THE HYBRID-360 ASSESSMENT STRATEGY TO STUDY MIDLIFE CAREER TRANSITIONS, A METHOGOLOGICAL REPORT

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Abstract

The following methodology paper delves into the process undertaken to investigate career transitions of a homogeneous group of former military personnel. The focus of the work is to describe the steps taken to understand the causes of their transition into school leadership roles andd the repercussions of this change of career. The method presented is dubbed the hybrid-360 assessment and uses aspects of the standard 360 assessment while modifying it to address the the ery specifdic issue of midlife career transitions.

With careers being more fluid than ever before and occurring at later ages, the methodology presented in this report can provide the theoretical framework to gain better insight into this sociological phenomenon andd offer the assistance and support needed to those undergoing this difficult and complex life exeprience.

Keywords: *career, transition, interviews, observations, MLQ questtionaire, full-range leadership model*

Introduction

Midlife career transition can be a daunting and difficult process. The familiar work and home structure is upended when one type of career is swapped for a different one. This transition affects not only the person attempting it, but their family, surroundings and coworkers. By definition, these life changes are highly individual and can occur due to external forces such as layoffs, or due to internal forces, such as personal development, relocation or changes in family status. The very unpredictability of these changes makes them difficult to study.

The armed forces in Israel provides a unique opportunity to focus in on and study these very transitions. The Israeli army is a civilian army with obligatory conscription for both men and women. While the majority serve the required time (3 years for men, 2 year for women), many find

they are a good fit in the military ecosystem and opt to remain as professional soldiers, slowly climbing the ranks. These soldiers make the army their career and remain committed to its system and its structure until they reach 'retirement' age, which in the army is between 45-50. These officers then, for the first time, enter the job market and have to transition into a civilian career after many years of being employed by the military. This reality has led to many facing career transitions at very advanced ages.

However, the transition process can be very different depending on the nature of the career the retired army personnel are transitioning into; a new career in the police force or in private security might prove less jarring than a career in law, education or politics. Ideally, to properly study this phenomenon, what is needed is that the new career they are transitioning into be the same. Fortunately, to assist retired officers, the Israeli government instituted a a pilot program specifically designed for this population to train them to be educational leaders – school principals. It was felt that the military training they had aquired could be put to use in leading teachers and educational staff in the Israeli school system.

This provided the necessary opportunity to carry out this reseach. On the one hand, a very specific subsection of the population leaving a career in their mid 40s, and on the other many of this group transitioning into leadership positions in elementary and high schools.

The aim of this paper is to present the methodology used to carry out this study. Due to the rare, nearly unique opportunity provided by this group we wanted to acertain that we could learn as much as we can from the process they underwent which could help others facing similar career changes. In order to carry this out we used a modified form of the 360 assessment structure. While this process is typically used to empower workers and provide them with a global view on their performance, development, and long-term potential, in this case it will be used to study these principals' career transitions and the effect it had on coworkers and staff at the schools they lead.

Study Size and Composition

The study size included a cluster of 40 retired career soldiers, with the rank of major and above, who currently work as high school principals and have between 1-6 years of experience. The group was composed of 6 women and 34 men. The cluster size was not chosen at random - 40 participants offer a diverse representation which allowed me to include participants from different backgrounds, different military ranks, different experience in teaching, and etc. This provided a more representative picture of the cluster in question. 40 participants is a number that can be

sufficient to perform reliable statistical analyses, and is the maximum number of participants that can practically be recruited, considering the resources and availability of high-ranking military personnel involved in education leadership.

Study Methods

To best get a sense of the process these participants went through various methods were employed. The study members were interviewed using very open-ended questions to allow them to express themselves and provide rich personal biographies. They were also observed in their schools to gauge their approach and style of leadership. Finally their staff was given questionnaires to probe their views of their leader.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted according to the narrative interview method, recorded and transcribed in full. An extremely broad opening question was chosen for the interview, which sought to obtain their personal life story, without any further intention on the part of the interviewer. The opening question was phased accordingly:

"I am researching the life stories of school principals. In this framework I am interested in hearing your life story as you experience it. I am interested in the whole story, whatever comes to mind, you can start wherever you want and focus on whatever concerns you. We have all the time you need to tell your story, and while you speak, I will not disturb or disrupt you, but will make notes, and then, when you are done, I will ask you some additional questions."

At the end of the interview, the interviewee was presented with two types of questions: First, internal narrative questions were presented, i.e. questions regarding topics that came up in response to the opening question. Following those, external narrative questions were asked that were more directly related and focused on the research topic, and included aspects not mentioned by the participant.

The interview analysis focused on trying to learn about the contemporary meaning the participant assigns to his past and present experiences. The interviews incorporated a number of research models: conceptually, the analysis was also based on the model developed by Rosenthal (1993). This model views the biography as a social structure that combines both social reality and subjective experience. According to this approach, 'biographical work' is the way in which a person

directs and interprets himself, based on a time-life continuum and during social changes (Bar-On, 1969).

In this way, the biography reflects the history of the society in which the person lives as well as his own personal experience. In this model, understanding the narrative is achieved, among other things, by analyzing the biographical data. In this context, a distinction is made between the participant's life story (subjective and flowing) and his life history (the objective chronology of events that can be learned from excerpts from the interview and through verification with other external sources).

The analysis also addressed the thematic fields that appear in the interview - that is, the total events and situations presented in the story and the internal relations (both overt and covert) between them. In this context, a distinction was made between different distinct units defined (a) according to changes in the person speaking (interviewer or participant), (b) types of texts - changes in the style of presentation of the text- argumentative, descriptive or narrative, and (c) thematic changes. The narrative analysis is based on the principle of abduction, according to which in the analysis of the text the researcher advances in a reconstructive manner from the facts to a general theoretical structure.

This principle recognizes that there are preconceived theoretical conceptions that guide the researcher throughout the research process, but that their value is purely heuristic- the existence or absence of a particular hypothesis the researcher seeks in the text. Another principle that guides the narrative analysis is the principle of sequentiality - this principle is based on the assumption that each action represents a choice between potential alternatives in a particular situation. That is, each action is the result of selection and a preference of one activity over another.

Methodologically, this means, that for each data unit in the text, it was possible to develop hypotheses related to continuous developments and examine them against their actual outcome, in a way that would help us locate basic laws that influence the decisions made. The interaction between the interviewer and the participant was also taken into account as a factor influencing the biography presented.

The analysis of the observations uses the model proposed by Eisner (Eisner, 1979) when discussing educational critique. In his view it is possible, in most cases, to distinguish between three aspects of criticism: The Descriptive Aspect, focusing on trying to identify and characterize in words the relevant qualities of educational life, the Interpretive Aspect, focusing on

understanding the meanings, ideas and concepts that can explain the main characteristics observed, usually using ideas drawn from the social sciences, and the Evaluative Aspect, trying to decipher what the desired outcomes were / were not achieved through the educational activity.

At this point Eisner points out the significant difference between educational criticism and scientific analysis. According to Eisner's conception, the concept of objectivity, prevalent in scientific discourse, does not and cannot reflect the existence of a true reality, since reality always depends on the way it is perceived. Thus, the important question, in his view, in educational critique, is not: Are our distinctions real? Rather: Can we use them effectively?

Will it help us function more effectively? Does this allow us to perceive the phenomenon in a more complex and appropriate way? Could it expand our understanding in dealing with important issues? As a measure of validity, he proposes the concept of Structural Corroboration as a term that describes the process by which data collection and information are linked in a way that creates a complete description supported by its various parts.

In this process, typical of the way detectives or lawyers construct their arguments, the central question is: Do the different aspects of the description reinforce each other? This process is very similar to the intuitive use of social judgment we employ in everyday life, and is therefore in many cases more effective and clearer than conventional experimental techniques. In addition to the structural strength, Eisner suggests examining the suitability of the arguments presented and the issue we have sought to examine. This component of referential adequacy examines the extent to which the critique presented contributes to a better and more practical understanding of the phenomenon we sought to describe, interpret and evaluate.

Observations

In order to see the prinicipals in action, observations were carried out in the schools. In the present study, the observations were used for the purpose of broadening and sharpening the assessment obtained from the interviews carried out.

Questionnaires

Construction and Validation of the Questionnaires

Two types of questionnaires were administered to the teachers serving under the participating principals in the study. The first questionnaire is the formative leadership questionnaire, designed to assess different levels of leadership beyond the specific context in which it occurs (e.g., military, industry, or education). The second questionnaire addresses specific

dimensions of the educational leader in the school and was constructed in accordance with the theoretical hypotheses of this study.

The Full Range of Leadership Questionnaires

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) relies on the full-range leadership model (Avolio, 2000; Popper 2000). This leadership model, based on numerous studies and theoretical models (Bass, 1985,1997; Avolio and Bass, 1995; House 1977, 1995) assumes that the entire repertoire of familiar behaviors can be divided into three general categories: Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, and the Laissez Faire approach.

These categories are subdivided into sub-categories, all of which make up a whole range of leadership styles:

The "sit and do nothing" style leadership represents the lowest level, as it is a passive form of leadership that passes on any attempt to influence. Rewarding leadership represents a higher level that clearly presents to the staff the levels they are expected to reach and the reward offered if they meet these criteria. The limitation of this type of leadership is that it is based on extrinsic motivation and conditional on the existence of external reinforcements. The formative leadership, on the other hand, creates a deep sense of commitment, power and ability among the staff. It motivates them to do more than they initially intended and often more than they believed possible. It is the embodiment of leadership in its highest and most significant form.

The full-range model includes eight components or leadership styles, which are an extension of the basic model presented above. The model components are:

1. "Laissez Faire" style avoidance and passivity. - A leader of this type refrains from taking a stand and from any attempt to influence. He is not involved in what is happening in the organization, and the typical result is that such leaders show indifference towards the organization and focus on personal goals, even if these are in conflict with the goals of the organization.

2. Management by Expectation - Passive - This leadership style is built on finding and correcting mistakes. A leader of this type focuses only on "putting out fires", and does not strive to improve and promote the level of performance in the organization. Those who are led this way are driven only by the fear of failure which will provoke a reaction on the part of the leader. They manage to maintain the existing level but not more.

3. Management by Expectation-Active - This type of leader invests a deliberate effort in locating faults and trying to solve them. His staff will avoid taking risks, for fear of making

mistakes. In this way the level of performance in the organization will be maintained but will not improve.

4. Contingent Reward - Leadership based on constructive reward, creates a clear structure of objectives and defines a reward system (positive and negative) that staff can expect based on their level of investment and contribution. In this situation the main motive of the staff is considerations of profitability, profit and personal benefit.

The styles described so far can at best lead to collaboration based on benefit considerations. In contrast, the following components of the model characterize leaders who have the power to cause people to reach levels of performance beyond what the required and to act out of deeper inner commitment. These styles belong to the overarching framework of formative leadership.

5. Individual Consideration - This type of leadership refers to the attention the leader gives to the personal development needs of each of his people and his willingness to invest in the processes of initiation and guidance. The personal treatment that the staff receives reduces the levels of frustration and competitiveness and increases cooperation. This situation encourages among the staff members the desire for personal development and a tendency to take on tasks that challenge their abilities.

6. Intellectual Stimulation - The main characteristic of such leaders is in addressing problems through questioning ingrained premises that have guided the way such problems were addressed in the past. They broaden the perspective through which the employees examine the problem and make mistakes a constructive part of learning. They do not necessarily solve the problem themselves, but rather improve the ability of their people to deal with it as well as with similar future problems. Leaders, for their part, usually exhibit deep, independent, and critical thinking, and strive to find new and varied ways to deal with complex situations.

7. Inspirational Motivation - This style represents energy, initiative, tenacity and ability to see the future, which in many cases distinguishes between an ordinary leader and an extraordinary one. A leader of this kind excites his people and evokes in them deep identification and commitment. It elevates people's expectations of themselves by understanding the significance of investing in the present in terms of expected achievements both at the organizational level and at the individual level.

8. Idealized Influence, Attributed and Behavioral Charisma - This is the highest level of formative leadership. This is leadership that sets a respectable moral and behavioral model. Such leaders demonstrate strength, confidence, consistency and commitment to a task. They are willing

to take risks and sacrifice personal interests. Staff has full confidence in their leader and embrace the values he emphasizes to such an extent, that they voluntarily adopt his vision as their own.

An important premise of the 'full-range model' is that each leader demonstrates within his or her relationships with his or her people and environment all leadership styles. Yet the dominance and frequency of use of each of the styles varies and creates the differences between one leader and another.

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) contains 36 items, statements about the leader, with the subject rating, in their opinion, how each item correctly describes their manager, across a scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (often or always). There are 4 items for each of the types of leadership described above. The last component, Idealized Influence, is divided into two dimensions: The behavioral charisma dimension describing actions and statements of the leader that emphasize which values are important to him. The dimension of attributed charisma, on the other hand, emphasizes the effect a leader has without reference to any actual concrete activity.

The Hebrew version was developed by Dr. Reuven Gal, Dr. Micha Popper and Giora Ayalon, from the Center for Quality Leadership in Zichron Yaacov, and was provided by them. The questionnaire consists of items typical of each of the leadership categories. Table 1 presents names and examples of the dimensions that make up the full range of the leadership questionnaire. Full details appear in the appendices.

Table 1: Names and examples of the parameters that make up the Full Range of Leadership Questionnaire

Parameter Name	Example
Attributed charisma	They inspire their employees to be proud of being with them.
Behavioral charisma	They talk about the most important beliefs and values.
Motivated by inspiration	They speak with enthusiasm regarding what is to be achieved.
Intellectual stimulation	They test central tenets to see if they are still relevant and pertinent.
Empathy and personal development	They invest time and resources in training their staff.
Rewarding good performance	They help workers for the effort they put in.
Management by exceptions (active)	They primarily focus on dealing with mistakes, complaints and failures.
Management by exceptions (passive)	They avoid getting involved until the problems become serious ones.
Avoidance and passivity	They avoid getting involved even when important issues and problems arise.

As noted, this is a recognized questionnaire that has received extensive empirical validation. For example, researchers Howell & Hall-Merenda (1999) report validation of all scales in a factor analysis of the questionnaire, with the index used with loadings of more than 0.70 per item. As well, the internal reliability of each scale exceeds 0.70. Similar results were obtained in the Hebrew version.

In this study, the inter-correlations between the different scales were examined in order to obtain a picture of the validity of the structure of the questionnaire, using measures of convergent validity and distinctive validity. The results are shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Inter-correlations between the parameters of the Full Range of Leadership Questionnaire

Parameter	Attributed charisma	Behavioral charisma	Motivated by inspiration	Intellectual stimulation	Empathy and personal development	Rewarding good performance	Management by exceptions (active)	Management by exceptions (passive)	Avoidance and passivity
Attributed charisma									
Behavioral charisma	R=.718**								
Motivated by inspiration	R=.608**	R=.719**							
Intellectual stimulation	R=.769**	R=.724**	R=.544**						
Empathy and personal development	R=.762**	R=.664**	R=.474**	R=.765**					
Rewarding good performance	R=.780**	R=.721**	R=.547**	R=.745**	R=.768**				
Management by exceptions (active)	R=.107	R=.180	R=.261**	R=.092	R=-.008	R=.037			
Management by exceptions (passive)	R=-.452**	R=-.371**	R=-.486**	R=-.366**	R=-.369**	R=-.389**	R=.093		
Avoidance and passivity	R=-.504**	R=-.402**	R=-.366**	R=-.551**	R=-.485**	R=-.517**	R=.052	R=.508**	

** P<0.1, n=115

It can be seen that, as theoretically expected, there is a negative correlation between the passive leadership indices and passive management-by-exceptions and the formative leadership indices. In contrast, there are high correlations between the various measures of formative leadership. The high correlation between formative leadership metrics and rewarding leadership has also been found in previous studies and reflects, in the opinion of the authors of the questionnaire, the fact that in formative leadership, the leader also uses rewarding leadership as part of the repertoire (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Questionnaire on Educational Leadership Patterns

This questionnaire includes items that indicate the behaviors and attitudes of the principal. The questionnaire is largely based on the dimensions of school leadership presented by Leithwood, Tomlinson, and Genge (1996), based on a meta-analysis of research in the field. These researchers offer a variety of behaviors that characterize each of the parameters, and allow the assessment of the principal's performance as a leader. The decision to use the teacher reporting index stems from the theoretical and practical need to get the staff's perspective. Leadership self-report metrics were found to be unreliable (Howell and Hall-Merenda, 1999) and are likely influenced by social desire. The questionnaire asked teachers to fill in details such as age, gender, seniority, and current position at the school. It then asked to evaluate the principal's performance in parameters that examine patterns of educational leadership.

Table no. 3 presents names and examples of the parameters that make up the Educational Leadership Patterns Questionnaire. A full list of the items appears in the appendices.

Table 3: Names and examples of the parameters that make up the Educational Leadership Patterns Questionnaire

Parameter name	Example
Use of formal authority (pattern emphasizing hierarchy and power)	They require teachers to obey carefully any instruction given.
Concern for the individual	They encourage their staff to try different areas that interest them.
Initiative	Since their entering the school, new initiatives were undertaken.
Community concern	The principal is attentive to the needs of the parents
Perception of status	In their professional capacity as principals, they receive appreciation and respect.
Career ambitions	I estimate that the principal will continue his / her work in the education system

The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) of the parameters that make up the educational leadership patterns questionnaire were calculated. In the process, items were discovered that significantly impaired reliability. Once it was decided to exclude these details from the data analysis process, the reliability was recalculated. The details of the process appear in the appendices. The updated reliability data are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) of the parameters that make up the Educational Leadership Patterns Questionnaire

Parameter	Number of Items	alpha
Use of formal authority	4	0.64
Concern for the individual	3	0.66
Initiative	2	0.51
Community concern	3	0.55
Perception of status	3	0.61
Career ambitions	3	0.55

Inter-correlations between the parameters of the educational leadership patterns questionnaire were calculated and are shown in Table 5:

Table 5: Inter-correlations between the parameters of the Educational Leadership Patterns Questionnaire

	Use of formal authority	Concern for the individual	Initiative	Community concern	Perception of status	Career ambitions
Use of formal authority						
Concern for the individual	R = -.176					
Initiative	R = .243*	R = .278*				
Community concern	R = .225	R = .712**	R = .062			
Perception of status	R = .324*	R =.116	R = .334*	R = .718**		
Career ambitions	R = .211	R = .577*	R = .484**	R = .035	R = .371**	

* P<0.05, ** P<.01, n=71

Positive correlations can be seen between the variables of perception of status, initiative and authority, and professional aspirations. The parameter of consideration for the individual relates to community commitment and implies the possibility that teachers identify the principal's tendency to consider them as part of a broader community commitment. No association was found

between the use of formal authority and consideration for the individual (although the direction of the relationship was negative).

Next, the correlations between the parameters of the full-range leadership questionnaire and the parameters of the educational leadership patterns questionnaire were calculated. The results are shown in Table 6:

Table 6: Correlations between the parameters of the Full Range of Leadership

parameter	Use of formal authority	Concern for the individual	Initiative	Community concern	Perception of status	Career ambitions
Attributed charisma	R = .017	R = .241*	R = .723**	R = .371*	R = .430**	R = .331**
Behavioral charisma	R = .125	R = .379**	R = .497**	R = .322**	R = .373**	R = .504**
Motivated by inspiration	R = .199	R = .277*	R = .647**	R = .290*	R = .243*	R = .647**
Intellectual stimulation	R = .316*	R = .145	R = .733**	R = .023	R = .225	R = .618**
Empathy and personal development	R = -.615**	R = .587**	R = .490**	R = .504**	R = .172	R = .225
Rewarding good performance	R = .214	R = .313*	R = .372**	R = .275*	R = .272*	R = .290
Management by exceptions (active)	R = -.353**	R = .214	R = -.304**	R = -.288	R = -.119	R = -.353**
Management by exceptions (passive)	R = -.467**	R = -.367**	R = -.306**	R = -.504**	R = -.385**	R = -.443**
Avoidance and passivity	R = -.789**	R = -.373**	R = -.615**	R = -.496**	R = -.549**	R = -.789**

Questionnaire and the parameters of the Educational Leadership Patterns Questionnaire

* P<0.05, ** P<.01, n=71

According to the correlations, it can be seen that, as expected, there is a high correlation between the indices of consideration for the individual and the parameter of personal attention. The measure of behavioral charisma is in high correlation with the measure of taking initiative.

It can be concluded that the findings provide support for the validity of the questionnaires. It seems that the questionnaires can, on the one hand, provide support for each other (convergent validity) and on the other hand, provide differential perspectives (distinctive validity).

Limitations

While the population size appears low, in fact, given the study design of finding a group of middle-aged people from the same profession who transitioned into a new and identical profession in another field altogether, it is a reasonably sized and somewhat remarkable cluster. In effect there are two major limitations to this study.

To fully understand career transitions it is essential to also investigate the families of the participants and not only their staff. What hardships did they go through? Did they take an active role in the transition or was the change a disruptive one? To fully understand the psychological and sociological impact of these transitions, ignoring the family proved to be a big limitation.

In addition, the interviews provided a rich biography of the participants' past and the observations and questionnaires highlighted their transition at a specific point in time. However, further follow-ups would have provided more dynamic and true-to-life portrayal of their choice to enter the area of educational leadership. Did their approaches remain the same over time or did they continue to evolve and grow into the new career?

Conclusion

In short, the methodology provided the framework to delve into the career transition of professional military soldiers as they completed their military careers and entered the school system as educational leaders. The use of the hybrid 360 assessment structure provided a global perspective of the participants and their views of the life changes they underwent at a very distinct phase of their careers and lives. By addressing career transitions in this way greater insight can be gleaned regarding the motivations and process undertaken by those choosing to take the road less traveled.

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