policy Research North (Clifton et al., 2016) outlined both the North's strengths and weaknesses, concluding that if it is to succeed in reaching and sustaining its economic potential, the North must place addressing educational disadvantage 'at the heart' of any transformational objectives.

Economic growth and prosperity depends on having a skilled workforce. However, the workforce in the North of England is lower qualified than the national average (Clifton et al., 2016). According to Ofsted (2015), 75% of all failing secondary schools are in the North and the Midlands. Arguably the most effective way to upskill the workforce is to raise the education levels of the local population. In October 2016, the government responded to this by launching its 'Opportunity Areas' initiative (Gov.UK, 2016), which include Bradford and the North Yorkshire Coast - areas covered by the SO programme. The primary purpose of Opportunity Areas is to focus local and national resources on the common goal of increasing social mobility through education. According to the government's press release (Gov.Uk, 2017), Opportunity Areas will create local partnerships with early years providers, schools, colleges, universities, businesses, charities and local authorities.

However, the North/South divide continues to persist. A recent article in The Guardian (Perraudin, 2018) reported that 16 year olds from the North receiving free school meals were down an average grade score of 6.5% on their London peers and 1.3% down across England as a whole.

When operating effectively, school governance sits at the centre of raising educational standards. However, it is widely acknowledged that the challenges facing school GBs are greater in areas of socio-economic disadvantage (James et al., 2011: 415) such as Yorkshire and Humberside. One of the ways in which improved educational standards for all pupils can occur is by GBs appointing individual members with the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience to help drive schools forward. Yet current figures (Holland, 2017) show that 57% of schools nationally have at least one vacancy and are struggling to attract new recruits to GBs. According to the NGA (2016 - the latest figures available), the governor vacancy figure for Yorkshire was 56%; amongst the highest in the country.

The SO programme was set up to improve school performance in areas of disadvantage under the Northern Schools Powerhouse strategy. It also forms part of LBG's 'Helping Britain Prosper Plan'. Employees were mainly recruited to the programme through either Sgoss or Academy Ambassadors. In January 2015, the organisation established a National Governors' Network which sought to provide LBG staff who were already school governors with the tools they needed to support their schools. Amongst other support, the Network offered dial-in webinars during working hours to address particular topics relevant to school governance. At the start of the evaluation, approximately 80 out of 400 members of the Network were in the Yorkshire and Humberside region; a higher proportion than anywhere else in the country.

The business community and school governance

Despite recent policy changes to school governance in England, there is a lack of research into how business volunteers develop into their roles as school governors. What research does exist tends to focus on either an educational perspective of the roles played by the business community (Young, 2017) or the ways in which the participation of the business community erodes the stakeholder model (Connolly, et al., 2017; Wilkins, 2016).

This lack of research is surprising, however, when the results of an extensive evaluation of GBs undertaken prior to recent policy changes is taken into account (Balarin et al., 2008). In their evaluation report, the second aim of which was to 'review the business contribution of governors', Balarin et al. (2008: 58) undertook a survey with over 3000 governors from different backgrounds, 80% of whom agreed that the expertise of governors primarily recruited for their business expertise was 'crucial to the running of the schools'. Given the quantitative nature of this aspect of the evaluation, however, what is unclear is why and how the business community's contribution to school governance was held to be crucial and whether it was particular stakeholders who tended to hold this view.

Subsequent research into governance has tended to focus on the negative effects of policy change rather than seeking to unpick why and how 'employee governors'' contributions have in the past been held as 'crucial' to the running of schools (Balarin et al., 2008). Connolly et al. (2017) undertook a literature review to evaluate the effectiveness of the new skills based model of governance as opposed to the traditional stakeholder model. Whilst acknowledging the need for GBs to be more skills-based in terms of their composition in light of policy changes, Connolly et al. conclude that 'the stakeholder approach to school governance continues to have much merit as it affords a degree of authenticity to those representatives as well as a degree of independence not easily replicated in the skills based approach' (2017: 17). By authenticity, Connolly et al. (2017: 6) mean that the GB representative have a genuine 'interest' in their schools. Earlier in their article, Connolly et al. advocate the 'Stakeholder Plus' model of school governance adopted by the Welsh government, which strikes a balance between maintaining the authenticity of the stakeholder model,

placing an emphasis on the need for the GB as a whole to have complementary skills (2017: 7). The Stakeholder Plus model of school governance, recommended by the Welsh Task and Finish Group (2013), will help '…retain the valuable contribution made by the variety of stakeholders in the current school governance model, but the 'Plus' aspect would allow GBs the flexibility and freedom to recruit additional governors on the basis of skills needed' (Welsh Government, 2016).

The idea of a skills based model of school governance as a threat to the stakeholder model is articulated further by Young in research articles (2016; 2017) based on her PhD thesis, with data collected in 2011/12. Drawing upon semi-structured interviews and observations in four maintained schools as well as wider policy critique, Young identifies how the rise of a skills discourse in policy serves to create a false 'skills/ representation binary' (2016: 170). This binary is further explored in a later paper published in this journal and using the same dataset Young (2017: 42) draws upon theories of 'deliberative democracy' to conceptualise GBs and focus on the nature of 'expert' knowledge and how this knowledge interacts with 'lay' knowledge throughout decision-making processes. Whilst emphasising the 'slippery' nature of knowledge types, here Young (2017: 42) differentiates between two forms of 'expert' knowledge at play within a GB – 'educational' and 'managerial' – and articulates how 'lay' knowledge is both marginalised and coopted by 'managerial' knowledge.

Young identifies three key reasons for this. Firstly, within a wider context of performativity where education becomes an auditable product (Ball, 2003), managerial knowledge is privileged as the business of the GB becomes primarily associated with 'compliance-checking' and 'accountability' (2017: 52). This point is further developed by Wilkins (2016: 112) who views the 'performative accountability' of the neoliberal education system as promoting 'calculative technologies' which play to the skills and discourses of the business sector. Secondly, in recognising the value of educational knowledge as expert knowledge, managerial knowledge 'lays claim', however tenuous, to educational knowledge (2017: 53). And thirdly, because lay knowledge tends to be associated with 'vague conceptions of common sense' (2017: 42), managerial knowledge coopts conceptions of 'common sense' leaving little space for lay knowledge to be articulated.

One problem with the way that Young identifies the business community as having little educational knowledge is that it is unclear from her research how many members of the four schools' GBs are from the private sector. Given the figures quoted earlier in this article (Holland, 2017), the majority of Young's GB members could well have fallen into this broad category, although again it would have been useful to have had their skill set as well as employment status (many governors are retired) identified. Furthermore, it is unclear how many governors from the business community participated in each school and whether, therefore, Young is able to capture their perspectives. Finally, the fact that all four schools are local authority maintained could mean that the GBs had an ideological bias against academisation and business governors.

Governor development

In order to think about how the IEB governors developed in their new roles, we draw upon the theoretical framework of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2014) who view professional development as occupying specific 'landscapes of practice'. For Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2014: 19), professional identity and associated knowledge results from participation in landscapes of practice which have three dimensions – 'flat', 'diverse' and 'political'. Here, they see 'flat' as the everyday experiences of a group of professionals who experience their landscape as a predictable and taken for granted normality. GBs, however, are comprised of a 'diverse' group of individuals who, depending upon the landscape of practice they experience outside of their governance roles, will find themselves participating by drawing upon knowledge which, according to Young (2017), is educational, managerial or lay. The lived experience of individuals within GBs is, we would therefore argue, more likely to be one that is 'diverse' rather than 'flat'. Linked to this, the

diverse landscape's 'political' dimension is potentially more apparent than other landscapes of practice where, as Young's work articulates, expert knowledge is valued and lay knowledge is marginalised.

What a landscape of practice like a GB brings to the surface, therefore, are boundaries between different practices where individuals have a 'lack of a shared history' which means that these 'boundaries are places of potential misunderstanding and confusion arising from different regimes of competences and commitments, values, repertoires, and perspectives' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2014: 9). Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2014) key idea is that learning in the form of professional development occurs through 'crossing boundaries' – an often uncomfortable manoeuvre that involves shifting away from the safety of a 'flat' landscape. For Clark et al. (2017), in order for professional development to occur it is the nature of the relationships between participants as they cross boundaries which needs articulating and exploring. When this occurs boundaries between practices are not merely identified through difference but are crossed as learning takes place through a 'hybridisation' of practice (Clark et al, 2017: 245). Young's research where 'lay' knowledge is seen as marginalised by managerial knowledge suggests hybridisation which involves lay knowledge could be difficult to achieve within GBs, especially as educational and managerial knowledge form their own exclusive hybrid practice within the context of performativity.

Project design

The evaluation team consisted of four members of staff from a post-1992 university located in the North of England who addressed the following research questions:

1. How does the SO programme contribute to improved school performance and educational outcomes?

2. What evidence is there that the interventions increase the confidence, knowledge and skills of school GBs and leadership teams?

3. What evidence is there that the interventions strengthen school governance and business practices?

4. How do these interventions contribute to colleagues' career professional development?

Running over four school terms, the evaluation took a mixed methods approach, gathering both qualitative and quantitative data through interviews, school case studies, surveys and workshops. In this paper, we focus on data gathered during the interviews and school case studies. Rather than present data which responds to the research questions above, we draw upon data which was originally gathered to answer all four questions.

In total, 109 (mainly phone) interviews were carried out with a range of stakeholders including: LBG participant school governors (69); School Executives (13); Chairs of Governors (14); School Business Managers (SBM), or equivalent (5); IEB governors' line managers (4) and key stakeholders (4). These stakeholders were chosen as members of GBs and Trust Boards who could help answer the questions above. Teachers and parents were not included, although we recognise the value of including their perspectives in future research. The perspectives gathered served to enrich the project, providing other perspectives upon the participation and impact of the IEB governors on schools and the ways in which this might also have benefitted LBG. All LBG participants involved in the programme were asked by LBG if they would volunteer to be part of the evaluation - 18 agreed. The volunteers represented 23% of those recruited to the SO pilot programme at the start of the evaluation. As indicated earlier, the evaluation tracked IEB governors from the start of their journey on the SO programme to approximately one year after being appointed as a school governor or NED. The 18 IEB governors (nine FGs; five e-govs; and four NEDs) were interviewed up to four times by phone by the same researcher. This provided the evaluation team with longitudinal and in-depth data on each LBG governor and their experience of being a new school

governor.   Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and the interviews were spread approximately four months apart. The interviews aimed to capture the IEB governors' experience of school governance at different stages and covered issues such as: the recruitment and induction process; training and support offered; and how well they settled into their role as a new governor or NED.

All interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed. The evaluation process followed the University's ethics procedures, in line with the British Education Research Association (BERA) guidelines. All participants were given information and consent forms, informing them of their right to withdraw at any time and that all data would be anonymised. A potential problem with this kind of evaluation is bias, with participants and researchers wanting to provide a purely positive outlook on the project under evaluation, especially in light of the evaluation's research questions outlined above and the fact that LBG funded the research. In order to reduce the potential for bias, each LBG governor was interviewed by the same researcher who was, therefore, able to build a sense of rapport and openness. Perceptions of the IEB governors were also compared with perceptions of key stakeholders in order to help verify any claims made. Furthermore, the evaluation team built an honest working relationship with key members of staff from LBG who had tendered the evaluation. This meant that professional discussions took place between the corporation and the evaluation team where data was openly discussed with the aim of improving their practices relating to recruitment, training and retention.

IEB governors and their schools

As outlined in Table 1, IEB governors had a range of primary skill sets and took on the role of either a non-executive director (NED), an e-governor (e-gov), or a full governor (FG). The NEDs were senior leaders within LBG and their governance role was strategic at Multi-Academy Trusts (MAT) level. E-govs were appointed to schools that struggle to recruit governors, largely due to their rural location, the idea being that they could participate in GB meetings remotely. FGs were more traditional in nature, in that they were part of an individual school's GB, they attended meetings in person and often held roles on other school committees.   All but two IEB governors identified themselves as British White with the remaining two self-defined as British Pakistani and British Indian. There were twelve male IEB governors and six females: five male FGs; four male NEDs; and three male e-govs. Female IEB governors accounted for four of the FGs and two of the e-govs.

The Ofsted grades of the individual schools and MATs varied and for this reason have not been included. For e-govs and FGs, however, the majority of the schools they were working with were 'good' (eight), with an equal number 'outstanding' and 'requires improvement' (three each).

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Data analysis

Using NVivo, the evaluation team took a thematic analysis approach to analysing the data across participants through coding (Miles and Huberman, 2014) which broke down the four original research areas above into themes. For this research paper, we returned to our thematic coding in order to explore the extent to which the codes generated matched Young's (2017) heuristic of knowledge as either educational, managerial or lay. Here we acknowledge that through observing GB meetings in action as deliberative democracy, Young sought to exemplify the slipperiness of her categories of knowledge. As we, however, analysed interview transcripts from single IEB governors, our use of these categories is more fixed. Having said this, through identifying IEB governors' use of all three knowledge types, we do go some way to exemplifying one aspect of the slipperiness of knowledge in that knowledge types do not align with individuals but are rather shared and negotiated.

Taking this idea of boundary crossing on board, we analysed interview transcripts to think about how IEB governors viewed and experienced the educational knowledge with which they were initially unfamiliar over a twelve month period. We also thought about their claims to 'lay' knowledge and how this manifested itself, particularly in relation to their 'authenticity' as governors with a

genuine interest (Connolly, 2017) in their schools. Three new themes emerged which are discussed in this paper: the importance of acquiring educational knowledge to cross boundaries; acquiring lay knowledge and demonstrating lay values in participating effectively as a governor; and transforming managerial knowledge to impact upon schools as well as professional life.

Acquiring educational knowledge to cross boundaries

Initially, the evaluation project was set to run for one academic year. However, following our second round of interviews with IEB governors in the spring term, our analysis of the interview transcripts indicated that it was likely to take more than a year for them to settle into their roles and participate more fully in the diverse landscape of practice of their GB. The reasons for this included the infrequency of meetings and difficulties around finding the time to participate, but more fundamentally the initial 'peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) of IEB governors was to do with them realising their need to acquire educational knowledge. In light of this and in light of the aims of the evaluation, the funders agreed to extend the evaluation by one school term. This enabled the evaluation team to complete four interviews with each LBG governor; the last of which took place at least 12 months after the first interview.

Whilst some IEB governors had school-aged children, this tended to be the extent of their educational knowledge prior to becoming a school governor. All were aware of their lack of educational knowledge and some exhibited the 'confusion' caused by a 'lack of a shared history', which is symptomatic of going through a process of boundary crossing (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2014, p.19). Most talked about the educational 'jargon' which they had to learn in order to fully participate and understand governor business. Some also commented on the length of documents circulated prior to meetings.

Whilst the educational discourse of the GB's landscape of practice initially served as a barrier to participation, on the whole, and in line with Young (2017), the IEB governors 'valued' educational knowledge as expert knowledge and were quick to acquire, understand and use it. This meant that rather than being marginalised by the need to cross boundaries, all IEB governors began to make some kind of contribution to meetings from the outset. FG7, for example, was surprised by the speed with which she began to participate: 'at the first meeting I thought I'd probably just sit there, just listening because I'm not really an extrovert person really. But I did actually make quite a few comments, suggestions and raise a few things, ask questions, queries about things.' According to FG8's Chair of Governors, the relative speed of participation in the GB meetings was because:

> If he didn't understand a particular piece of jargon, he certainly asked, "what does that mean?" and "what's the implication of that?" Whereas some other people would just let it wash over them and hope to pick things up; but FG8 was keen to learn more quickly, which was good.

Indeed, not being afraid to ask questions or ask for clarification was seen by some school stakeholders as one of the key strengths of a governor primarily recruited for their business expertise as opposed to a lay governor.

An awareness of the need to acquire educational knowledge in order to participate was linked to the different kinds of governor training accessed by different IEB governors, which included local authority training, school training, StandingOut training as well as IEB governors having access to relevant information through The Key (a website offering information, guidance and resources for school governors). Interestingly, the local authority training was held by the majority of IEB governors as the most beneficial, largely because they were able to interact with individuals who had participated within the school governance landscape for a number of years. As FG8 attested:

> The person who ran it was the Chair of Governors and he was offering his insight on what we should be focussing on, some of the key elements of being

a governor. I found it cut through a lot of the noise and information and helped
me to understand the most important parts of the role.

Equally, IEB governors found The Key helpful, especially if there was a specific aspect of educational knowledge they needed to acquire:

I think if you are looking for something specific it's very useful but there is just a lot there… you wouldn't know where to start if you were just looking in general, but if you're looking for something specific and if you want help with something specific, I think it's really good. (Egov-2)

Some IEB governors also valued filling in a reflective log. Initially, the log was part of the research team's data collection tools, but as the majority of the IEB governors found they did not have time to fill them in, the logs were ultimately not used for this purpose. However, two IEB governors did continue using the logs as a 'boundary object' (Clark et al., 2017), which helped them think about the nature of their participation in the new landscape. For FG3, the log helped her to place her development as a school governor acquiring educational knowledge in a landscape of practice: 'it reminds you of the incremental steps that you've taken along the way because otherwise it's very easy, 16 months on, to think well actually now you're asking me what did I do?'

By comparing the three governor types included in the evaluation, we were able to draw out some generalisations about the ways in which these different groups acquired educational knowledge and what this meant for their participation in the landscape of their GB. No doubt as a result of the skills sets acquired in their jobs as senior leaders, NEDs were least likely to access formal training and most likely to learn through professional conversations with key school stakeholders. NED4, for example, said, 'I've not tapped into any training. I felt like I didn't need it, I've done leadership days before, I've facilitated before, I've set strategies for teams and areas before'; and NED1's CEO testified how NED1 had 'over-performed in terms of his uptake of complicated sector specific knowledge.' E-govs, on the other hand, appeared to be at disadvantage in terms of acquiring educational knowledge, mostly due to technical difficulties experienced in schools, which often prevented e-govs dialling into meetings remotely. Indeed, the e-gov who felt that their participation in the landscape was most effective was one who had also been able to attend some meetings in person: 'I'd been to a few of the meetings so I'd met them all face-to-face and they were a really good group of people. So being on the phone worked really well because I never felt like they'd forgotten that I was there and they kept me included as and when anything was happening' (e-gov2).

Lay knowledge and values

As well as the importance of gaining educational knowledge, the experiences of the e-govs in our evaluation emphasised the importance of personal relationship in terms of participating in the diverse landscape of the GB. Indeed, the building of these relationships with other GB members was evident with most IEB governors and was symptomatic of both the ideological values which had initially motivated their participation as well as the ways in which they endeavoured to gain a contextual understanding of their school or schools. Taken together, these motivations and context specific actions meant that IEB governors were developing 'authenticity' associated with the stakeholder model (Connolly et al., 2017) through acquiring contextual, local knowledge which is similar to Young's lay knowledge (2017).

From a broad ideological standpoint, all IEB governors spoke about wanting to take on a governing role in order to 'make a difference'. Often this was linked to pupil employability and how their organisation could help ensure pupils had the right skills and understanding to enter the world of work, but more generally it was about volunteers working with a school which was part of, or close to, their communities in order to 'give something back'. FG11 proclaimed a 'passion' for schools and a belief that education can change lives:

Education for me is one of those things that makes a big difference. So my family background, I am the first to go to university. That seriously changed the kind of work I do compared to what the rest of my family do…I honestly believe that education is a great game changer. I wish I'd [become a governor] years ago… The more people do it the stronger schools will be, the stronger schools will be then we will all benefit from that.

For IEB governors, their purpose went beyond 'compliance-checking' where education is viewed by professionals as an auditable commodity (Young, 2017; Wilkins, 2016). For FG3, whilst external measures of school competence were important, there was a clear sense of the need to provide a holistic education bespoke to the pupils in the school:

'It's that constructive challenge to help the school move forward with its aims, one of which is of course to become outstanding. But also, I suppose on the softer side, retaining the character of the school whilst at the same time clearly ensuring that the right education is provided to sectors of the pupil population.'

For the majority of IEB governors, understanding the local community as well as the teachers was key in terms of ensuring their effective participation on their GB. This enabled IEB governors to understand and share the values of their schools and in order to do this, most IEB governors visited classes, spoke to teachers and, in some instances where they were unfamiliar with the community, accompanied Community Officers on visits. NED1's CEO recounted:

… he spent a morning in school and went out on home visits with our New to English Team who support Roma students who have very poor attendance records and he went out with them in the minibus and he watched them. In fact, he did a home visit with one of them and knocking a kid up who hasn't got up and out to school but trying to get them in for the rest of day. So, that had the impact that the people doing the work felt very much recognised.

For his CEO, this was a clear indication that NED1 was 'just a thoroughly decent guy. He's got the schools' interests at heart.'

Equally, there was an awareness and understanding of the importance of the GB in leading the school and how the IEB governors had an obligation to commit their time and energies to ensuring the school was successful. FG10, for example, was acutely aware of the history of her GB and what this meant for her participation: 'One of the things they're hoping to achieve, which I would like to support them with, is a little bit of stability within their GB as they have had a lot of change for the last couple of years and someone who is hopefully going to stick around.'

Transforming practice: educational and professional impact

The evaluation presented perspectives from IEB governors and their school stakeholders which demonstrated that all IEB governors had been able to participate in the diverse landscape of their GB in order to make some kind of impact upon different aspects of the running of their school. This included: outcomes for pupils; the confidence, knowledge and skills of the GB; and school business practices. In relation to pupil outcomes, school stakeholders felt that their IEB governors had, on the whole, indirectly contributed to improving school performance and the educational outcomes of pupils. This tended to be associated with ensuring the 'financial and business state of the school is intact' (Headteacher, FG3). Indeed, all school stakeholders felt their IEB governors had increased the confidence, knowledge and skills of their GB as a result of the complementary skill-set they brought with them. In relation to school business practices, some schools were in greater need than others of the IEB governors' professional skill-sets. E-gov5's Chair, spoke about how e-gov5 had been able to act as mentor and how this was crucial in turning the school around:

The finances of the school were in a dire state when I took over as Chair. So when I had conversations with e-gov5 a lot of the conversations were around

the financial aspects of the school. The aspect of delving into the finance was quite a big part of my initial duty. E-gov5 was able to act as a mentor to me when I was starting to move things forward with the Headteacher.

However, as indicated above, the impact of IEB governors upon their GBs and schools was by no means immediate and tended to become more apparent to the research team at the fourth and final interview. What this demonstrates is that the application of the LBG governor's existing skill set to a GB was contingent upon them crossing boundaries to acquire educational knowledge rather than tenuously laying 'claim' to educational knowledge (Young, 2017). Perhaps more fundamentally, this acquiring of educational knowledge was contingent upon the LBG governor holding ideological views about the purpose of their participation in order to represent the school authentically and in doing so, acquire lay knowledge.

That being said, even once some IEB governors had acquired new knowledge, on occasion they found it hard to bring their business practices into the landscape of the GB. Often these difficulties related to the ways in which the GB meetings were run, with IEB governors expecting short, outcome-driven meetings. FG8, for example, had recommended to his GB that they streamline their documentation prior to meetings and adopt a more corporate approach within meetings:

> To give an example of what I mean by that is, when we use governance, we are very clear on the purpose of each agenda and who is presenting and for how long, what position we need to make of it. What I found is from the governance meeting is that they just have stuff to talk about and it's not actually clear whether a decision needs to be made or not. I have raised [it] at the last governor meeting and … I think they were more comfortable with how it's currently set out.

What this indicates is that managerial knowledge, even when transformed by the acquisition of educational and lay knowledge, was at times subject to being marginalised within the GB. In contrast to Young, therefore, what our study shows is that managerial knowledge was not only tentative in developing agency in GB meetings, but that managerial knowledge also appreciated the need to be transformed by educational and lay knowledge – a process which meant that managerial knowledge itself was sometimes marginalised by the what had become the 'flat, common-sense' practices of the GBs (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2014).

What we can also demonstrate is that the acquisition of new knowledge in order to participate in GBs resulted in transformation of practice for IEB governors in different ways. These new hybrid practices, which resulted from crossing boundaries (Clark et al., 2017), were not simply enacted in GBs but were transforming in relation to the workplace. Indeed, most IEB governors reported that their governance role had positively impacted on their professional work and benefited them in terms of their continuing professional development. The professional benefit most commonly cited by IEB governors and their line managers was not the acquiring of new skills per se, but rather a growth in their 'self-confidence' which enabled them to carry out their professional role more effectively. This was explicitly linked to a 'broadening of horizons', 'working in a new environment' and 'working with people from different backgrounds, cultures and communities':

> I think because I've gone into something that I've not done before, it's given me more confidence because I've taken the skills that I've got in my current role, from a finance background, to use them in another environment and with people that I didn't know and who didn't know me. And I feel like they appreciated my input and appreciate the support they got from us, so it's just given me a bit more confidence in my role. (e-gov2)

In line with our theoretical framework, we see this confidence gained by some IEB governors as arising from the changes undertaken through acquiring the knowledge to participate effectively

and with agency in a landscape other than their usual workplace. For FG11, gaining confidence seemed to have a more profound effect upon his participation in the businesses landscape of practice as his line manager attests:

> I feel that he's now got that drive and passion within him. It will end up seeping through into his work. I feel that it has had a positive impact on giving him that purpose that he has been looking for. That spark.

Conclusions

By capturing the perspectives of new business governors as they settled into their roles as well as the perspectives of key school stakeholders on this process, we are able to provide an insight into the ways in which IEB governors crossed boundaries in the acquisition of educational and lay knowledge to transform their practices within the diverse landscape of practice of a GB. In contrast to earlier research, which tends to see the business community as a threat to both the stakeholder model (Connolly et al., 2017; Wilkins, 2016) and lay knowledge (Young, 2017), our longitudinal study captures some of the complexities of practices in GBs involving new business governors.

Seen from this longitudinal perspective, rather than participating through exerting power which claims educational knowledge and coopts and marginalises lay knowledge (Young, 2017), managerial knowledge is often tentative in its initial participation in this diverse landscape. Furthermore, managerial knowledge's tentative participation is symptomatic of an awareness of the need to acquire rather than lay claim to both educational and lay knowledge in order to be able to contextualise skills and practices. More fundamentally, managerial knowledge seems to be underpinned by a value set which is altruistic and authentic and which has otherwise been seen as only belonging to lay governors within a stakeholder model (Connolly et al., 2017). That this tentative participation involving those with managerial knowledge seeking to acquire both expert and lay knowledge, means that, whilst becoming more diverse, the GB becomes less hierarchical as a landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2014), which facilitates boundary crossing and the transformation of practice through 'hybridisation' (Clark et al., 2017).

There are several implications of these findings. Firstly, that other businesses should follow suit in allowing their staff time to undertake school governance as the resulting hybridisation of practice could have benefits for schools and businesses alike, especially within the wider context of performativity. Secondly, that given the different ways in which different IEB governors acquired educational knowledge, an understanding of the bespoke nature of professional development is needed by those who provide induction and training (local authorities, private companies, schools). Thirdly, that in light of the limitations of the e-gov model, further work and research is needed for this to become a more effective solution to governor recruitment. Fourthly, that whilst the demarcation of educational, managerial and lay knowledge is often unclear in terms of the make-up of a GB with individuals potentially holding all three, to ensure representation the Stakeholder Plus model adopted by the Welsh government could well be the way forward for England's educational policy makers. And finally, that further research needs to be undertaken by the academic community and shared with school leaders in order to better understand the ways in which different GB members utilise their knowledge sets and interact with other members.

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