From personal ethos to organizational vision: Narratives of visionary educational leaders

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Abstract

Purpose – Successful visionary educational leaders promote a shared vision with great commitment and manage to connect other organizational members to it. In spite of this, the source of their personal commitment to the organizational vision has not yet been the subject of extended study. This study aims to correct this by investigating leaders' personal ethos; the personal experiences and values which form their motives and personality. This study furthermore considers the influence of personal ethos on the content of the vision promoted in educational organizations. Finally, it explores the link between leaders' personal vision and the organizational vision they promote.

Design/methodology/approach – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with visionary educational leaders. These interviews were narrative in nature and aimed to explore the development process and the interrelation of personal and organizational vision in an educational framework.

Findings – Data indicate that visionary educational leaders do not separate their personal vision from their organizational vision. Furthermore, the educational leaders interviewed told of formative experiences which affected their worldview and shaped their personal ethos. Personal ethos proved to be a key element in formulating the leaders' personal and organization vision. Four prominent factors emerged as central to the personal ethos of educational leaders: identity, culture and values, professional experience and family.

Originality/value – The findings suggest that educational leaders should engage in a process of self-reflection in order to form a significant personal vision to which they can fully commit. Furthermore, the insights of leaders about what's important to them can enable an open dialogue with other organizational members and the development of a shared vision.

Keywords: Leadership, Principals, Vision, Narrative Inquiry

1. Introduction

In recent years we have witnessed a growing number of schools and educational NGOs formulating their own vision as a means of guiding organizational activity, very often in the form of a "credo" or formal doctrine. This phenomenon is related, among other things, to the assumption that vision focuses the energy within the organization and increases its effectiveness (Bogler and Nir, 2001). Furthermore, it has been argued that a shared vision of the organization provides vigor and focus to organizational learning (Wang et al., 2004), uniting people around the image of the desired future, and generating mutual commitment among them (Senge, 1990).

In fact, most researchers agree that vision is an important component of any organization and is necessary for organizational success (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Senge, 1990; Collins and Porras, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1995; Frese et al., 2003). The process of formulating a vision is long and complex, and usually begins with the leader's unique personal ethos. According to Katz (1999), in formulating a personal ethos, the leader is "trying to trace what it motivates him to influence, trying to identify what a reality he wishes to promote, and trying to learn from the people who influenced him and past experience" (p. 135). The ethos reflects his patterns of thinking and acting (ibid), and as such significantly affects his personal vision of the organization.

Different studies have focused on the various characteristics that can be attributed to organizational-educational visions. For example, Larwood et al. (1995) classifies vision statements by their level of innovation, difficultly, and flexibility; while Korland (2006) classifies three types of school visions according to content: mission oriented, inspirational and communication oriented.

Most studies in the field, however, have ignored the complex system of relationships between the process of developing an organizational vision and its content (Larwood et al., 1995). As a result, no studies have been conducted investigating the influence of past personal experiences and values that shape leaders' motives and personality - i.e. leaders' personal ethos - on the content of the vision they promote in their organizations. The innovative contribution of this narrative research is the light it sheds on this relationship through the use of personal-professional narratives.

2. Organizational Vision

There are many definitions in the literature of the concept "organizational vision." Most of them share the view that organizational vision reflects a desired ideal for the organization's activity (Daft, 1999; Levy, 2000; Garcia-Morales et al., 2006). Often, vision is described as an organizational compass that points in the direction the organization should aim (Levy, 2000). Some researchers expand the definition of vision to include organizational goals and strategies for achieving them (Yukl, 1998). Others emphasize shared values (Berson, Shamir, Avolio and Popper, 2001). According to Katz (1999) successful organizational vision establishes principles and values that guide the daily routine of the organization and construct its meaning. In addition, it has been stressed that vision plays an important role in creating a distinct organizational identity by uniting members of the organization and promoting their sense of commitment and belonging (Landau et al., 2006).

The notion of vision is undoubtedly of great importance to organizations for a number of reasons. Vision is perceived as directing the organization and its members to unified values and standards, as well as encouraging commitment at all levels of the organization (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Garcia-Morales et al., 2006). It functions as a "glue" holding together different organization units and activities (Katz, 1999), enabling every member to integrate his desires and needs into the organization's goals and its future development paths. As such it is an important element in increasing the motivation of organizational members (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). In addition, it has been contended that a shared futuristic vision, worthy and attainable, pushes the organization to excel and succeed better in the long term (Nanus, 1992).

It is further argued that organizational vision is no less a central element of educational environments. A literature review recently performed shows that school vision may serve as a measure of school performance and is a significant factor in planning the curriculum, the teaching methods and the professional development of the educational staff (Korlnd, 2006). In each of these areas, visionary schools are considered to be more effective in achieving their goals (ibid).

The success of an organizational vision largely depends on its development process. This process is described as complex and gradual. For example, Katz (1999) and Nanus (1992) present a five-step model demonstrating how to create a vision and realize it. This model stipulates: 1) The leader's formulation of a personal ethos 2) The creation of an organizational vision by the leader in cooperation with other members

of the organization 3) Formulating and focusing the organizational vision. 4) Making the vision tangible by identifying opportunities for assimilating it. 5) Integrating the vision into organizational activity and making it "real." Chance (1992) presents a similar model designed to aid school principals to develop an individualized school vision. This model includes three stages: 1) Principal self-evaluation and development of a personal vision. 2) Formulating a school vision. 3) Communicating and assimilating it.

The way these models are structured highlights the significance, not to say centrality, of the leader in developing organizational vision. Visionary leadership not only promotes the organizational vision by inspiring people (Foster and Akdere, 2007), but also exercises a personal impact on its definition (Chance, 1992).

3. Personal Vision and Personal Ethos

Although the formulation of an organizational vision should be a process in which other members of the organization participate, most of the time it is framed by the leader and not by the followers (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). A situation in which an organizational vision exists without a visionary leader (Foster and Akdere, 2007) is the exception rather than the rule. Organizational vision starts at an individual level (Crossan and Mazutis, 2008), so it depends on the leader's personal ethos, representing his personal desire regarding the organization's future (Chance, 1992). Furthermore, the leader's personal vision has an important role as a starting point and a base for developing a shared vision with other organizational members (Manasse, 1986). The visionary leader therefore faces many challenges in relation to the internal organizational environment as well as the external environment. First, internally, he must be a leadership role model that can change perceptions, train, share, minimize objections, determine direction and define challenges. Second, externally, he must a spokesperson and market the vision; mobilize support and represent it (Nanus, 1992).

It is, as a result, important to carefully examine the leader's personal ethos, which affects the formulation of his personal vision. This ethos reflects the leader's values and believes (Chance, 1992) and affects his patterns of thought and action in every frame and context (Katz, 1999). The personal ethos displays motivational factors driving the leader to influence and is strongly linked to the goal he wishes to promote. The leader's process of formulating a personal ethos is described as one of personal reflection and examination (Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Crossan and Mazutis,

2008), sometimes under the guidance or with the cooperation of others. The ethos is shaped and molded by the leader's personal experiences, his professional and organizational experiences, his needs and desires, his values, his personality and his abilities (Katz, 1999).

In the literature it has been contended that leader's personal values are a key to understanding his personal vision (Chance, 1992). The value system is considered stable and is presumed to accompany a person throughout his life (ibid). Since the visionary leader tries to establish his personal values within the organization he leads (Murphy, 2000; Crossan and Mazutis, 2008), they may be identified echoing in the vision he has formulated. It has been contended that despite the importance of organizational and environmental constraints in vision formulation, they take second place in the eyes of the visionary leader when developing the vision (Chance, 1992). Chance adds that the leader's analysis of the organizational reality reflects his personal values. Thus, personal ethos in fact affects both the perception of the current organizational reality and the perception of the desired organizational reality. The elements of personal ethos that the leader impresses on the organizational vision are the elements which stimulate his commitment to spread it and win the support of others.

It is important to note that sometimes there is a distinction between the personal vision of the leader and the organizational vision, since his vision does not always become the shared vision of his organizational partners. In order to spread and implement his personal vision within the organization, the leader must maintain an open dialogue with organizational members, and examine how his vision of the organization is received in the existing context by his partners (Bogler and Nir, 2001). Visionary leaders who are widely recognized as such are those who are able to maintain a strong connection between their personal vision and the organizational one (Shamir and Eilam, 2005). For example, it has been contended that visionary leadership changes the organizational climate and enables employees to understand and accept the leader's plans (Larwood et al., 1995). In this situation, the leader's personal vision and his organizational vision are complementary (Katz, 1999).

4. Method

This work's research method is qualitative and derived from a phenomenological approach designed to reveal and understand the subjective experience of an individual

as it is perceived by him (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). To this end, the study employs narrative interviews focused on visionary leaders' stories. The narratives are considered as cognitive schema in which people organize their lives and identities (Sarbin, 1986). The analysis is based on coherence, causality and intention. The person gives his life and his experiences meaning with the act of storytelling, and these stories in turn shape his life and his relationships (White and Epston, 1990). A person's story explains the way he relates himself to events that he believes have meaning, and as such opens a window into the internal world of a person (Lieblich, Tuval-Maschiach and Zilber, 1998).

There is a consensus in the literature that visionary leaders can or should be able to express their organizational vision statement clearly (Larwood et al., 1995). The interview approach was selected on the assumption that an individual may organize his life story into a holistic narrative giving every event and place meaning (Lieblich, Zilber and Tuval-Mashiach, 1995). In this way one can shed light on the personal motives and meanings present to a leader in promoting a specific organizational vision.

4.1 Sample

Thirty nine visionary educational leaders from the public sector and the third sector participated in this study, including 27 women and 12 men. The purpose was to interview successful educational leaders with clearly defined visions. The interviewees included elementary school principals, high school principals, special education school principals, hospital school principals, supervisors, directors of educational training programs for teachers and principals, and leading personnel in the Israeli Ministry of Education.

4.2 Research Process

The study is based on comprehensive, semi-structured interviews of a personal-professional nature. The visionary leaders were questioned regarding the organization they lead, their organizational vision and their personal ethos. The interviews start with an open question asking the interviewee to speak about the organization and its vision. After the interviewee finishes his initial narrative, the interviewer elaborates with questions related to the specific times, situations and other claims of that narrative. In these respects, the interviewee is asked to elaborate and enrich his story.

For example: "Can you elaborate and describe the time at which that process began?", "Can you describe the situation in which you informed your team of that decision?", "Can you remember the meeting at which this argument took place?" In the final stage of the interview, the interviewee is questioned regarding issues not raised in the interview, or matters requiring further explanation. Examples of such question include: "Tell me about the partners who helped you implement the vision?", "What are the most important values for you when implementing the vision?", "Can you recall an event that encapulates the hardships you faced as part of the process of realizing your vision?"

The narrative story emerging from the interview reflects the leader's identity and worldview, as well as his relations with others and with his environment. Moreover it reveals how the leader organizes and structures his professional and personal inner world (Mitchell, 1981). Thus the narrative interview makes it possible to achieve a rich description (Fraser, 2004) of the leader's personal ethos and organizational vision.

The aim of the qualitative analysis is to provide a meaning to an unclear text through a reasonable interpretation with internal regularity (Bilo, 1986). Narrative analysis deciphers and exposes the interpretation and selection processes which the story teller enforces on reality in order to create the story. This study uses a method of analysis first proposed by Giorgi (1975), which allows the analysis of social reality from the subjective view point of those experiencing it. In the first stage of analysis, the interview is divided into categories of meaning, with each category receiving a name embodying its central theme. In the second stage, central themes related to the research subject are examined and grouped. In the third stage, an attempt is made to explain the studied phenomenon theoretically by analysis of the hyper-themes of each single story and of all the stories collectively.

5. Findings

During the extensive interviews, educational leaders recount narratives which organize their view of their personal and organizational vision, as well as their view of the personal ethos that inspired them to develop the vision. Qualitative analysis of the leaders' personal-professional stories begins with the classification of the data into two main categories. The first category examines the interpretive mechanisms through with the leader structured his organizational vision in light of his personal vision. The

second exposes the nature of the relationship between the leader's personal ethos and his organizational vision. The first part of the findings section shows the lack of separation between leaders' personal and organizational visions; the second part shows how leaders' personal ethos' influence the organizational vision they formulate and promote in their organization.

During the interviews, leaders reveal their vision in both explicit and implicit ways. Each of the personal-professional stories contain references defining the organization's *raison d'être* and explaining the leader's motivations. Despite the finding that every leader has a unique worldview and different personal values informing his vision, all organizational visions included a focus on the welfare of the children.

5.1 "I Feel Like it's My Baby ... I Feel that it is me" – A Lack of Separation between Organizational and Personal Vision

In the interviews, managers describe a sense of belonging and a sense of "ownership" over their organizations. Furthermore, a deep emotional identification with the organizational vision is present among most interviewees. This on several occasions causes them to perceive the organization and its vision as reflecting their own identity and self worth. This is epitomized in the comments of a principal regarding the organizational vision of her school: "I feel it's my baby, I've created something special here, something new, I feel that it is me." This principal also notes that if the school were ever to close down, she would experience actual feelings of loss and grief. Another interviewee, who also states that the organization "is me," explains the source of the strong emotional connection he feels to organizational vision as follows:

> It's not just a job, it's a kind of mission. So-called life mission, you can't do it from nine to five. This is not about 'approximately,' well, come on let's go home, it's not. It's not! Once you are invested in an ideology or a certain idea, you have a chance to do something that is your own, and that you believe in so much. So it draws you in, it draws you in.

A clear sense of mission is apparent in all the managers' stories. This sense of mission serves to fuse their identity, goals and personal vision into the organizational vision. Among some, the sense of calling is grounded in a sense of fulfilling unmet

needs. For instance, a school director who was a partner in founding a school for children of immigrants in one of Israel's small peripheral towns, describes the source of her strong personal commitment to implementing her vision as follows:

> The needs of the place drew me, a sense that I am needed here and that here education is more important than in other places where it's taken for granted ... I feel a commitment toward the people we [as a society] brought here ... they were denied the proper conditions to develop and advance themselves in this country.

Among others, the sense of personal calling and commitment to the organizational vision is presented as providence or even physiological necessity. For example, one school manager explains the meaning of the sense of calling which accompanies her vision: "A long time ago I said I don't ever want to be a teacher. Once that changed, there was no way back. It was like destiny, a guiding hand from above shedding light on the fact that I should work in education." She adds: "The educational craft must run through your veins, otherwise you can't be an educator, once it flows through your veins you can't get away even for a second." The principal of a boarding school for underprivileged girls, describes her sense of calling as a given: "The work with youth, who never had real opportunities to realize its potential, has formed a social impulse in my bones."

The interviews show that visionary leaders merge their personal and organizational visions; and that in fact they receive the organization as a setting to express and realize their personal vision. Though emphasizing the importance of the strong connection found between the personal and the professional, some of the managers recount personal experiences in which they felt an incompatibility between the two. They claim such experiences create a cognitive and emotional dissonance, making it difficult to remain in the organization over time. These feelings are clearly described by one of the interviewees:

> I know that when I believed in something and it was not done the way I believed it should be, I have moved on, I've changed the atmosphere, I've

changed the setting. Otherwise you go around with stomach ache; you're filled with questions whether you're doing the right thing or not.

The leaders also note that their personal vision, which they brought to their organization, reflects past experiences. One interviewee elaborated: "The vision of the school today, as I perceived it, derived from my "credo." That contains values, beliefs, perceptions and experiences from different times of my life." These influences, representing the leader's personal ethos, leave their imprint on his professional activity and on the vision he develops for his organization.

5.2 Personal Ethos as a Source of Organizational Vision
Each of the educational managers interviewed reveals a distinctive personal ethos, which manifests itself in the specific organizational context under which each manager operates. The manifestation of personal ethos enables us to see the latent link between the leader's personal and organizational visions. Typically, the leader's personal ethos evolves from past experiences which have left a deep imprint on his worldview and values. From the personal-professional narratives it can be seen that managers choose to emphasize certain aspects of their ethos. Four prominent factors influencing personal ethos emerge from the managers' stories: identity, culture and values, professional experience and family. These factors are mentioned in the interviews as significant, in many cases vital, in formulating the manager's personal and organization vision. The majority of the managers emphasize a single prominent factor, while others describe a mixture of other factors in addition.

"Know yourself, be yourself" – the identity factor (I and myself, I and society.
The narratives of the interviewees show that personal style may be built around the factor of identity. The identity factor is based, on the one hand, on a man's reflective relationship with himself; and on the other hand, on his relationship with the society in which he lives in. For example, some interviewees describe influences on their personal ethos accruing from past episodes of self-discovery which defined their actions and thought patterns. An illustration of this can be found in an interviewee who founded an organization to develop youth leadership. The interviewee testifies about his childhood:

I never knew what I want to do growing up; I always made decisions in order to postpone the big decision. 'Well let's study sociology in high school in order to postpone the decision, and let's study psychology in order to delay it'. I studied because I thought that it wasn't binding. If you're a doctor you are a doctor, you can not be anything else.

This process of self-revelation and search are a cornerstone in the personal and professional vision of this interviewee. Later on in the interview, he states: "This is the story of my life, this I had already realized a long time ago ... to develop people to their full potential." Afterward, he explains that the key to his organizational vision is: "Know yourself, be yourself. That's the story, know who you are, what you are and what you will be." A different interviewee, who designs and runs educational leadership programs, talks about a change in her self-identity during her thirties following traumatic events in her life. She describes how the death of her brother in an accident, as well as undergoing a surgical procedure, sparked her desire to engage in activism in order to influence and change the world:

I woke up from the surgery ... and looked out [of the window] and I told myself ... I will learn something that can make a difference in this damn world. So on one hand there is my brother who was killed, and on the other hand all of a sudden I had to deal [with the implications of the surgery] ... It was not, wasn't something in my childhood ... when I woke up after my surgery, it was the start of the change, yes it was.

The interviewee elaborates and tells about her strong desire "to do something that will lead to change in other people." Her will to affect and change received scope when she was appointed to head the educational leadership program. She says that, despite the program's existing framework, she received a free hand in formulating a new vision and choose to promote one to "establish a home for those who want to be educational leaders, [where] they may view themselves as colleagues at a nurturing place preparing them to lead the educational system." This organizational vision is compatible with her personal ethos and her need to influence and change the world for the better.

Other interviewees describe how the experience of the search for identity may wear a social aspect, if its formulation relates to social experiences such as relationships and communication with others. For instance, one of the interviewees, a school principal, describes a childhood experience as a central element of her personal ethos. This interviewee recounts how when she was a child and grew up in a small community, she was diagnosed as gifted and moved to a boarding school far from home. She describes this transition as a personal crisis due to the fact that she was severed from her natural and supportive environment. These personal feelings of alienation and social rejection are expressed when she says that while in her home-town she was considered to be a gifted student, in the boarding school she was considered a mediocre one.

The traumatic childhood experience left its markings on the principal and is reflected in the organizational vision she presents. In the description of the vision organizational the principal stresses that "it is important to me that people in my organization be happy, love the profession, and choose it out of love and not from lack of options. I want to see joy, faith in the profession, openness, acceptance, empathy, perseverance and learning." One can see how childhood experiences characterized by sadness, detachment and trauma influence her in her adulthood to as she envisions her organizational environment as full of acceptance and joy. She adds that her ideal organizational environment is:

> Very feminine, supports, has a lot of emotion… courtyard, rumors, and gossip ... less concrete. It's less focused on tasks and outputs. Less economic in it's approach, more educational. There is a family atmosphere, kinship, forgiveness, no hierarchy, everything remains in the family.

The narrative of this principal provides the link between her personal experience of social alienation as a child, and her vision aiming to develop an intimate and supportive environment. The social influence on personal identity is also marked in another interviewee, who today heads an alternative school. This interviewee testifies about herself:

> I always felt different, the way I looked, I dressed differently, I was bold,
> earrings in unconventional places, nose-ring, tattoos. I always felt that I should
> confront the stigma of being different and it took a lot of energy from me.

This principal says that the uniformity and the lack of flexibility in the educational system increased her distress when she was at school. She mentions that "already at the age of five, when I was brought to kindergarten, I climbed the fence and walked by foot back to my house ... I just couldn't stand the place." The interviewee explains that even in high school she "was not really there." She goes on elaborate how educational difficulties, partly due to undiagnosed learning disabilities, deepened her sense of isolation in high school and later on in the teachers' seminar she attended. According to her story, these experiences marked her in such a way as to significantly affect the organizational vision she promotes. She says, "I decided to work in education, in search of an affirmative experience." As a result, her vision is to enable children to be "individuals, at ease, calm, in a safe place. To allow them [to grow] in a different place than I knew".

From the interviewees' narratives one notices that the marks of social experiences on vision formation can also be indirect. Another alternative school principal mentions difficult events she witnessed as child and wanted as an adult to prevent or correct. She wishes to create an alternative environment able to protect children's rights.

> As a child I was a very disciplined pupil, I was a good student .... Such a good
> girl ... I never had problems ... I remember that I was appalled when I
> witnessed the principal hitting two children ... I heard him hitting them as an
> educational punishment and I remember the terrible fear I had and I didn't
> know ... I was so horrified and I had no idea what to do about it as a child, I
> thought that is what was supposed to happen ... Already back then, it was
> something that planted a hidden desire in me [to protect and help children] and
> maybe after some time had past that caused me to go in this direction.

"Vision that becomes a way of life ... or a way of life that is anchored in vision" – the factor of values and culture. Another factor present in the interviewees' personal ethos relates to values and culture. Educational leaders note in the interviews that values are part of their personal ethos and that they had influenced them during the formulating of the organizational vision. These influences are reported by most managers as accompanying them throughout their professional activity and personal lives. Prominent values expressed in the interviews included the pursuit of excellence, innovation and learning, as well as human and community development. For example, one interviewee, who had been an educational manager, shows how her humanistic values affected her actions during her career:

> If I look back on all the organizations I led ... I brought to all of them the same things: same attitude towards the individual, the basic understanding that organizations are built from people, first of all from people and only after that people in the roles of pupil or teacher, but first of all people ... This vision became a way of life for me or a way of life that was anchored in vision. I don't t know which came first, but this worldview influences every organization you work in and also the field you deal with.

Another value she notes as accompanying her in her work is professional excellence. She says that it "becomes a way of life so that you can't compromise for anything less, because in every course you take you want to do your best and get to the top." She adds that this value also shaped her behavior during her military service:

> I was asked when I was an officer in the officers training course why would a simple solider volunteer for officer training ... My philosophy says go through each course you can, exhaust all you have to get from this course you are in ... So, yes, that also means be an officer ... What is one more year [of volunteer service]? It's really nothing compared to the ninety years a person lives. But my approach is, if you can get a grade of 90, why compromise on 80? Go for 90, work harder, study more, take extra help from teachers, you'll get the 90 and see that you can also get to 95 or 100.

These two personal values, humanism on the one hand, and excellence on the other hand constitute the personal ethos of this principal. They are also manifest in the organizational vision of the school she founded and directed: "My life mission was to found a school with my own bare hands, based on my dreams and the dreams of the educational staff which accompanies me ... To prove that anything is possible, and that every child can succeed." She further notes that: "I founded an American style school, in terms of the service policy: quality service, accessible service, everything on the phone, not inconveniencing people, respecting the parent's time, even if it requires extra hours in the afternoon." Her organizational vision is built from a combination of her personal values: humanism, placing the child and parents at the center of the school's activity, and the pursuit of excellence.

Values of innovation and learning appear in the vision of a different principal.

> [I prefer] unorthodox goals, making the system sweat… Thinking about new
> alternatives, doing something that was never done before. Initiating a new
> program, teaching students in a different way ... [in order] not to fall into
> mediocrity ... and to learn, constantly learn from others.

Another example of the way in which the values and culture of the leader's personal ethos affects the leader's vision can be seen in another interviewee. This interviewee, heading a religious boarding school for girls, emphasizes a feminist concept of equality among genders.

> I came to an established institution, it was already 25 years old ... I didn't
> want to impose my ideology ... But the most important thing in my view is
> that I am the first female principal [here] and the statement [made is] that the
> place is headed by a woman, managing and doing the same things as were
> always done ... that in the past people thought only men could do.

> This value is particularly prominent in light of the interviewee's remarks
> regarding the patriarchal culture of the religious society in which she was
> raised. The personal importance to her of the value of equality is what results
> in its incorporation in the educational vision she chooses to promote: "My

dream is that every girl understands that the most important thing in life is first
of all her education, developing her mind, that she becomes a woman who can
stand up for herself as a person and will look for the right spouse, someone
who is equal to her, not above her or below her, someone who will complete
her."

"Thirty years of educational activity" - the factor of professional experience.
An additional factor prominent in the personal ethos of some of the interviewees is
professional experience. This factor includes all past professional experiences
affecting the current organizational vision promoted by the leader. The factor is seen
clearly reflected in the comments of a school principal who stresses: "My vision was
built from thirty years of educational activity." Some interviewees express the wish to
"repair" and change a familiar educational reality. For instance, one interviewee who
worked in the past in adult leadership development came to the conclusion that:

> With all due respect to the high quality work done there, leadership
> development is a long, hard, Sisyphean and complex process, and can not be
> accomplished in a one week workshop. If you want to do it right and
> thoroughly, you need to catch people when they are much younger, work with
> them much more profoundly, and create a change that is sustainable and can
> be passed on [to others].

In fact, his professional experience in leadership research leads him to
formulate a different approach to leadership development. These insights, together
with a new youth development organization he encounters, cause him to change
career and devote his time fully developing to his personal vision under a new
organizational framework. Another interviewee, who heads a boarding school, also
emphasizes her desire to correct elements of her past professional experience. She
recounts how her past experiences as a vice principal at a school primarily populated
by student of low socio-economic status pushed her towards a vision of integration for
the children in her boarding school:

> At the school where I worked ... we saw how [segregation] is not good, and
> how it prevents the children from overcoming their poverty ... The idea of

integrating [the boarding school children] in the community arose after I arrived ... We discovered that it causes the children to feel good about themselves. Because they are able show their strengths and receive reinforcement… without all the environmental problems that would have distracted them.

Other interviewees emphasize "continuity" and the development of familiar power bases in their leadership vision. For example, the principal of a new school chooses to create a school vision that combines two areas familiar to her from past experience: "I looked to fields that are very familiar to me, science which I mastered in, and social and community activism."

"A grandma can be a significant thing" - the family factor. Another important factor apparent in the visionary managers' stories is family. A number of the interviewees emphasize the influence of figures from their family environment in shaping their personal ethos. For example, one school principal leading a teachers training program, cites her grandmother and mother as a significant factor in formulating her vision. She relates that her grandmother made her learn the meaning of social criticism:

The ability to view society critically was in me from a very young age. my grandmother was communist, maybe it's from there ... When I think about it, one of the strongest memories I have of my grandma is after the victory in the 1967 war, I was still a child in the first or second grade ... I remember my grandmother sitting with me in front of the television screen and saying to me that war and occupation are bad, nobody said such things at that time ... I remember it as a child, maybe a grandma can be a significant thing.

This same principal connects her idealistic ambition to expose and correct social injustices to her mother's disability and the hardships it caused:

I have a partially deaf mother who paid a heavy price in the educational system, even though she is a very intelligent woman ... She could not keep pace [with the others]. When she was growing up, they weren't aware hearing

problems back then, so they made her repeat first grade ... Afterwards they
realized that it wasn't an understanding problem but that she didn't hear well,
so they moved her up to the front row.

It appears then, that the perceptions and personalities of her immediate family
bring her to - "a place very critical of Israeli society with a lot of energy invested in
making a change." Her decision to establish a teachers training program on critical
pedagogic principles follows. The program trains and empowers teachers by
examining issues such as social inequality, as well as political and social
discrimination. This educational vision of her program reflects an personal ethos
shaped by growing up with strong family role models.

The family dimension is also visible in the personal ethos of a different
interviewee who is the principal of a hospital school for hospitalized children. The
interviewee describes how her parents took care of her when she was ill with polio at
the age of two. She says their devotion rehabilitated her. Her parents, with their views
and attitudes, are a role model and inspiration for her.

My parents set an example for me filled with a lot of positive energy, care and
much faith ... They really took care of me in every possible sense ... the
moment I was ill my parents took me to the sea, and every day before school,
summer or winter, we went to sea and swam, swam a lot. And I think it
educated my body physically and I needed to prove that I was like all the other
children.

The example set by her parents during her childhood illness forms a strong
personal ethos that substantially influences her organizational vision for the hospital
school she heads: "every sick child can be educated and we need to provide him with
the education suitable for him."

On the other hand, some family experiences have a negative impact, and in
these cases vision creates a 'second chance' to repair past experiences:

There were things I wanted to [learn] like music but my father broke my flute.
He did not want me to learn music, [instead] I learned to sing and joined a
band, but I didn't tell my father. When I got first prize I was very happy.

Someone in the street said to my father 'congratulations, your daughter received the first place'. My dad was happy because he thought it was school related. He answered, 'yes I know she is always like this'. They said to him 'no, this is her first time - why don't you let her sing, she has a beautiful voice, why are you hiding it?' ... My dad came home and broke my flute and told me I could never be in a band. So the first thing I did as a principal was to organize a school band.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This research examines the stories of educational visionaries and contributes to our understanding of the personal meaning a leader gives to the organizational vision he formulates. It also enables us to see the link between personal and professional vision. The innovation of this narrative research lies in its examination of the interpretation leaders themselves give to the link between their personal ethos and the vision content they promote in their organization.

It demonstrates the perceived lack of separation between the leaders' personal vision and the organizational one. The interviewees express strong feelings of "ownership" and sense of mission which fuses their own vision with the organizational vision in a deep emotional bond. Furthermore, this research sheds light on previous research dealing with organizational values in schools (Friedman, 2001), insofar as it is the first study to examine the connection between principals' interpretation of their personal values, i.e. motives guiding their behaviors (Schwartz, 1999), and their interpretation of the organizational values which they promote.

The findings show that there is a danger in adopting an organizational vision incompatible with the personal ethos of the educational leader. Moreover, it reinforces claims against promoting an organizational vision which does not match the values of the manager or have a personal meaning for him. Actions of this kind may lead to feelings of guilt (Hemingway, 2005) and prevent the development of commitment on the part of the leader which is necessary to the success of the vision (Manasse, 1986; Nanus, 1992).

The study acquaints us with the stories related to personal ethos recounted by leaders, as well as their own understandings of the personal meanings which motivate them to promote vision processes. Most of the educational managers who participated in the study emphasize a particular factor of their own ethos most responsible for the

organizational vision that they promote. Some of them noted a mixture of factors, although emphasizing one or another. Among the factors shaping leaders' vision that this study exposes are identity, values and culture, professional experience and family.

We have seen how a principal who in childhood experienced feelings of alienation and solitude seeks to promote a school culture with supportive family characteristics; another manager, who for a long time looked for the right path in his own life, seeks to help others find their place and develop their leadership skills; a religious boarding school principal for girls, who grew up in a patriarchal society, wishes to promote feministic values and gender equality; and another boarding school principal who in her past led a school primarily composed of students from a low socio-economic population, chose to build an integrative learning framework for the boarding school children. Another educational manager, who in interviews emphasizes the importance of family role models which influenced her to develop a critical view of society, founded a teachers training program that encourages and promotes equality and social criticism.

The research findings describe the relationship between the leader's personal ethos and his interpretation of the vision content he promotes. Although the literature has already noted the importance of the personal ethos of the leader, it mainly deals with the development of his capabilities. It has been contended, for example, that the leader should develop awareness to his strengths and weaknesses (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Crossan and Mazutis, 2008). However, the effects of the personal ethos on the content vision as perceived by the leader himself received little notice and mostly only in connection to his personal values (Chance, 1992; Katz, 1999). This study's findings reinforce the claim that values are essential to the development of vision due to their role as a behavioral motivator (Chance, 1992; Katz, 1999; Hemingway, 2005), but additionally it elaborates and points to other important influences on the development of a personal and organizational vision, such as family influences, professional ones, and identity formulating experiences which the individual has experienced during his life.

The findings strengthen the importance of a leader's personal ethos to the formulation his professional vision. Research conducted among teacher trainees also reveals a relationship between their notion of what school is, shaped by their personal experiences in the system, and the educational vision they wish promote as future teachers (Katz, 2000). The relationship between personal experiences and

professional vision receives support in this study. The current study builds on this theme to explore a wide range of experiences in different arenas, personal encounters, and values that influence leaders' professional vision and it's expression in the specific organizational context.

7. Research Limitations and Implications

It is important to note that the sample selection criterion used in the study was 'successful visionary educational leaders.' This criterion led us to select interviewees who were successful in formulating organizational vision and promoting it. Likewise it assigns a central role to the educational leader in initiating and developing the visionary process. The study included only educational leaders in the public sector and in the third sector. The research findings therefore do not represent all educational leaders and are not intended as comprehensive.

Nevertheless, this study innovates by shedding light on the link between leaders' personal ethos and their educational organizational vision by focusing on an aspect so far neglected in research on organizational vision, namely, the personal ethos of mangers and its origins. The study's findings indicate that despite promoting a successful organizational vision, interviewees assign a very personal meaning to the organizational activity and goals. This has practical implications for leadership development processes. The findings support claims emphasizing the need for educational leaders to engage in introspection and to develop self-awareness in order to form a significant personal vision (Manasse, 1986; Chance, 1992; Katz, 1999). Furthermore, the recognition that leaders should be encouraged to revel the personal ethos motivating them, allows for greater control in directing the desired course of action in promoting organizational vision. For example, a process of this type which includes self-reflection enables the manager to consciously grasp what connects him to the organizational vision and thereby enter an open dialogue with other members of the organization on that vision.

Narratives of personal ethos can also be used as a screening instrument in selecting candidates for educational leadership. A candidate's ability to articulate a clear personal ethos may be an indication of his introspective talent and level of maturity, both required characteristics of successful educational leaders. Openness and deep authentic reflection may, however, be hard to induce in a formal screening procedure since a candidate's account of his personal ethos can only be fully

appreciated as a part of his overall personal-professional story. Selection processes are necessarily multifaceted and require the examination of the candidate's full range of abilities, such as pedagogical leadership ability, team development ability and ability to enact a vision and bring about change. Before utilizing the criteria of personal ethos in the selection process of educational leaders, further study should be conducted into the ways these factors are reflected in personal ethos.

Organizational vision is frequently described in the literature as a rope which one should hold at both ends. Researchers emphasize that the leader is a central factor in formulating and shaping the organizational vision according to his personal vision and values, (Katz, 1999; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Blumberg and Greenfield, 1980). And it has also been contended that the values of the leader determine which vision images are considered eligible alternatives (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). On the other hand, to succeed in realizing the vision, the leaders have to transform it into creation shared with other organizational members (Katz, 1999). As a result, the vision can only be embraced in the organization by means of persuasion and enthusiasm and not by force (Bennis and Nanus, 1985).

Success therefore lies in the balance between the need to promote a unified organizational vision shared by all the partners, and the need of the individual to feel that the vision reflects his unique desires and values. Successful shared vision reflects the personal visions of all organizational members and encourages their commitment (Senge, 1990; Bogler and Nir, 2001). It is important to note that a shared vision does not in any way eliminate divergent personal views of the complete vision on the part of each individual in the organization (Senge, 1990). Leadership is only effective when it is able to create a rich shared vision that connects the members of the organization in a personal and meaningful way that also allows each individual to realize his personal vision to some extent. The leader is required to produce a shared vision out of multiple personal visions, but as we have seen that does not eliminate the personal significance of the vision for him. Understanding the personal meaning and content that are significant for the leader enables him to create an open and genuine dialogue with organizational members and to promote a shared vision.

For a better understanding of the influence of personal ethos on organization vision, further research is necessary. It would be worth examining the relationship between personal ethos and the organizational vision promoted by private sector educational leaders. It might also be instructive to compare the ethos' of educational

leaders with those of business leaders. Though the current research includes entrepreneurial founders as well as leaders and manager of existing educational organizations, it has not focused on a comparison between them. It would be highly instructive to examine differences between the personal ethos and organizational vision of entrepreneurial leaders who founded organizations based on a personal vision against those whose came to an existing organization and then tried to impress their personal ethos on it. In light of evidence indicating that women's personal narratives tend to be more emotional and interpersonal in content than those of men (Fivush and Buckner, 2003), it would in addition be instructive to explore how gender differences relate to the various aspects of personal ethos.

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