Why Are Assistant Superintendents Not Moving into Superintendent Positions:

Is It A Matter of Age?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine assistant superintendents' perceptions of motivators and barriers to career advancement as they relate to age. Data was collected from 149 assistant superintendents from Suffolk, Nassau, and Westchester Counties, New York. A survey measured motivators and barriers to becoming superintendents. A One-Way Anova was conducted to evaluate the relationship between age, and barriers and motivators. The findings suggested age plays a role in various aspects of advancement as it relates to barriers but not to motivators; assistant superintendents in their 40s experienced more barriers than those in their 30s and 60s. Assistant superintendents in their 30s experienced more barriers than those in their 60s.

Keywords: Age, Barriers, Motivators, Assistant Superintendents, Superintendents, Career Advancement

Introduction

Wolverton (2004) noted the applicant pool for superintendents is declining; within the viable pool of applicants (240 of the 371 certificate holders), sixty-five percent have no intentions of applying for a superindentency. Reasons vary from the perceived negative power associated with the position, the lack of reward for services performed, the desire to be treated fairly with regards to compensation, observational assessments of the position, and age play a role in the lack of superintendent applications. During the year 2000 their superintendent pool consisted of 75% of superintendents over the age of 50, of which 40 % of them planned to retire by 2004 or 2005 (Wolverton, Rawls, & Macdonald, 2000; Copper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000).

In 2012, Hunter found that between the years 1920 and 2010, the average age and marital status of a model candidate for superintendency has transformed. She indicated the average age of superintendents was 43 during the 1920s when there were one to three schools in most of the school districts and the national system of schools was extremely rural. During the 1990s, the

average age of superintendents rose to almost 50 (Glass, 2000). This study, then, examined assistant superintendents' perceptions of internal and external motivators and internal and external barriers to career advancement as they relate to age (see Table 1).

Table 1

Survey Items: Barriers and Motivators

External Barriers (Reliability=.731)	Internal Barriers (Refined) (Reliability=.769)	External Motivators (Reliability=.731)	Internal Motivators (Reliability=.863)
Increased commitment to the job (longer days, more meetings, etc.)	Salary differential is too small	Increased prestige / status	Commitment to the American public education
Increased time spent away from family	No tenure / lack of job security	Increased power	Desire to be in Leadership
Child care issues in my home	Increased amount of paperwork / bureaucracy	Desire for a higher salary	Desire to have a greater impact on student achievement
Increased commitment of time and paperwork	Fear of failure	Relocate to a desirable location	Desire to serve the community
Balancing personal and professional responsibilities	Fear of litigation surrounding education		Interest in the work and tasks of the Superintendent
To what degree have you felt that you have deferred your career aspirations in order to support your family responsibilities?	Self confidence		Personal challenge
	Self image		Professional challenge
	Increased Accountability		
	Management of Fiscal Resources		
	Isolation/Alienation Due to the job		

Hunter, T. N. (2012). *(p.* 120 - 124*).*

Theoretical Framework

Internal Motivators

According to a study conducted by Posner (2010), age has an impact on personal values and organizational clarity, which relate to obligation, fulfillment, motivation, anxiety, and work stress (Posner, 2010). Siu, Specter, Cooper and Donald (2001) found that "age is positively, significantly correlated to job satisfaction, mental well-being, problem-focused coping and organizational tenure" (p. 709); noting a correlation between internal motivators and age.

External Motivators

The potential of becoming a leader can serve as a career motivator. Banicki and Pacha (2011) stated, "The superintendent, as a leader, must build, facilitate, and promote a team approach to decision making" (p. 3). The authors suggested that superintendents must begin communicating valuable strategies and procedures, which can serve as external motivators. Similarly, a desire for a higher salary often times serves as a career motivator (Harris, Lowery, Hopson, & Marshall, 2004).

Internal Barriers

Management of fiscal resources can be an internal barrier. Superintendents' experiences determined the scenario and instability of the issues discussed at school board meetings. With the struggling economy and school district budgets strained, there is greater stress placed on decision-making by administration (Banicki & Pacha, 2011). Along with a lack of job security, the decline in the superintendency applicant pool has become a concern over the years. In a review of school administrators, the average tenure of superintendents in the United States has

been as low as 18 months in some of the large urban districts (Cummings, 1994) and superintendent tenure reached an all-time low in the 1990s but achieved an average high of 13 to 14 years in the 1950s (Natkin, Cooper, Fusarelli, Alborano, Padilla, & Ghosh, 2002).

Cooper (2000) stated that 70% of superintendents are eligible for retirement and 79% are over the age of 50. In the same way, Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) indicated that the median age of public school superintendents is 52.5 years old. Wolverton (2004) endorses Cooper and Glass et al. findings in her analysis of a recent study of superintendents in the Pacific Northwest. The demographics in Wolverton's study indicated that in the year 2000, 25% of the superintendents were under the age of 50 and the 40% who were 50 or older, planned to retire in the next four years. The author looks at factors that contribute to a decline in the applications for superintendent and serve as disincentives. Her study included research commissioned by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) and suggested that content, process, and environment-based theories of motivation play a key role in the decline in applications for and exodus of superintendents.

External Barriers

Balancing personal and professional responsibilities can be seen as external barriers to career advancement. White and Spencer (1987) indicated that not only does age relate to work well-being but also to numerous factors that in turn are correlated to well-being. Control beliefs and the domain of control over work magnify according to the age of the employee (Lachman & Weaver, 1998). According to Aldwin (1991), Aldwin, Sutton, Chiara and Spiro (1996), older people tend to report less concerns than do younger people because they view problems as less stressful, based on the development of their coping resources and increased experience levels. Siu et al., (2001) found that age is "negatively related to the total sources of stress and

managerial level (because a low score denotes a high position, older workers are more likely in the higher position)" (p. 709).

Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

An analysis of a sample population consisting of 149 assistant superintendents was conducted based on data secured from a large quantitative study of assistant superintendents by Hunter (2012). The participants held assistant superintendent positions in Suffolk, Nassau, and Westchester Counties, New York. Data was collected through a survey instrument developed by Hunter (2012). The survey was comprised of 68 items on a 5 point Likert-scale and one open-ended question. This study focused on internal and external: barriers and motivators, as they relate to age. Items that measure these variables are in table 1. Reliability varied from .73 to .86 (Table 1). Age was divided into four groups as shown in table 2.

Table 2

Assistant Superintendents Age Groups

	Age	Frequency	Percent
Valid	30's	16	10.7
	40's	44	29.5
	50's	61	40.9
	60's	28	18.8
	Total	149	100

Results

One Way ANOVA was performed to answer the following research questions: Does the mean change in the external and internal motivators of assistant superintendents among the four

age groups of 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s? Does the mean change in the external and internal barriers of asst. superintendents among the four age groups of 30s, 40s 50s and 60s? Table 3 shows the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of each of the variables as it relates with age.

Table 3 shows the level of importance of the four variables. Note that Assistant Superintendents level of importance are between "a little" and "somewhat important" referred to internal barriers (M/Items=2.61). External barriers are categorized as "somewhat important"(M/Items=2.93). Interestingly, internal motivator's responses are in between "important" and "very important." This is not the same for external motivators that have the lowest mean of all the variables (M/Items=2.43 between "a little" and "somewhat important").

Table 3

Age vs. Barriers and Motivators Descriptive

		N	M	M/Items	SD	Std. Error
Internal Barriers	30s	16	24.75		6.19	1.55
	40s	44	27.52		6.73	1.01
	50s	61	27.43		7.13	.91
	60s	28	22.00		6.67	1.26
	Total	149	26.15	2.61	7.10	.58
External Barriers	30s	16	19.56		4.57	1.14
	40s	44	19.14		5.37	.81
	50s	61	16.87		5.30	.68
	60s	28	15.82		5.66	1.07
	Total	149	17.63	2.93	5.45	.45
Internal Motivators	30s	16	30.06		2.41	.60
	40s	44	29.43		4.09	.62
	50s	59	29.15		4.28	.56
	60s	26	29.42		3.78	.74
	Total	145	29.39	4.19	3.94	.33
External Motivators	30s	16	10.19		4.18	1.05
	40s	44	9.41		2.82	.43
	50s	61	9.90		3.21	.41
	60s	28	9.54		3.44	.65
	Total	149	9.72	2.43	3.24	.27

Table 4

Age vs. Barriers and Motivators ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Internal Barriers	Between Groups	695.86	3	231.95	4.97	.003
	Within Groups	6770.90	145	46.70		
	Total	7466.75	148			
External Barriers	Between Groups	286.52	3	95.50	3.37	.020
	Within Groups	4106.18	145	28.32		
	Total	4392.70	148			
Internal Motivators	Between Groups	10.67	3	3.56	.23	.879
	Within Groups	2223.72	141	15.77		
	Total	2234.37	144			
External Motivators	Between Groups	10.71	3	3.57	.34	.800
	Within Groups	1543.45	145	10.64		
	Total	1554.16	148			

Table 4 shows four One-Way ANOVAS. A One-Way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the difference between age and internal barriers. The independent variable, age, includes four levels: 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. The dependent variable was the internal barriers. The ANOVA was significant, F (3, 145)=.97, p=.003. The strength of the relationship between age and internal barriers, as assessed by eta squared, was medium, with the age factor accounting for 9.3% of the variance of the dependent variable.

A One-Way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the difference between age and external barriers. The independent variable, age, includes four levels: 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. The dependent variable was the external barriers. The ANOVA was significant, F(3, 145)=3.37,

p=.02. The strength of the relationship between age and external barriers, as assessed by eta squared, was medium with the age factor accounting for 6.5% of the variance of the dependent variable.

A post hoc analysis was performed to evaluate pairwise differences among the means. The results suggested significance in the internal barriers of Group 4, who were in their 60s, and Group 2, who were in their 40s (p=0.35), and approaching significance between the 50s and 60s. Group 4 reported fewer internal barriers than Group 2. Regarding external barriers, Group 4 reported lower external barriers than Group 2 (approaching significance).

A One-Way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the difference between age and external motivators. The independent variable, age, includes four levels: 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. The dependent variable was the external motivators. The ANOVA was not significant, F (3, 145)=.34, p=.80. The strength of the relationship between age and external motivators, as assessed by eta squared, was not existent, with the age factor accounting for 0.69% of the variance of the dependent variable. In the same way, no significant difference was found between age and internal motivators.

In conclusion, there was no differences found between age and motivators, but significant differences were found with age and barriers.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine assistant superintendents' perceptions of motivators and barriers to career advancement as they relate to age. For the first research question, the result showed that there was no statistical significant difference in external motivators and internal motivators. For the second research question, the result suggested statistical significance in the internal barriers of Group 4, in their 60s; Group 2, in their 40s

(p=0.35) and approaching significance between the 50s and 60s. Group 4 reported less internal barriers than Group 2. Regarding external barriers Group 4 reported lower external barriers than Group 2 (approaching significance). Although, internal and external motivators were the same in all age groups there was a major difference in internal and external barriers.

Overall, regarding motivators, the study showed no correlation with age, which is interesting because it contradicts literature related to the correlation between age and motivators. For example, White and Spencer (1987) indicate that not only does age relate to work well-being but also to numerous other factors that in turn correlate to well-being. According to Lachman and Weaver (1998), control beliefs and the domain of control over work magnify according to the age of the employee. Aldwin (1991), Aldwin, Sutton, Chiara and Spiro (1996) noted older people tend to report less concerns than do younger people because they view problems as less stressful, based on the development of their coping resources and increased experience levels.

Overall regarding barriers, the study showed a correlation with age and echoes studies conducted by Siu et al., (2001) who found that "age is positively, significantly correlated to job satisfaction, mental well-being, problem-focused coping and organizational tenure" (p. 709). Banicki and Pacha (2011) also indicate that with barriers such as, the economy struggling and school district budget being strained, that there is greater stress placed on decision-making by administration.

All the respondents had high level of importance as it related to internal motivators. However, indicators of external motivators were not as high as internal motivators. Indicators of external motivators were the lowest at 2.43. These results implied that assistant superintendents did not perceive such factors as: prestige, power, salary, and relocation as more important motivators than they did commitment to public education, leadership, impact on student

achievement, serving the community, interest in the role of superintendent, and personal and professional challenges. Each of these internal motivators relates to a professional learning community (Sergiovanni, 1994) and suggests that assistant superintendents placed more importance on community values and theories as it related to motivators.

In terms of barriers the respondents seemed to strongly agree or disagree. The researchers believe that those respondents in age group 4 who are in the 60s have a lower perception of internal and external barriers based on the fact they are closer to retirement. Group 4 respondents had a higher sense of tolerance as it related to barriers than those in Group 1, individuals who were in their 30s, and Group 2 who were in their 40's and possibly had less experience. Therefore, the researchers found that age did matter as it related to assistant superintendents moving into superintendent positions in the case of barriers.

Based on the findings of this study, expanding the scope of the definitions for motivators to include additional external and internal factors such as job satisfaction, equitable pay for performance, and positive support from role models such as mentors is recommended. Assigning mentors to assistant superintendents, providing training in overcoming external barriers, addressing internal barriers, and conflict resolution, might increase their intention to pursue a superintendent position.

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