

# INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP IN A YOUTH MOVEMENT AS A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

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## ABSTRACT

*This study discusses the social leadership of counselors in youth movements in Israel and its contribution to social engagement, both for themselves and the members of the movements. The study method is qualitative, in which six senior counselors (branch managers) from two major youth movements in Israel participated: The Scouts and Bnei Akiva. The study provides a glimpse into the world of youth in Israel who participate in youth movements. The study shows how the quality of leadership of the counselors, empowers and advances social goals and contributes to community engagement from which everyone benefits. The study can contribute to the field of education by perceiving the leader as both a teacher and an educator.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Leaders have a significant role in creating the state of mind that is the society. They can serve as symbols of the moral unity of the society. They can express the values that hold the society together. Most important, they can conceive and articulate goals that lift people out of their petty preoccupations, carry them above the conflicts that tear a society apart, and unite them in the pursuit of objectives worthy of their best efforts. (Gardner, 1965)

Perhaps more than anything, Plato's Allegory of the Cave (Georgiadis et al., 2021), illustrates the various aspects of leadership. In this allegory, prisoners are bound together in an underground cave, they face the wall, and behind them there is fire or sun, but they cannot see it and in fact, they cannot see anything, but shadows cast by people and animals that are walking outside the cave. One of the prisoners is released and he likens the release to being cured of ignorance. The

process of release is lengthy and painful and is accompanied by anguish until he can gaze on the light. The whole process is made up of dilemmas - if he had to look to the light, would he not want to escape from the suffering and the darkness? Would he not want to return to the old world, beyond the cave, a world that does not hold such suffering? Perhaps he will stay in this place of happiness and transcendence and just pity those he left behind, in the dark cave. And in this free world, will he feel a social and class disconnect compared to those in the cave, who, though they are in the dark, have a social interaction? According to Plato, there is no dilemma at all. The released prisoner goes back to the cave; however, he returns a different person. The process of going back to the cave is described as suffering, because what he saw as true all his life, when he was dwelling in the cave, suddenly seems to him a lie, after he has seen the light. But upon returning and faces the risk that he will be ridiculed or even killed by his mates. The sun, the source of good, is the divine spark, and the moral of

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the allegory is that the sun, the light, is the education. A person goes through a process of transcendence that symbolizes degrees of truth. And the truth of the allegory is revealed. He who comes out into the light, he who discovers the truth, he who passes through education, must go back, and try to elevate the whole community. The leader is an educator. Everyone has a goal, to increase the benefit of the community, in order for the community and all its members to be happy. Thus, leaders must first of all, find their light, their knowledge, and only then, turn to leadership. That is, it is not a matter of persecuting the governing, but of a commitment to the community. Commitment to the society that took him through the education process, in which he found happiness. The leader rewards the community by returning to the cave and educating the people. Since according to Plato, the leader's goal is not to command people to follow him, but to persuade them to follow him (Plato, 2017).

Naturally, youth movements serve as a platform for leadership development (WHO, 2020). This conclusion arises after summarizing studies' findings and after reading the movement training programs. It can be said that, in the youth movements, every member in the senior class, experiences leadership education. Even if they are not counsellors, they are partners in an increasing involvement in society and community, partners in contributing to society and helping others. Thus, it seems that education for engagement and caring, which forms the basis of every youth movement, provides an opportunity for leadership for every senior member in youth movements (Even et al., 2016).

Daudi (2013) contends, that the art of leading others comes through the art of leading oneself. Thus, leaders are an example of doing. The research question then is how the leadership experience in a youth movement can shape the world of values, personal identity, and the social engagement of the counsellors.

## **2. LEADERSHIP**

Wherever there is a hierarchical community, such as a workplace, a youth movement, a state leadership, and more, the "boss" is always a different person from everyone else (Bennet et al., 2015). It is usually a person with great self-confidence who radiates power and has a presence that has "filled the room". Such person is not always pleasant or loveable, but in most cases, it is an inspiring person. Scouller (2011) contends that a leader is a person who leads a particular group at a particular time. But leadership is a rather broad and multidimensional term to be conceivable. It is a particularly complex system of influences that greatly affect the way a group of people are organized and how they act. The larger the community and situation, and the environment in which the group is involved, the more complex the leadership is as a system. When leadership is addressed as a process, it is more understandable that leadership and a leader are not the

same thing. Although the phenomenon of leadership has existed for many years in human relations, the definition of leadership has occupied many academic researchers. Stogdill (1974) argues that the word "leader" was already in use in the early 14th century and the word "leadership" first appeared in the early 19th century (Fairholm, 2002). The concept of leadership is controversial. Rost (1991) argues that "these attempts to define leadership have been confusing, varied, disorganized, idiosyncratic, muddled, and, according to conventional wisdom, quite unrewarding" (p. 99). However, many other researchers, continue their work in learning, defining, identifying, and developing leadership (Fairholm, 2002).

As there is no one definition for a leader, there is no one leadership model agreed upon by all. In every department and at every stage, there must be people who can take a leadership action to make their part in the system work. People who are willing to adjust a systemic policy to the reality at the field level. Men and women who are not afraid to sound an alarm to the higher echelons that the new policy should be corrected or reversed (Gardner, 1990). When we want to separate leadership and management, Fairholm (2002) argued that one is "performing leadership" and the other is "performing management" and these are two different tasks. Bennis and Nanus (1985) clarified that managers are "routine masters" and they achieve efficiency, whereas leaders are "masters of change." They are influential, they are effective, or in the authors' view: "The manager does things right; the leader does the right thing" (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

Gardner (1965) argued that leaders play a significant role in creating the mindset that is society as a whole. They can serve as symbols of the moral unity of society, they can express the values that hold society together and most importantly, they can think and express goals that will lift people out of their petty pursuits, carry them over the conflicts that separate members of society, and unite them in another striving goal, worthy of their efforts. This statement sums up the importance we assign to leadership, since in order for leaders to be able to draw from morality and use their influence, they need to wrap people around collective goals (Antonakis & Day, 2018). An interaction between the leaders and their followers is the foundation upon which leaders instill in their followers a motivation that leads them to pursue their goals (Shamir et al., 2018). As a result, these leaders become role models (Schweitzer, 1984; Willner, 1984; Bryman, 1992) and their followers internalize the values and ideals with a sense of motivation and enthusiasm (Shamir et al., 2018), when the ability to inspire trust, is what allows leaders to motivate others for the cause (Bennis, 2010).

Is a person born to be a leader? The theory of the Great Man known also as the theory of traits, holds that there are people who are born to be leaders and there are people who simply "don't have it." The Great Man theory born in the 19th century, holds that history can be largely explained by the influence of great people, or

heroes, who were influential and incredibly unique, and by virtue of their natural qualities, such as superior intellect, courage, heroism, or divine inspiration, they had a decisive historical impact. The father of the theory is the philosopher Thomas Carlyle who stated that the history of what man has achieved in this world is in fact the history of the great people who have acted over the years. They were great leaders, and created models of doing and achieving, that all human beings aspired to achieve and do (de Vries & Cheak-Baillargeon, 2001; Halaychik, 2016; Harrison, 2018). In their book, "Leading minds: An anatomy of leadership", Gardner and Laskin (1995) proposed a cognitive approach to leadership by which, a leader is a person who influences a large number of people and in a sense, such people inherit certain qualities that make them more suitable for leadership. For example, traits such as extroversion, self-confidence, and courage are all traits that can be associated with great leaders (Grant et al., 2011). Gardner and Laskin (1995) discussed leadership in the light of the stages of human development and researched Gandhi, Napoleon, Margaret Thatcher, Martin Luther King and more. They concluded that the leader has an influence on the emotions and behavior of masses of people. In contrast, the behavioral theory holds that great leaders are created and not born. This can be seen as a reversal of the Great Man theories. This leadership theory, which is rooted in behavior, focuses on the actions of leaders rather than mental traits or inner states. According to this theory, people can learn to be leaders through teaching and observation (Derue et al., 2011). Proponents of this theory argue that anyone can be a leader and that leaders can be developed, and leadership skills can be learned (Di Giulio, 2014).

There are many models of leadership. Two major models that stand out in their importance are transactional leadership and transformational leadership. The concept of transformational leadership, first coined by Burns (1978), speaks of transformative leadership that enhances the motivation, morality, and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms. These include connecting the sense of identity and sense of self of the followers to the task at hand, and to the collective identity of the organization; to be a role model who simulates the followers; challenge them to take more ownership of their work, and understand the strengths and weaknesses of followers, so that the leader can delegate tasks to his followers that will maximize their performance (Burns, 1978). Bass (1985) expanded Burns' idea by explaining the psychological mechanisms underlying business design and leadership. Bass added to Burnes' first concepts to explain how transformational leadership can be measured, as well as how it affects motivation and performance (Bass & Avolio, 1995). The degree to which the leader is transcendent is measured by the mirror of his influence on his followers. The followers of such a leader feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect for the leader, and due to the qualities of the transformational leader, they are willing to work harder than expected. These results

occur because the transformational leader becomes for his followers something more than a work for self-gain. Such a leader gives his followers a sense of mission, an inspiring vision and identity. The transformational leader motivates his followers through the transmission of ideals, intellectual stimulation, and personal concern. In addition, such leaders encourage their followers to come up with new and unique ways to challenge the status quo and change the environment (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1995; Burns, 1978; Yukl, 1999).

Burns (1978), coined another term, "transactional leadership" and argued that transformational leadership and transactional leadership are reciprocal styles. Transactional leaders do not usually strive for cultural change in the organization, but they operate in the existing culture, while transformational leaders can change the organizational culture (Burns, 1978). Under this leadership there is an exchange and reciprocal relationship between the leaders and their followers and transactional leaders can cultivate the commitment of their employees through appropriate rewards and by recognition that translates into compensations, new initiatives, and ideas (Breevaart et al., 2014). Bass (1985) argued that transformational leaders emphasize the development of higher motivation and evoke positive motivation and emotions by creating and presenting an inspiring vision of the future, while transactional leaders rely on a clear system of contracts and rewards. Unlike Burns, Bass (1985) argued that leadership can be both transformational and transactional.

As such, Bass and Avolio (1994) introduced the full-range leadership - a concept that consists of transactional leadership, transformational leadership and a leadership style known as laissez-faire ("let do"). The novelty of this model compared to the other models, is that each leader has characteristics of different styles where the combination of these characteristics, the characteristics of the leaders and the dominance of a particular characteristic or trait, determine the effectiveness of the leader as well as the leadership style as perceived by his or her followers (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Today's leaders integrate the entire sequence, and they reap tremendous success in situations where others have failed (Stafford, 2010). A full-range leadership model operates on several principles. The first is an idealistic influence, referring to the charisma of a leader or the ability of a leader to be a role model for his followers. This is the emotional component of leadership. The second component is leadership behavior. In general, the components determine whether the leader is perceived as trustworthy and respectful by his followers and whether they tend to try to emulate his behaviors and pursue common goals (Kirkbride, 2006). Another principle of a full-term leader is to inspire motivation among the followers as well as the question of whether the leader evokes an intellectual stimulus in his followers. They encourage their followers to be creative and innovative in solving organizational problems. These leaders do not criticize people who

"come out of the box" and deviate from traditional organizational practices. Another factor is individual attention. That is, a leader who is attentive to the individual follower, gives advice and support and addresses the personal needs of each one of his followers, and thus, enables them to develop and realize themselves. This individual attention is typically translating into positive organizational outcomes based on the collective efforts of significant individual performance (Antonakis & House, 2013). Salter et al. (2014) found a significant association between moral maturity and inspirational and rewards leadership qualities, suggesting that leaders' communicative behaviors include both transformational behavior and transactional behavior and that both styles are needed to create effective leadership. We found an example of effective leadership in non-formal education as this study will show.

## **2.1 Youth Movements**

Youth movements constitute a non-formal education framework in which an organized and systematic activity operates outside the formal education system in order to receive defined educational goals such as the acquisition of knowledge and skills, leisure education and recreational activities or ideological education. The activity provides unique patterns of education for different groups in the population. This pattern is characterized by a unique code whose main characteristics include free choice regarding participation or leaving an activity, interaction based on equality, and peer supervision, i.e., supervision through advocacy and persuasion instead of prohibition. This unique education method operates on the basis of adaptation to participants and courses of action that are appropriate to the goals (Pineda et al., 2019). One of the major contributions in the field of non-formal education is voluntary activity. Volunteering experiences in general are defined as perceptions that are characterized by a sense of personal well-being that results in satisfaction and a sense of empowerment. Studies conducted in the field indicate that when volunteering is interesting and challenging, require responsibility and characterized by accomplishments, the volunteers will be satisfied. A study by Magen (1997) found that adolescents who were engaged in volunteering, described experiences of intensified happiness and a high sense of coherence as well as their aspirations for life indicated a stronger desire for personal commitment, compared to adolescents who did not engage in volunteering. Thus, the engagement of adolescents in social activities is of great importance. The sense of being able to help others, be effective in states of distress and serve as a source of support and hope with the ability to devote time and internal resources to realizing worthy social values, act as empowering factors for adolescent and their personal identity, sense of meaning in life, personal discovery,

and ability to be more open and capture moments of true happiness (Gross & Goldart, 2017; Magen, 1997).

Into this niche, youth movements enter. According to the Israeli Ministry of Education, youth movements have an important place in the establishment of the State of Israel and continue to contribute to youth and society in a wide range of issues including strengthening love for the country, self-fulfillment, encouraging coexistence, tolerance, reducing social disparities, fostering leadership, democracy, responsibility, and social engagement. In 2015, there were 13 youth movements in all sectors of the population in the Israel (Even, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2016). Youth movements emerged in the early 20th century and are a tool for instilling ideologies for youth (Minkov, 2010) which holds a built-in worldview. The youth who participate in such activities, come by choice and according to their ideological perception. One of the important aspects in youth movements is the principle of "youth educating youth." The training programs train the youth to be young counselors (Ministry of Education, 2009). Generations of active leaders and citizens are being trained in youth movements. The movements, thanks to the structure and the connection between counselors and groups, constitute a fertile paradigm for the experience and practice of the youth in tasks that require responsibility, initiative, and leadership (Even et al., 2016).

## **2.2 Youth Movements and Social Engagement**

In the delicate seamline between childhood and adulthood, youth movements play an important role in the maturation process of youth into adults with values and a sense of social engagement; In our time, dominated by technological innovations and online communication, youth movements offer another alternative - a human encounter "as before" and joint and empowering group action. The youth movements in Israel transmit and educate the values, each in accordance with its ideology. All this, with practical experience: the youth themselves lead the various activities in the youth movements - activities that invite members in movements with diverse experiences, as well as an opportunity for personal development and expression of personal skills (Shemer, 2013).

Studies on youth volunteering around the world, found that volunteering is a beneficial experience and has significant developmental implications for adolescents. According to studies, adolescents who volunteer and are socially involved in settings such as youth movements, feel happier and more optimistic and also have greater self-confidence than their peers who are not active in the youth movements (O'Connor, 2011; Smith et al., 2010; UN Volunteers, 2017). A comprehensive study found that volunteer youth were better integrated into society, had higher self-control, and had a significantly lower tendency to engage in activities of a criminal nature (Shemer, 2013).

### **3. METHOD**

The research method in this study is the qualitative research method. This method is based on the assumption that the best way to show human experience is by a narrative. The qualitative paradigm is appropriate for the current research since it seeks the essence of the human experience and the central meaning that underlies it. This approach focuses on understanding the meaning of the experience for the people who participate in it. The experience of the study participants is the subject of this research, and therefore, the author explores them in the framework of these concepts. In other words, in terms of the meaning that ideas and actions have for the study sample during their period as senior counselors (branch managers) (Shkedi, 2007). This research does not attempt to give key answers to "what", "where", "when", but addresses the "how" and "why", which helps understand the internal leadership processes of the former counselors who participated in the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

#### **3.1. Sample**

The study population includes six participants who were formerly branch managers from two major youth movements. Three were former branch managers of the Scouts in Haifa and three were branch managers of Bnei Akiva in Jerusalem. All currently between the ages of 25-30 and were senior counselors between the ages of 21-25.

#### **3.2. Research Instrument**

The research tool is a semi-structured in-depth interview consisted of 8 questions.

#### **3.3. Research Design**

The study was conducted via Zoom. The author reached out to the participants through mutual friends and relatives. Before conducting the interview, the author had a "small talk" with the participants, explained to them the meaning of the research and its contribution and emphasized that the research was conducted in the mirror of leadership while paying attention to the value structure of their experience as youth counselors. The reliability of the study was maintained by condensing the study in quotations (Shkedi, 2007).

The analysis of the data is done by coding the findings, sorting, and filtering out unnecessary or similar findings. The data were then collected and divided according to key themes (Shkedi, 2007).

### **4. RESULTS**

#### **4.1. Coping with organizing and organization**

The experience provides an opportunity to discover the assertiveness inherent in the participants and their

ability to build an organization while tackling challenges and identifying problems.

S.:

"When I first came to run the branch, I realized that the current staff of counselors was not active and did not contribute to the members. Therefore, I fired all of them and mobilized all the resources to recruit a new team of counselors."

During the challenging role, the participants often worked under conditions that were far from optimal. This can be seen from S. experience when he encountered a difficulty that every organization goes through and that is high employee turnover. S. solved the problem in a creative way and with the help of organizational and leadership ability.

The counseling experience is mainly a personal connection for the senior counselors themselves. The personal connection is significant to the success of the goals.

A.:

"You feel that you are a meaningful person and have a built-in desire that the youth will love you and make you feel a part of them."

It seems that the participants perceive the personal connection as important.

One of the important principles of leadership is to be attentive to the followers. It was evident that the participants showed great deal of consideration.

M.:

"On Tuesdays I would arrive at the place, relatively early, and organize it to create a good atmosphere for the members."

#### **4.2. Personal Engagement**

One of the components of a leader is the ability to set a personal example. The counselors acted to engage and set a personal example.

R.:

"I would greet everyone and make sure that each one of the members is with their counselors and they are collaborating as well."

Part of setting an example is not demanding from others what you are not willing to demand from yourself. From S., we can learn how he implemented that theme.

S.:

"I decided to take on all the tasks associated with the group, and entrust counselors, to cope solely with recruiting members since it was important for us to get as many youths as possible to actively participate in the movement's programs. Therefore, I performed many tasks which are ordinarily under the responsibility of my team, to make sure that they would be free to concentrate on the young members."

### **4.3. Leadership**

It is evident that one of the things that guided the participants is the desire to lead also out of a personal sense of mission.

Y.:

"I felt that I would and could continue with this line, out of a sense of mission and efficiency."

It is clear from D. that he sees himself as a leader and his role as a senior counselor enabled it.

D.

"I have something in me that really likes to take part and be responsible, lead, be the one who drives processes and things."

The senior counselors organized the members for social activities in the community.

Y.:

"On one occasion I initiated a task that involved all of the members and the junior counselors and that is garbage collection from all over the city. We received large garbage bags from the municipality. All the members participated and wore the movement uniforms holding big, orange bags. They managed to sweep the task, passers-by and after a while it was no longer possible to differentiate between members and local residents. They all worked together to clear the streets from garbage. In the meeting that followed, all the members wanted to talk about was how much they felt empowered by the garbage collection initiative.

It is evident that this framework, of education for values in after school hours, contributes to the empowerment of the youth. The study participants talked about values of community and giving as their values shared between unity and society, in which they see supreme and inclusive values.

A.:

"The value of unity is a value without which, no group can exist. There must be brotherhood among the members of the movement in order for us to move forward and act."

An important value that constitutes one of the goals of the youth movements is community. Participants internalized this value, which gave them social tools of containing and observation.

Y.:

"In terms of values, it is the ability to be a part of a community, a population that is diverse, to rejoice in it, to love it, to move forward together with it."

In addition, the participants also expressed social values of giving.

G.:

"Starting with the junior counselors and the senior counselors, where they don't give, there is nothing there."

And they also received social values of action.

D.:

"We performed all kinds of volunteer activities and created initiatives that their essence is act for the sake of the other, especially to show the children (members) that they don't live only for themselves."

These values of volunteering and giving to others, contribute to the empowerment of the contributors themselves.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

When we refer to the counsellor as a leader, as we do in this study, we can see how the quality of the leaders is reflected in their role. Bennis and Nanus (1985) argue that a leader is a "master of change" and indeed, the research participants appear to have been agents of change during their counselling experience in youth movements. This experience allowed them to discover the assertiveness inherent in them and their ability to build an organization when faced with challenges they had not been prepared for before. Gardner (1990) argued that a leader is a person who adjusts systemic policy to the field and that he or she, warns of flawed policies and solves problems. The participants encountered situations in which they were required to make organizational changes, such as replacing the entire counselling team.

Gardner (1990) also argued that the leader has a role to play in creating a mind-set in society as a whole. The counsellors were able to increase their population through unification and formation. They managed to sweep the junior counsellors after them, as Antonakis and Day (2018) argued, that one of the important things a leader needs is to involve people around collective goals. It is evident that this is reflected in the behaviour of the participants. One of the important things that defines a leader according to Bass (1985), is the ability to set a personal example. In doing so, the leaders empower their followers, in this case, both the junior counsellors and the members, while setting a personal example. One of the participants said he arrived earlier, taking on a load of chores and tasks to make it easier for the junior counsellors. This serves as a personal example and as asserted (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1995), such behaviour inspires and invokes action among the followers. According to the study participants, one of the things that came up was their personal engagement with the members of the movement. A transformational leader is a leader who communicates personally with his or her followers. It is also evident from the participants' words that they aspired to be loved by their followers. Not only did they inspired the junior counsellors to do what they wanted them to do, but they wanted these actions to be conducted out of will and warmth. These are basically the principles of transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1995). When the leader instils motivation and enthusiasm in his and her followers, the followers emulate their leader's values and ideals (House, 1988).

The study participants empowered the junior counsellors and members and instilled in them a trust that they followed them and their tasks, all of which are the marks of transformational leadership (Erkutlu, 2008), and by doing so, they were able to bring their followers to success.

In terms of value, we can see how the experience empowered the participants. They felt that they had been given a lesson for life, which added to their personal identity. Gross and Goldart (2017), contended that when volunteering is interesting and challenging, the volunteers act out of a sense of worth and giving. This value can be seen in the narrative of the participants who described the variety of values they received from the movement, the value of giving was one of them and they instilled this value in their followers as well. By doing so, a sense of ability and competence was created in them (Gross and Goldart, 2017).

In terms of social action, Magen (1997) found that involvement in volunteering indicates a stronger desire for personal commitment. It is evident that the research participants have a deep commitment. Gross and Goldart (2017), argue that adolescents' involvement in social activity is of high importance because the sense of helping others and the sense of self-benefit, act as empowering factors and the consciousness of personal identity. Magen et al. (1992) found among young people from low socioeconomic neighbourhoods, that when they were motivated by the desire to contribute and help others and when they were actually involved in doing so, their sense of self-worth increased and their sense of coherence was strengthened and with it, the ability to experience life to a more fulfilling and happier levels.

More recent studies also demonstrate the contribution of civic engagement among adolescents. Callina et al. (2014) researched the term Hope among adolescents in

various contexts. Adolescents' sense of hope was found to be woven from all sets of life, including their contribution to the community and society. McBride et al. (2011) researched youth volunteer programs in Latin America and the Caribbean and concluded that volunteering enables youth to take on significant roles that contribute to their development.

It can be concluded that the study participants, in retrospect, were aware of their power and strengths and the fact that they can attest to themselves today that they have moved things, led and driven processes, indicates high awareness and growth as a result of the process.

### **5.1. Limitations of the Study**

Since this is a qualitative study that was conducted on a small sample, it is naturally not inclusive. In contrast to quantitative research, none of the answers to the interview questions were identical to each other. Because this is a completely subjective view of the participants, each question had answers as the number of participants, which sometimes made it difficult to find a connecting line in some of the questions, and sometimes required deepening the meaning in order to make the analysis continuous and non-schematic. To overcome this problem the author focused on analysing findings that directly relate to the research question.

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