THE MAKINGS OF A SUCCESSFUL PRINCIPAL:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH STUDY

A doctoral thesis presented

by

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Abstract

Recent research has revealed that a school’s principal is a vital component in delivering quality education to the school’s students. With that in mind, it seems productive to examine effective principals and what they perceive as shaping their effectiveness. Recognizing that effectiveness of principals is defined differently in different contexts, this study addresses the specific context of high schools in Israel, a country with a distinctive cultural milieu and an educational environment featuring strong parental involvement in schools, constant security concerns, and political issues such as decentralization policies. This study used phenomenological methods to analyze data collected from interviews with 10 Israeli high school principals who have been identified as excellent. The 10 interviewees were selected from a group of 25 principals recognized for their excellence by the Israeli Ministry of Education. This study examines what these principals experienced as the major challenges presented by their jobs, their perceptions concerning the behaviors and practices they found to be most effective in meeting the various challenges, and their perspectives on school leadership. In addition to the interview data, field notes concerning the schools where these principals work, as well as their social context and environment, provide perspectives on how the principals were able to excel in their jobs. Data from the interviews were reduced, and the individual narratives were shaped into one coherent description of how an effective principal perceives his or her work and how to succeed in it. This narrative of the essence of the experience highlights the themes, perceptions and perspectives, behaviors, and practices that the principals interviewed identified as important in their success. Their experiences tended to cluster around six repeating themes: vision and planning, leading teachers, dealing with a complicated structure, powerlessness, leading with others and sources of power.
The study found that the four effective practices identified in the literature to be used by successful educational leaders were implemented by the study participants as well. However, due to Israel’s unique educational climate, the emphasis on each of these effective practices was different to what others have reported. The principals participating in the study identified the three major obstacles that appear in the literature: powerlessness, isolation, and dealing with different stakeholders. In addition, they discussed unique aspects of these obstacles within the context of the Israeli educational system. The participants mentioned coping strategies that were both similar and unique to those cited in the literature.

The insights gleaned from this study should prove useful both to the Israeli Ministry of Education and to individual principals who are trying to find their own paths toward excellence in their careers.

Keywords: educational leadership, high schools, principals, leadership practices, school leadership
To my beloved grandparents,

Ruth and Eliezer Pereg

and

Shprintze and Yehezkel Fajnkind,

who instilled in me the love of learning.

Their wisdom and kindness will always live in my heart.
Moses spoke to the Lord, saying:

May God, the Lord of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly

(Numbers, 27)

Moses said: Lord of the universe You who knows the intricacies of the human mind and personality Appoint their leader to be the one who understands their differences and embodies the divine characteristics so as to accommodate all the individuals who comprise the nation

(Rashi)
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem and Significance

Recent years have witnessed a growing acceptance and understanding of the crucial role of effective educational leadership in schools (Davis, Darling-Hamond, Lapointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Portin, 2009). Research on educational leadership emerged as a separate field of knowledge in the early 1990s. Until then, the perception was that educational leadership was merely an insignificant branch of the general discipline of management within the business world (Bush, 2008). Bell (1991) concisely described the field of educational leadership:

We are still guilty of borrowing perspectives, models, concepts and even theories from the world of industry and commerce. . . . Our understandings of educational management are in the main derived from a non-educational framework and this is a weakness both from the conceptual analysis it enables us to make and in terms of our credibility with practitioners in schools (p. 136).

During the last 20 years, this conceptual lacuna has been addressed by researchers who have provided frameworks, models, and research aimed at creating a body of literature on educational leadership. The field was established as a separate and valid academic area of knowledge by “theorists and practitioners who began to develop alternative models based on their observation of, and experiences in, schools and colleges” (Bush, 2008, p. 275).

During these years, four major conceptual shifts were identified in the discourse of the field of educational leadership. One is the meaningful change in terminology from management to leadership (Bush, 2008). A second is the turn toward instructional leadership manifested in the understanding that “principals can no longer simply be administrators and
managers. They must be instructional leaders focused on improving student achievement” (Portin, 2009, p. 5). A third is the adoption of a distributive approach, acknowledging that “a successful school leader more closely resembles an orchestra conductor than a virtuoso soloist” (Mitgang, 2008, p. 2). The fourth is the importance of focusing on effective practices of educational leaders rather than on the special traits or charisma of individuals (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008).

Numerous studies have shown that there is an acute shortage of leadership at the helm of many schools in Israel, Europe, and the United States (Barkol, 1996; Education Writers Association, 2002; Keller, 1998; Krüger, Van Eck, & Vermeulen, 2005; Whitaker, 2003a). One reason is the enormous workload involved in the job. Principals often work extended hours, with workweeks of 60 or even 80 hours (Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001; Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). It is also widely accepted that principals face tremendous pressure (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004), and in recent years, many have found it virtually impossible to cope effectively with the multiple pressures of the job (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006).

Many studies have shown that the school principal is the most important factor in the success of a school (Barth, 1976; Fullan, 2007; Kelley & Peterson, 2007; Levine & Lezotte, 1995; Smith & Andrews, 1989; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Leithwood et al. (2008) confirm that current research clearly shows that “leadership has very significant effects on the quality of school organization and on pupil learning” (p. 29). Moreover, they testify that “there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership” (p. 29). Therefore, for schools to function
properly, or better yet to excel, it is important to identify and define the makings of a successful principal.

Over the last two decades, many studies have focused on the characteristics of highly effective principals and the specific behaviors and actions that enable them to succeed (Blumberg, 1989; Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2008; Whitaker, 2003b). Leithwood et al. (2008) present a comprehensive set of core practices that characterize outstanding principals, obtained by compiling and summarizing numerous recent quantitative and qualitative international studies conducted in the field of educational leadership. Much of the current research on educational leadership uses Leithwood et al.’s (2008) taxonomy of practices, in a wide range of contexts and settings (Crum & Sherman, 2008; Crum, Sherman, & Myran, 2009; Drysdale, Goode, & Gurr, 2009). This research study uses that set of core effective practices as a framework for a phenomenological study of how successful principals experience their work and what they perceive as making them successful.

Schools in Israel, the particular focus of this study, face multiple problems such as low achievement, high student dropout rates, major budget cuts, large socioeconomic gaps among students, and violence (Tamir, 2009; Yonah, Dahan, & Markovich, 2008). Finding solutions to these problems is a significant concern in Israel’s public discourse (Tamir, 2009). In 2008, the Ministry of Education in Israel established a new center called Avney Rosha\(^1\) (literally translated from the Hebrew as “the keystone”) for the development of school leadership. Avney Rosha’s mission is to promote development and support of principals in Israel (Harpaz, 2009). The center’s activities include the development of training programs

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\(^1\) In the interest of full disclosure, on July, 2010, I was appointed by the Secretary of the Ministry of Education in Israel to serve as a member of the managing board of Avney Rosha.
for principals and research in the field of school leadership. Similar innovative programs are currently being developed in the United States, such as New Leaders for New Schools (Teske & Williamson, 2006), the Boston Principal Fellowship Program, the First Ring Leadership Academy, LAUNCH, and NJ Excel (McGuinn, 2006).

This thesis identifies factors that contribute to the success of high school principals. A phenomenological interview process explored what successful principals perceive to be the actions and behaviors that have made them effective, as well as how they perceive their jobs and how they approach the problems that they, and most high school principals, encounter. The study focuses on successful principals in Israel, with the goal of constructing a description of their shared experience that contains the essence of what it means to be a successful principal and how such success is achieved in combination with the behavioral factors that contribute to that success. This study assists in providing an understanding of how principals can cope successfully with the numerous challenges facing schools today.

**Practical and Intellectual Goals**

I have been a high school principal for more than 13 years. Throughout this period, the Israeli school system has been in a constant state of crisis. My personal interest in educational leadership is closely related to my beliefs as an educator; I believe education plays an important role in creating a better society. Along with my specific responsibilities as a principal, I have also had the opportunity to work with other principals as a mentor and/or a consultant. Too often, I have seen good people with admirable intentions fail in leading schools after a short period of time. This study was used to identify the essence of what it takes for principals to succeed and to organize a set of useful strategies and protocols for educating principals and supporting them in their work.
Cultural and societal contexts are important for determining effective educational leadership practices (Dimmock & Walker, 2002; Ewington et al., 2008; Johnson, Møller, Jacobson, & Wong, 2008; Moos, Krejsler, & Kofod, 2008; Oplatka, 2007). This study focuses specifically on Israeli principals, as many of the aspects that affect them are unique to Israel. These aspects include political issues such as decentralization policies (Gibton & Goldring, 2001; Gonen, 2009), the role of teachers’ unions (Gaziel, 1994; Tamir, 2009), Israel’s distinctive cultural milieu, parents’ involvement in schools (Rutger, 1969), constant security concerns, and other social and cultural matters (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Zelniker, 1995).

A study of Israeli principals and their unique challenges “can illuminate our understanding of how leadership practice is enacted and negotiated in different contexts” (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 420). Such a study can also be used to improve existing methods, to develop new methods for preparing Israeli principals for leadership, and to support principals throughout their careers.

**Research Questions**

This research study employs Leithwood et al.’s (2008) taxonomy of four categories of effective leadership practices of educational leaders as a paradigm for understanding effective educational leadership. The research questions focus specifically on practices and behaviors of highly effective principals in Israel in order to understand why some principals succeed in their work and others fail.

The research questions are as follow:

1. What behaviors and actions do highly effective principals perceive as promoting their success?
2. What problems and challenges do highly effective principals perceive in their work?

3. How do highly effective principals understand and deal with the problems and challenges they face?

Content and Organization of the Thesis

This doctoral thesis is divided into four additional chapters. The remainder of this chapter presents the theoretical frameworks used as the foundation of the study. Also in this chapter is a discussion of why effective practices and behaviors were chosen as the main focus of the research rather than other approaches. This discussion includes why these practices and behaviors were preferred as paradigms for understanding effective educational leadership. Chapter 2 is devoted to a literature review of the major elements in the field of educational leadership and trends in the research. Chapter 3 details the research design, including the research questions, methodology, data collection, and analysis, along with issues of validity, reliability, and credibility and how they are addressed in the study. Included in discussion of the research method is a discussion of the ethical challenges of the project and the measures taken to protect the participants of the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, including themes and super-ordinate themes that emerged from the interviews and a summary of the commonalities that occurred throughout the interviews. The chapter ends with a summary discussion that ties together answers to the research questions and provides a brief composite account of the principal's descriptions and recollections. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the research findings and implications of the findings for educational practice and for the literature on educational leadership.
Theoretical Framework

The field of organizational development and leadership provides a valuable framework for studying successful principals and school leadership. Researchers and practitioners have offered a wide range of paradigms and models explaining the notion of leadership, from transformational leadership down to a focus on behaviors and practices of leaders. Lewis and Murphy (2008) claim that the different leadership models and approaches developed in the general literature on leadership over the years are not always academically sound and sometimes use confusing and ambiguous terminology. Moreover, they point out that many of the models overlap and therefore do not help clarify and sharpen the concept of educational leadership.

For the purpose of this study, behaviors and practices were chosen as the foundation for this research for three reasons. First, clear and concrete definitions can be used to acquire a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes good practice. Second, as Oplatka (2009) stresses, scholars of the field “are obliged, by and large, to assist practitioners in their work to improve their functioning” (p. 25). The knowledge obtained through the lens of effective behaviors and practices is practical by nature and therefore can be simply constructed, categorized, and transferred to other practitioners. Foskett, Lumvy, and Fidler (2005) add that “without a clear payoff for our research in terms of enhancing policy and practice, however measured, educational leadership and management researchers will surely be doomed to an existence that is marginal in both academic and professional arenas” (p. 245). Third, as Portin (2009) appropriately notes, the focus on “actual behaviors and actions rather than on knowledge or traits” (p. 5) allows a better potential and prospect for assessment of leadership effectiveness that “can promote better learning outcomes” (p. 5). Related to the previous
point, conducting this research in Israel revealed local cultural expectations and norms, highlighted the country’s propensity toward the “bottom line,” and enabled tangible recommendations to be made that were generated from a discussion that focused on germane behaviors and practice.

A primary assumption in the current research is that educational leadership can be taught and should not be based solely on special traits or charisma of individual educational leaders. In the rapidly changing world of experiences and challenges that principals face today, it is useful to understand what actions and behaviors outstanding principals exhibit, so that others can replicate their success.

A central theoretical framework focusing on behaviors and practices of leaders, coming from the discussion of leadership in general, is the leadership practices model developed by Kouzes and Posner (2007). Kouzes and Posner (2007) focus on five essential practices of excellent leadership. These practices are “model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart” (p. 3). Kouzes and Posner began their research in 1983, examining best practices of managers and other leaders in the private and public sectors, including organizations in government, business, academia, the community, and religion. They based their research on analyzing leadership surveys and on “personal-best leadership” stories that were shared with them during in-depth interviews. Through these tales of active change and courageous deeds, they developed the model of five practices of exemplary leadership, acknowledging that “leadership is not all about personality; it’s about practice” (Kouzes & Posner, 2008, p. 63). Kouzes and Posner concluded that listening to leaders’ and managers’ stories and experiences is highly valuable in the quest to discover the path of success for individuals and organizations. Their findings
received empirical support by numerous studies conducted in diverse settings (e.g., Abu-
Tineh, Khasawneh, & Al-Omari, 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Zagorsek, Jaklic, & Stough,
2004).

The model of effective behaviors and practices of leaders developed by Kouzes and
Posner (2007) describes leadership in general, but also has been applied specifically in the
field of education (Abu-Tineh et al., 2008). The findings of Kouzes and Posner (2007)
regarding the effective practices of exemplary leaders, along with their inquiry method,
provide a useful outline for interpreting the perspectives and experiences of successful
principals and understanding the practical components of excellent educational leadership.

An emphasis on looking for effective practices of educational leaders is prominent in
the literature during this era, which Day and Leithwood (2007) call the “golden age” of
school leadership (p. 1). Recent research has been aimed at finding useful ways and effective
practices to improve educational leadership so as to create a better education system (Riehl,
Larson, Short, & Reitzug, 2000). Day and Leithwood (2007) claim, “These efforts are taking
place in the face of tremendous pressure for public schools to be more publicly accountable”
(p. 1). Blumberg and Greenfield (1986), Whitaker (2003b), Boris-Schacter and Langer
(2006), Leithwood and Riehl (2005), and Evans (2010), for example, have directed attention
to discovering the behaviors and practices of effective principals, the ways they confront
challenges in the workplace, and their perspectives on school leadership. Their studies on
educational leadership have contributed to the identification of key patterns and behaviors
that have made some principals successful in their work.

The theoretical framework of the current study draws mainly upon the work of
Leithwood et al. (2008), conducted for the American Educational Research Association
(AERA). To provide an agenda for future research on educational leadership, Leithwood et al. (2008) compiled a comprehensive review of current knowledge about excellent principalship and presented “the results of a large and robust body of evidence about what successful leaders do” (p. 30). Their summary and analysis of “academically sound” quantitative and qualitative international studies conducted in recent years in the field of educational leadership led to the delineation of a set of four effective practices of successful educational leaders (p. 30). The first is “building vision and setting directions,” which includes “building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and demonstrating high-performance expectations.” The second, “understanding and developing people,” includes “providing individualized support and consideration, fostering intellectual stimulation, and modeling appropriate values and behavior.” The third, “redesigning the organization” includes “building collaborative culture, restructuring the organization, building productive relations with parents and community, and connecting the school to its wider environment.” The fourth practice, “managing the teaching and learning program,” includes “staffing the teaching programme, providing teaching support, monitoring school activity, and buffering staff against distractions from their work.”

The four effective practices of successful educational leaders identified by Leithwood et al. (2008) echo some of the key themes in the leadership model developed by Kouzes and Posner (2007). The notion of the importance of building a shared vision, enabling others to act, and encouraging and understanding people is parallel in its importance in the conclusions and recommendations of Kouzes and Posner (2007) and Leithwood et al. (2008). Day, Leithwood, and Sammons (2008) stress that research indicates variations between principals in different settings, such as elementary and secondary schools or relatively privileged and
relatively deprived schools, in the degree of importance of each practice of the taxonomy. Nevertheless, these four practices can be used as archetypes for examining the characteristics of effective principalship in different contexts. Day et al. (2008) recommend that research “investigate and classify in more detail the patterns and strategies headteachers in different sectors and in schools in different improvement groups use to position their schools for improvement” (p. 86). It is important to note that Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) emphasize that the “core practices are not all that people providing leadership in schools do. But they are especially critical practices known to have significant influence on organizational goals” (p. 19). It seems that effective principals rely on the same set of four practices, though they combine and apply them in varied ways depending on the different contexts and challenges they face (Day & Leithwood, 2007). Day et al. (2008), for example, show that effective principals in challenging schools use a broader range of techniques for promoting change and are more focused on improving instruction than their peers in regular schools. Another conclusion pointed out by Leithwood et al. (2008) is that current evidence shows clearly that educational leadership is much more effective in improving schools and student outcomes when it is broadly distributed. Principals of schools in different settings and contexts do, however, exercise distributed leadership in different ways (Day et al., 2008).

Leithwood et al.’s (2008) taxonomy of four categories of effective leadership practices provides “the educational leadership community solid footing . . . to articulate successful leadership qualities” (Crum & Sherman, 2008, p. 565). This research-based taxonomy serves as a powerful framework for excellent educational leadership research and development because it captures repeated themes concerning effective educational practices
that can be compared and investigated in different settings and contexts. In recent years there
has been a consensus among scholars regarding these core aspects of effective educational
leadership (Crum & Sherman, 2008; Crum et al., 2009; Drysdale et al., 2009) and their
usefulness for illuminating successful principalship.

The International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) is an excellent
demonstration of this consensus. Research was conducted in numerous countries, including
Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, England, and the United States, using
Leithwood et al.’s (2008) taxonomy as its theoretical framework (Johnson et al., 2008).
Recently, follow-up studies (Moos & Johansson, 2009) were conducted in six countries,
Australia, England, the United States, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, under the umbrella of
the ISSPP to examine the sustainability of the success of the principals who were investigated
in previous studies.

Leithwood et al.’s (2008) taxonomy was used in this study to investigate and compare
the ways in which successful principals in Israel choose and perceive their leadership
strategies within their complex environment. The taxonomy provides a useful benchmark for
examining the data that was collected in the interviews with the principals. In addition, the
taxonomy was instrumental in informing the discussion on effective educational leadership
practices in Israel, enabling comparison and investigation of commonalities and differences
in the information provided by the Israeli principals. Analyzing the data in light of the
taxonomy supports the inquiry defined by the research questions, taking into consideration
the unique cultural and societal context of Israel, a country that is multicultural by nature (Bar
Shalom, 2006) and is currently dealing with major challenges and changes within its
educational system.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This review of the literature proceeds from a broad overview of leadership to studies on increasingly focused topics. Leadership models and paradigms in general are explored, including those that emphasize various traits, characteristics, and behaviors of leaders. From there, the review proceeds to research on principals, noting the key themes and trends in this research. The evolution of the principal’s role is described, from manager of a school to instructional leader and from individual leadership to collaborative leadership. Perspectives on principals as agents of change (transformational leaders) also are addressed. The review describes attempts and methods to evaluate whether principals are successful and illustrates the recent trends of instructional and distributive leadership, casting light on where current studies should focus. The review concludes by identifying research most closely related to the research questions in this study and to the international, and especially Israeli, context of the research.

Part 1: Leadership Literature

Various models and paradigms have been presented in the scholarly literature on leadership. Among them are the following models: managerial leadership, which discusses effective organizational and managerial tools; instructional leadership, which focuses on the actions a leader takes in order to promote learning in the organization; transformational leadership, which is known mainly by its goal of improving internal motivation and achievements; change driven leadership, which focuses on the process of change in organizations; participative leadership, which suggests a distribution of information and power within the organization; interpersonal leadership, which sees relationship building as the most important component of leadership; transactional leadership, which interprets
leadership as a set of interactions of leaders and followers based on a series of positive and negative transactions; *postmodern* leadership, which was developed by sociologists and cultural studies scholars who criticize models with one leader as the center of the organization rather than emphasizing a multifaceted construction of leadership; *contingent* leadership, which highlights the context and conditions in which leadership is exercised; and *moral* leadership, which focuses on the ethical and moral choices made by leaders in different situations (Bush, 2003; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Kotter, 1995).

Additional approaches that were developed to explain the complexities of leadership are the *skills* approach, *style* approach, and *psychodynamic* approach (Northouse, 2009). Other prominent leadership models are *servant* leadership, which explains the notion of leadership as serving the requirements of the group members (Greenleaf, 1977), and *situational* leadership, which highlights the importance of choosing different styles of leadership depending on the people involved, the situation, and varying challenges (Blanchard & Hersey, 1996). Some early scholars focused on the special personality traits or charisma that characterize successful leaders (Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1948), whereas others preferred to examine the behavior of leaders or the context in which leadership develops (Doyle & Smith, 2001; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Although their model is classified as transformational more than behavioral, Kouzes and Posner (2007) in *The Leadership Challenge* do focus on the actions and practices that make up effective leadership.

The behavioral model was first presented in the late 1950s and early 1960s by Blake and Mouton, who suggested abandoning the search for special traits and shifting the focus to what leaders do and how they behave (Doyle & Smith, 2001). Further development of this model by other researchers stressed the importance of the context or situation in which
leadership is exercised, emphasizing and centering on the contingent aspects of leadership (Bush, 2003). This research stressed that leadership “is too complex and unpredictable to rely on a set of standardized responses to events. Effective leaders are continuously reading the situation and evaluating how to adapt their behavior to it” (Yukl, 2002, p. 234). Similar efforts of focusing specifically on the behavioral components of leaders were made in the field of educational leadership (Elmore, 2000). The work of Blumberg and Greenfield (1986), Whitaker (2003b), Boris-Schacter and Langer (2006), Leithwood et al. (2008), Evans (2010), and others centers on the behaviors and actions of individuals in leadership roles in schools.

**Part 2: Key Themes and Trends in the Literature on Principalship**

The literature on educational leadership contains hundreds of studies. Recent research shows an increased interest in studying principals because of the crucial role they hold, particularly in the current era of accountability in education (Bell & Bush, 2002). The McKinsey Report, detailing major factors affecting successful educational systems around the world, highlights the importance of quality principals at the helms of schools (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Principals play a pivotal role in recruiting and leading teachers, and in implementing educational plans for school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). As a factor affecting student achievement, the quality of principals was found to rank in importance below only classroom teaching (Leithwood & Day, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2008).

A number of theories and key themes recur in the research on educational leadership: 1. the evolving role of the principal, from being the manager and administrator of the school building to being an instructional leader; 2. evolution from singular to collaborative leadership; and 3. transformational and moral leadership in schools.
1. The evolving role of the principal: From building manager to instructional leader. During the last two decades, the literature regarding educational leadership and roles of principals has described major conceptual changes reflecting vast transformations in principals’ responsibilities, roles, and tasks. Perspectives on the role of a principal have evolved over time. Principals first were seen as managers of their school buildings, responsible for various administrative tasks of running the school and seeing that the facility itself met educational needs. Later, principals were recognized as leaders within their schools, responsible for implementing up-to-date educational methods in the school, guiding teachers in this implementation, and, in general, leading by example. That perspective was further refined to view principals more specifically as instructional leaders who establish, develop, and promote the mission of the school, the instructional curriculum, and the school learning environment so that instruction can take place in the most appropriate environment and with the most appropriate goals and methods (Elmore, 2004; Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Robinson, 2006; Stronge et al., 2008). It is important to note that research on principals in recent years has explored the roles of principals in numerous countries, with much of the work focusing on the United States (Oplatka, 2009; Whitaker, 2003a).

Crum and Sherman (2008) state that principals, within a climate of increased demands for education reform aimed at improving student achievement, are finding that they are being held more accountable for student outcomes. This has been the case in the United States particularly since the passage of the No Child Left Behind act in 2002. Crum et al. (2009) stress that accountability has become an increasing focus in schools worldwide. Principals all over the world are being held increasingly answerable for students’ performance and progress.
Firestone and Riehl (2005) state, “Leaders are increasingly being held accountable for the actual performance of those under their charge . . . given growing expectations that leaders can and should influence learning” (p. 2). Kelley and Peterson (2007) add that states that enacted increased accountability reforms have seen increased involvements of principals in qualitative changes such as: curriculum standards, an increased focus on higher-order thinking, high-stakes testing, and accountability for student learning (p. 358). Regardless of the numerous administrative tasks a principal must perform, the ultimate goal of a school is to teach, and Stronge et al. (2008) emphasize that principals must always make this a top priority.

This major shift is demonstrated by the *instructional leadership* model. This paradigm emphasizes the mission of the school, the instructional curriculum, and the school learning environment as the key factors on which educational leaders should focus (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger, 2003). Murphy (1990) suggests defining the main work of the principal as managing the educational “manufacturing” and “production” of the school. Southworth (2002) explains that “instructional leadership . . . is strongly concerned with teaching and learning, including the professional learning of teachers as well as student growth” (p. 79).

Detailing the practical applications of instructional leadership, Colvin (2010) states, “It’s up to the principal to establish a strong, achievement-oriented school culture and clear expectations, and he or she must endorse a specific ‘learning improvement agenda’ for the school” (p. 16). Elmore (2000) and Bottoms and O’Neill (2001) claim that most principals build up their instructional leadership capabilities intuitively rather than through structured preparation and training. Portin (2009) suggests trying “to narrow the focus on most potent behaviors that can promote better learning outcomes” (p. 5).
Concurring with the sentiment of the need for the structured training of principals, Hopkins (2003) notes, “If we are serious about raising the levels of student achievement and learning in our schools, then we need to research and develop, more than ever before, styles of leadership that promote, celebrate, and enhance the importance of teaching and learning and staff development” (pp. 5–6). Bush (2003) forecasts that the paradigm of instructional leadership will develop more in England in the coming years, following its approval by the National College for School Leadership. In reference to the United States, Mitgang (2008) claims, “There is a growing agreement that with the national imperative for having every child succeed, it is the principal who is best positioned to ensure that teaching and learning are as good as they can be” (p. 1).

It is important to note that some scholars question the importance and applicability of the model of instructional leadership (Leithwood, 1994; Oplatka, 2007). In a review that contradicts and opposes mainstream findings, conducted for the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) in the United Kingdom, Bell, Bolam, and Cubillo (2003) conclude that there is still incomplete support for the belief that the quality of a school’s principal strongly affects student achievement; they suggest that the hypothesis should continue to be investigated.

2. From singular to collaborative leadership. A major shift in the way principalship is being discussed is toward acceptance of a distributive approach to educational leadership, acknowledging that it takes more than one individual to manage a school effectively (Portin, 2009). The distributive leadership model arose in response to the complicated, multifaceted, and ever-expanding workload facing principals. It replaces the traditional notion that a school should have one “great leader” who is solely responsible for leading the school (Elmore,
2000; Spillane, 2006). Hartley (2010) suggests that the reason for the popularity of
distributed leadership is mainly “pragmatic: to ease the burden of over-worked headteachers”
(p. 271). It “resonates also with a culture wherein the boundaries among categories are
rendered more permeable than hitherto” (p. 271).

*Collegial and distributive leadership* models recognize that one institution, such as a
school, can have numerous strong leaders (Zenger & Folkman, 2009). The collegial model
assumes that “organizations determine policy and make decisions through a process of
discussion leading to consensus” (Bush, 2003, p. 64). Elmore (2000) points out that
distributed leadership models offer the potential to treat instructional practice as a collective
good—a common concern of the whole institution—while respecting, acknowledging, and
capitalizing on differences in expertise (p. 24). Leithwood (2005) claims that it would be
difficult for a single leader to manage all the departments in a school effectively without the
assistance of other members of his or her staff. Asking for information from staff members
can minimize errors in decision making. Stronge et al. (2008) agree that distributing
leadership is necessary for a school and for a principal to be successful (p. 6).

Bell et al. (2003) state that there tends to be more resistance from staff in schools
characterized by *top-down leadership* than there is in schools that share leadership
responsibilities and roles among staff members. They also contend that student outcomes are
more likely to improve in schools characterized by distributive leadership than in those
operating using the traditional model of a single principal running the school. Leithwood
et al. (2008) seem to concur, stating that “school leadership has a greater influence on schools
and pupils when it is widely distributed” (p. 34). Harris (2008) emphasizes that distributing
leadership roles and responsibilities do not necessitate disrupting all of the traditional or existing management and leadership structures within schools.

It is important to note that debate continues among scholars concerning the real substance of the distributed leadership perspective (Spillane & Orlina, 2005). For example, Lindahl (2008) claims that in most cases, experiments with distributed or shared leadership were less productive than expected. Harris (2008) notes that sharing leadership can result in ambiguities and miscommunication in several important areas, including setting priorities and designing schedules. Harris also believes that distributive leadership is not appropriate in all situations, countries, and cultures. In some countries, such as England, it is still strongly supported (Bush, 2002; Harris, 2002), and varied models of distributed leadership are emerging, such as leadership teams and co-principalship (Harris, 2008).

Like collegial and distributed leadership models, the participative leadership model calls for the creation of professional learning communities in which power is divided democratically among members of the organization (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Fullan (2004) explains that educational leaders who wish to implement the participative paradigm must be able to nurture numerous leaders within the school who will be able to continue in leadership roles should the current principal leave the school or school system. Day et al. (2008) claim that current research clearly shows “the importance to the success of the school in broadening participation of staff, and consulting with them on a regular basis” (pp. 88–89).

3. Transformational and moral leadership in schools. Other models have been introduced to explain the core task of principalship during the past two decades (Oplatka, 2007). The transformational leadership paradigm in education developed by Leithwood
(2005) emphasizes “emotions and values and . . . the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organizational goals on the part of leaders’ colleagues” (p. 10). Using such models, Kirby, Paradise, and King (1992) investigated principals as transformational leaders and the ways they incorporate transformational and transactional behaviors in their interactions with the teachers in their schools. These models further develop the general leadership concept described by Bass (1985) and are highly relevant for schools that are dealing with major changes.

Transformation and a focus on values are further developed by an emphasis on moral leadership advocated by Sergiovanni (2005). Sergiovanni presents the principal as a moral leader who is faced with making numerous value-defined decisions on a daily basis. Principals acting in accord with this model must harmoniously combine their values, decisions, and actions in ways that demonstrate that they have a strong moral compass (Sergiovanni, 1992). Moral leadership in schools assumes that social justice and democratic values are at the foundation of educational leaders’ work because these leaders are responsible for the development and improvement of the entire society (Dantley, 2003).

The themes and trends identified in the literature on principalship are important to the current study because they provide information on the current roles held by principals and the expectations held concerning principals’ performance in those roles. Rather than functioning mostly as building administrators, wielding top-down authority, principals now are seen in a wider variety of roles as instructional leaders. They have the ability to put their own stamp on schools as transformational leaders. These relatively recent perspectives on the work of principals indicate that it is important and useful to identify the particular perspectives that
successful principals bring to their work and the types of experiences that define and guide that work.

Part 3: Educational Leadership Assessment

A significant problem that concerns many scholars is how to assess whether educational leadership is effective. Portin (2009) justly notes that “learning requires feedback to know what you are doing and where new growth is necessary” (p. 12). Traditionally, principals have been assessed by their supervisors who check for the fulfillment of goals determined by the district (Portin, 2009). Some scholars have recently suggested that there is a lack of adequate assessment tools for the evaluation of educational leadership (Goldring et al., 2008; Reeves, 2005).

Bulach, Boothe, and Pickett (2006) question the accuracy and usefulness of the tools that are available to evaluate and assess leadership effectiveness. Goldring et al. (2008) question whether these evaluation tools assess the appropriate things, especially in the area of ensuring top-notch curriculums and instruction (p. 27). Quoting researchers from Vanderbilt University, Portin (2009) adds, “The content of leadership assessment is a ‘mile wide and an inch deep’; many aspects of leadership are assessed, but almost nothing is assessed in depth” (p. 4).

Numerous methodologies have been developed to help principals evaluate their leadership and improve their performance. Among the key assessment tools are 1. the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) (Portin, 2009); 2. the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ 5X) developed by Bass and Avolio (1997), measuring leadership style; 3. the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) developed by Kouzes and Posner (2008), modified to educational leadership (Abu-Tineh et al., 2008); 4. the
Instructional Improvement Survey developed by Bulach and Berry (2001); 5. the Principal Skills Assessment Checklist developed by Stronge et al. (2008); and 6. the 49 Leadership Behaviors of a Principal instrument developed by Bulach et al. (2006).

Goldring et al. (2008) summarize numerous studies conducted in the field that show development trends for the assessment of principals, noting “the movement toward assessing behaviors instead of traits, relying on professional standards, focusing on learning results, emphasizing leadership development, and considering organizational context” (p. 8). Portin (2009) suggests that assessment tools of educational leaders should be developed to be accurate and trustworthy, as well as flexible enough to be used in a variety of educational contexts and settings.

Part 4: Literature Specifically Focused on the Research Questions

This section discusses how recent research has addressed the questions that are of particular interest in the current study. Literature particularly relevant to the first two research questions is addressed in the following sections concerning those two questions. The third research question, concerning how principals dealt with the problems and challenges that they identified, is addressed throughout this discussion.

What behaviors and actions do highly effective principals identify to explain their success? Consensus has grown in recent years regarding the importance of identifying the behavioral components of effective principals (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Studies by Blumberg and Greenfield (1986), Lawlor and Sills (1999), Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin and Collarbone (2003), Whitaker (2003b), Boris-Schacter and Langer (2006), and Leithwood et al. (2008) have tried to determine such behavioral components. These studies focus on the behaviors and actions of effective principals, the ways they confront challenges in the
workplace, and their perspectives on school leadership. The studies by Blumberg and Greenfield (1986), Lawlor and Sills (1999), Gold et al. (2003), and Whitaker (2003b) were qualitative in nature, using interviews with principals as their main research tool. Boris-Schacter and Langer (2006) conducted a mixed-method study analyzing the results of surveys and interviews. Leithwood et al. (2008) analyzed numerous qualitative and quantitative international studies on effective practices of successful educational leaders.

Some summary statements can be made concerning the characteristics of effective practices of successful principals. Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) identify three main factors that have led principals to success: having a clear vision for the school, being proactive and supporting new initiatives, and carefully structuring personal roles and responsibilities in order to avoid being overly burdened by administrative hassles (p. 176). Lawlor and Sills (1999) found 14 characteristics typically demonstrated by highly effective headteachers: working concurrently on many different tasks, having a clear vision, modeling their passion for students’ accomplishments, practicing interpersonal abilities, setting high expectations, supervising and evaluating outcomes, exhibiting a willingness to take risks, demonstrating professionalism and knowledge, using the school system’s tools and organization effectively, managing time efficiently, deploying political skills, planning strategically, taking full responsibility for the entire school, and developing a culture of positive commitment.

Whitaker (2003b) focuses on the actions that effective principals take vis-à-vis teachers. He discovered that successful principals hire first-rate teachers, guide them, and set high standards for them but also encourage and reward them. Gold et al. (2003) stress the ways that outstanding principals manage and support the shared values in their schools. They
point out the following leadership actions that outstanding principals utilized in keeping and disseminating shared values: “working with constant change, keeping staff informed, working closely with senior management and leadership teams, and developing leadership capacity in the school” (p. 132). Boris-Schacter and Langer (2006) stress that the key to the principals’ success is their ability to use mechanisms that “involve workload sharing, emotional sharing, personal nurturance, and the application of customized rules to the balance of time and work” (p. 86).

These different studies exhibit repeating themes that illuminate the core practices of effective educational leadership. These include the practices of building clear vision, being proactive and adaptive, distributing responsibilities, and focusing on teaching staff’s ability to continuously improve. Leithwood et al. (2008) state parallel conclusions in their recent comprehensive study of effective practices of successful principals. In this study conducted for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) to provide a direction for future studies on principalship, Leithwood and colleagues compiled a comprehensive review of the knowledge acquired by scholars to date concerning excellent principalship. Their synthesis of results from numerous international studies provides evidence regarding four sets of effective practices of successful educational leaders. These sets of practices center on “building vision and setting directions,” which includes “building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and demonstrating high performance expectations”; “understanding and developing people,” which includes “providing individualized support and consideration, fostering intellectual stimulation, and modeling appropriate values and behavior”; “redesigning the organization,” which includes “building a collaborative culture, restructuring the organization, building productive relations with parents and the community,
and connecting the school to its wider environment”; and “managing the teaching and learning programme,” which includes “staffing the teaching programme, providing teaching support, monitoring school activity, and buffering staff against distractions from their work” (p. 30). Many scholars have used Leithwood et al.’s (2008) taxonomy as the basis for further research on successful principalship in different settings and cultures (e.g., Crum & Sherman, 2008; Crum et al. 2009; Drysdale et al., 2009).

It is interesting to note that some attempts were made to find knowledge on the “dark side” of educational leadership in schools and the behaviors of principals that contributed to ineffective leadership. Blasé and Blasé’s (2002) qualitative study concludes that the following practices are considered the most hurtful, abusive, and destructive in the eyes of mistreated teachers:

Discounting teachers’ thoughts, needs and feelings; Ignoring; Personal insensitivity; Stonewalling; Isolating and abandoning teachers; Controlling teacher-to-teacher interactions; Nonsupport of teachers in difficult interactions with students and parents; Withholding resources and denying approval; Obstructing opportunities for professional development; Withholding or taking credit; Favoring “select” teachers; Offensive personal conduct; Spying; Sabotaging; Stealing; Destroying teacher instructional aids; Making unreasonable demands; Overloading; Nitpicking; Stigmatizing and pejorative labeling; Intentionally vague criticism; Gossiping; Unfounded third-party criticism; Soliciting others; Public criticism; Lying; Explosive behavior; Threats; Unwarranted reprimands; Unfair evaluations; Mistreating students; Forcing teachers out of their job; Preventing teachers from leaving/advancing; Sexual harassment; Racism. (p. 686)
What problems and challenges do highly effective principals identify in their work? A survey of the literature identified three major obstacles that have detrimental effects on principals, hindering their chances to succeed: powerlessness, isolation, and dealing with different stakeholders.

**Powerlessness.** Many principals feel powerless or vulnerable in their struggle “with the ambiguities of power in their own leadership” (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004, p. 322). Research shows that they feel helpless in dealing “quickly and effectively with tenured teachers whom they judged to be incompetent” (Blumberg, 1986, p. 155). Moreover, the nature and quality of principals’ relationships with their teachers, staff, and parents can contribute to their growing feelings of powerlessness and stress (Krüger et al., 2005).

A manifestation of this issue of powerlessness is the gap between managerial expectations and achievements (Bell & Bush, 2002), which has increased dramatically in recent years (Krüger et al., 2005). For example, the lack of principals’ autonomy in determining teachers’ salaries has been identified as one of the biggest barriers to effective school leadership. Adamowski, Therriault, and Cavanna (2007) note that principals feel particularly constrained in this area.

Some researchers have concluded that the risks for premature departure of principals consist of a combination of context and personal factors that are significantly related to the school culture and setting (Krüger et al., 2005). The pressures on principals are enormous (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004), and principals typically work long hours (Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001; Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998), which undoubtedly affects their health and overall well-being (Saulwick & Muller, 2004).
Among the inducements to becoming a principal are a desire to acquire a greater sense of power to affect changes and the opportunity to deal with broader educational issues (Bredeson, 1991). It is not surprising, therefore, that some researchers have found that many principals feel that the lack of autonomy in their work is one of the toughest obstacles to their overall success (Adamowski et al., 2007). Sometimes, even performing an evaluation of a teacher’s effectiveness can be a cause of tension, pressure, and misunderstanding (Loveless, 2000). Two other major areas of stress for principals are the increasing number of school safety regulations that need to be implemented and the lack of appropriate managerial tools and finances to meet various demands (Hurley, 2001).

Researchers have pointed out that principals need strong political skills and knowledge to be successful and overcome barriers of powerlessness (Keedy, 1992). Boleman and Deal (2007) explain that “organizational change and effectiveness depend on managers’ political skills” (p. 132). Bush (2002) stresses the notion of “micropolitics” in schools, in which “policy and decisions emerge through a process of negotiation and bargaining” (p. 22).

Deal (2009) explains that the very notion of using political skills to acquire power within schools is perceived by many as controlling, Machiavellian, and deceitful. Nevertheless, to deal with lack of power, principals must understand that “power and conflict are natural by-products of co-operative activity. A leader engages in normal pushing and tugging as a full participant in the ongoing contest” (p. 136). Giles (1998) suggests that when principals share leadership with other members of the community such as teachers and parents, they show that they are willing to share some of their power, which allows them to become less stressed and more effective. Goodwin, Cunningham, and Eagle (2005) concisely state the need for principals to hold a certain level of power: “Given the dichotomy between
expectations and needs, between accountability and inclusiveness, it is axiomatic that principals must have the autonomy to be flexible, to build the relationships necessary to reach school goals, and to allocate resources to support those relationships” (p. 12).

**Isolation.** Another obstacle to effective leadership is feelings of isolation that often accompany various aspects of a principalship. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004) state that “necessary boundaries in leadership life require a degree of administrative isolation relating to personal and professional roles, visibility, decision making (‘the buck stops here’) and confidentiality” (p. 319). This isolation can create stress and can become a chronic problem for educational leaders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Krüger et al., 2005). Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004) found that the experience of feeling isolated and lonely contributed to feelings of burnout for many educational leaders.

Many researchers have investigated the connection between loneliness and depression (e.g., Blackburn, 1996; Brown, 1997; Izgar, 2009; Quinn, 2002; Weeks, Michael, & Peplau, 1980). Izgar (2009) discusses the vicious cycle it creates: Loneliness leads to depression, which makes people less engaged with society, which results in higher levels of loneliness. He chose school principals as the target population for his study because he hypothesized that they are prone to higher levels of loneliness because of their higher rank in the administrative hierarchy and the fact that their performance is evaluated using extremely high standards. School principals might appear to be surrounded by others for a large part of their workday, but this does not preclude school principals feeling lonely and being prone to high levels of depression (Izgar, 2009).

Some scholars have suggested the distributive and collegial leadership paradigm as a useful model to help principals share their burden (Harris, 2002). Hargreaves and Fink (2006)
state, “Large-scale studies of educational leadership effects provide clear indications that some element of shared, collaborative, or distributed leadership is associated with effective leadership in schools” (p. 101). Many studies indicate that “the work of leading and managing the schoolhouse is indeed distributed” (Spillane, Camburn, & Pareja, 2007). Implementing a policy of sharing power in a school environment can be instrumental in creating new flexible educational leadership models (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006). It can be difficult to identify specific factors that hinder a principal’s success and to remove those obstacles by distributing the power associated with them because doing so violates the traditional assumption that “principals alone are responsible for the organization and management of schools” (Bush, 2003, p. 69). Understanding that the process of dealing with the conflicting pressures facing schools can be collegial (Brown, Boyle, & Boyle, 1999) can provide some understanding of how some principals manage to thrive in their position (Harris, 2002). They share both the power and the pressures of their position with their colleagues.

Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) found that crossing boundaries and connecting with others within a school system was a useful coping strategy for dealing with feelings of isolation. They believe that the main thing leaders need is the reassurance and confidence to talk openly about some of the less publicized negative aspects of their job. They also suggest redefining the role of a principal, changing it from a single leader of an educational institution to a facilitator who creates and maintains a culture of shared responsibility. Krüger et al. (2005) recommend that principals receive some sort of coaching to help them deal with various aspects of their job, including coping with feelings of
isolation. Izgar (2009) suggests using peer learning and support groups to promote principals’
development and functioning.

**Dealing with different stakeholders.** A third major source of pressure and conflict for
principals comes from dealing with the different stakeholders in schools. Different
stakeholders often expect the school to progress in different directions (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004). Goodwin et al. (2005) describe “the ‘nonrational world’ of the principal as
a world of many, often conflicting, goals, . . . a world where decisions must satisfy many
shareholders” (p. 9). Lortie (2009) mentions that principals often must make difficult choices
involving the desires of various stakeholders, with those choices leaving some of the involved
parties feeling dissatisfied. Goldring and Schuermann (2009) discuss the “open-system
perspective” in which schools currently operate these days. School leaders need to consider
the interactions that occur with “other communal institutions, such as the juvenile court
system, the police department, welfare and health services, the business community, and
private and public philanthropic foundations” (p. 14). Cheng (2002) agrees with this
perspective, stating that stakeholders come from multiple places inside and outside the
school, and they bring different perspectives and desires to the process of managing schools.
Their perspectives, desires, and calls for action often are in conflict, making the work of a
principal stressful and difficult (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006). It is not surprising that, as
mentioned above, some principals suffer from high levels of anxiety and depression (Carr,
1994).

Glatter (2002) recommends that school leaders try to manage conflicts among
stakeholders through “buffering of the staff from external pressures that conflict with the
school’s goals” (p. 236). Goldring and Schuermann (2009) suggest adopting the relatively
new concept of “civic capacity,” in which the principal tries to “build and maintain effective alliances for collective problem solving, . . . going beyond the view that any one single institution, such as schools, can address the needs of its constituencies” (p. 15). Boleman and Deal (2007) add that effective principals today “know how to fashion an agenda, map the political terrain, create a network of support, and negotiate with both allies and adversaries” (p. 132). Stronge et al. (2008) suggest that “relationship building and stakeholder involvement are of fundamental importance in establishing and sustaining school success” (p. 20).

**Part 5: International and Israeli Contexts for the Research**

**International perspective.** Day et al. (2008) summarize the current scholarly literature on educational leadership, finding promising areas for research concerning how excellent principals act and behave in different situations, sectors, cultures, and contexts. Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford (2006) highlight the fact that most theories about educational leadership are based on research conducted in the United States or the United Kingdom, and “despite observations of the apparent homogenization of world education, there remain important differences in how countries approach school education, such as the degree of autonomy given to principals” (p. 372).

Johnson et al. (2008) suggest that future studies on successful school leadership should focus more on investigating and collecting data from other countries and cultures. The International School Principalship Project (ISSPP) is an exemplary manifestation of this recommendation. Research teams from eight countries, Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, England, and the United States, conducted 63 studies of school leaders (Johnson et al., 2008). The researchers tried to “uncover the influence of national context on
the practices of school leaders” (p. 408), although they recognized that “many concepts of successful schools and school leadership look alike on the surface” (Moos et al., 2008). A key question addressed in this project was how successful school leadership was defined in different cultures and settings. In some countries, such as England, Denmark, and Norway, the definition was based on superintendents’ recommendations, whereas in other countries, such as Sweden, Australia, and the United States, the criteria were based on student achievements (Johnson et al., 2008). The variety of studies conducted under this project illustrated “the role of varying ideological orientations and policy contexts in the day-to-day practice of successful principals” (p. 419).

Johnson et al. (2008) show that excellent principals in different cultures utilize Leithwood et al.’s (2008) four core effective leadership practices (previously mentioned) differently, making their choices in the light of their local cultural context. In the United States, for example, the culture of decentralization and accountability guided some principals in choosing their leadership practices (Ylimaki, 2007). In Norway, the cultural notion of democratic values was more influential (Møller et al., 2005). In China, authoritative norms had an enormous impact on the choices that excellent principals made concerning which leadership practices to utilize (Wong, 2005).

Follow-up studies (Moos & Johansson, 2009) were conducted in six countries, Australia, England, the United States, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, to investigate the sustainability of the success of the principals who were examined in prior studies. These studies show that success can be sustained, particularly under several favorable conditions. Success was more sustainable when principals developed a distributive leadership model
within the school, interacted more with the staff and drew attention to these collaborations, and considered external and local expectations when making decisions.

Research in Israel. Research in Israel regarding principals and leadership is in its very early stages. This section will summarize the research on educational leadership that has been done by Israeli scholars. Barkol (1996) focuses on the unique phenomenon of retiring military officers of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) choosing to work as principals in Israeli high schools and the rationale behind this trend. Brama (2004) investigates principals’ professional self-efficacy. Gonen (2009) studies the ways that centralization and decentralization affect how principals perceive the roles of superintendents and local authorities. Gibton and Goldring (2001) research the role legislation has played in the decentralization of education in Israel. Tubin (2008) discusses the role of principals in the creation of new, innovative schools. Oplatka and Hertz-Lazrowitz (2006) focus on female principals and the gender aspects of a principalship in the multicultural society of Israel. Oplatka and Hertz-Lazrowitz investigation includes four different communities: Arabic, ultra-orthodox Jewish, the Bedouin, and secular Jewish. Oplatka (2002a) studies the phenomenon of mid-career crisis and renewal among female principals in Israel. Addi-Raccah (2002, 2005) analyzes the economic, organizational, and sociocultural contexts affecting the feminization of principalships in Israel. Benoliel and Somech (2010) examine how participative management may affect teachers’ performance, with a focus on how that management style relates to teachers’ personality characteristics.

There is an apparent lack of published research specifically focused on excellent principals in Israel, their perspectives on educational leadership, the actions and behaviors that make them effective, and how they deal with problems they encounter. The current study
is intended to fill that gap in the literature. It is important to note that establishment of the Avney Rosh Educational Leadership Institute in Jerusalem, an educational agency committed to promoting growth and support of principals in Israel, may be an important step in the development of research on school leadership in Israel.

**Literature Review Conclusion**

Running a school as a principal involves a multifaceted set of tasks that have become increasingly complex and challenging in recent years as a result of changing societal needs and expectations. Studying the work of principals has become of interest to many scholars because of the crucial role they hold and their major contribution to school effectiveness.

The review considered the current state of research regarding effective principals and the most troubling obstacles they face, including “some quite important things that we do know, and claims that we can now make with some confidence” (Leithwood et al., 2008) about principals’ effective repertoire of practices, as well as areas of research that have yet to be addressed.

This review explored leadership models and paradigms in general, including those that emphasize various traits, characteristics, and behaviors of leaders. This research was useful in shaping the theoretical framework of this study. From there, the review narrowed the focus to research on principals, exploring the ongoing conversation on the crucial role they hold, especially in the current era of accountability, and noting key themes and trends in relevant research. The role of principals was seen to evolve from that of managers of schools to instructional leaders, and from individual leadership to collaborative leadership, and to include aspects of principals as agents of change (transformational leaders). The review also
showed how researchers have tried to explore ways to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of educational leadership.

This review was useful in sharpening the research questions in this study, identifying and clarifying the central issues of successful principalships. The review identified research most closely related to the research questions to be addressed in this study, focusing on effective practices and behaviors of principals and on key challenges and coping strategies identified by scholars in the field. Lastly, the literature review described the current scholarly research on educational leadership in different cultures and contexts, recognizing the valuable information that these studies could yield. The review revealed the current lack of published research specifically focused on excellent principals in Israel and the perspectives of the principals themselves on effective educational leadership. The current study is intended to address that gap in the literature.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Research Questions

This research employed Leithwood et al.’s (2008) taxonomy of four categories of effective leadership practices of educational leaders as a paradigm for understanding effective educational leadership. The research questions focus specifically on practices and behaviors of highly effective principals in Israel in order to understand why some principals succeed in their work and others fail.

The research consists of obtaining and analyzing interviews with successful principals concerning their experiences in their work, their perspectives on their work experience, and insights into the obstacles they have faced and how they overcame them. These interviews revealed patterns of behavior that led to the success of these principals, and it is hoped that other principals can be informed by and learn from these identified patterns and can apply the relevant perspectives to their own careers and professional lives. The research questions focused on the behaviors and actions of highly effective principals in Israel in an attempt to understand why some principals succeed in their work while others fail. The research questions addressed in this study are the following:

1. What behaviors and actions do highly effective principals perceive as promoting their success?
2. What problems and challenges do highly effective principals perceive in their work?
3. How do highly effective principals understand and deal with the problems and challenges they face?
The research was qualitative in nature, using open-ended questions. The study consisted of in-depth interviews (Seidman, 1991; Kvale, 2009) with 10 Israeli principals who were labeled successful by the Ministry of Education in Israel. The end result of the research was a synthesized description of success that combines the different experienced histories of work life as a principal, along with the principals’ perspectives and insights, into one coherent description of the essence of what it takes to be a successful principal (Wolcott, 2001).

**Methodology**

**The qualitative research paradigm.** This qualitative research study, using a phenomenological interview process with open-ended questions, explored the experiences of successful Israeli principals. The study was phenomenological in its nature because it sought to examine the reasons (Kvale, 2009; Seidman, 1991) why principals succeed, from the “vantage point of someone who actually experiences that phenomenon” (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2010, p. 187). This research method is distinctive in that it focuses on the experience of the participants and the meanings given by them to those experiences (Coleman & Briggs, 2002, p. 200). Phenomenological research is well suited to this study, which focuses on promoting an understanding of several individuals’ common or shared experiences (Creswell, 2007, p. 60), in this case the phenomenon of successful principalship. Interviews allow researchers to put behavior and practices in context (Seidman, 1991, p. 4), which in the case of this research led to a greater understanding of actions that lead to success for principals. The research design allowed different stories of lived experiences to unfold. Giving the interviewees some control over the direction of the interview enabled them to reveal their personal stories in a manner that was meaningful to them.
Edmund Husserl, the founder of the modern phenomenological movement, claimed that perception is the most important foundation of knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). It is the “primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (Husserl, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 52). Creswell (2007) agrees that the phenomenological approach is useful for research questions that focus on the description of participants’ experiences of a common phenomenon, in this case the conduct of successful principalship. The intent of this study was to capture the essence of that shared experience and determine what factors contribute to making these principals successful.

Qualitative research appears to be the best method for gathering data concerning personal experiences and behaviors. Phenomenological research in particular is suited to this research, in that the main purpose of phenomenology is to illustrate the point of view of participants in the phenomenon being examined (Moustakas, 1994). As Locke et al. (2010) emphasize, “colorful descriptions, portrayals of intense affect, flashes of humor, and vivid sketches of context” (p. 235) are very effective in providing deep insight into the subject of inquiry. Like Crawford (2009), I strongly believe that profound knowledge can be acquired by listening to people’s narratives. As Blumberg emphasizes, “studies that yield a \( p \leq .05 \) are rather less than likely to communicate the experience [of principals] and so for the most part have little meaning for practice” (Blumberg, 1989, p. 220). On the other hand, the process used in this research, that of constructing a shared description or narrative about a shared experience, can lead to revelations of significant, but frequently unrecorded, human components of principalship (Ribbins & Marland, 1994; Seidman, 1991). The power of analyzing stories and the recall of experiences is that it allows researchers to examine and reveal some “presumably unintended insights” (Coleman & Briggs, 2002, p. 206).
phenomenological approach is aimed at providing a comprehensive description and determining what a shared experience means for the people involved. From these descriptions, general or universal meanings can be derived, creating an essence of the structure of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). This was the intent of this research, to find the essence of the shared experience of being a successful principal, including the thought process, perspectives, experiences, and practices that contribute to success. The phenomenological approach also allowed the researcher to engage in constant self-reflection about problems of practice (Moustakas, 1994). Because I share the experience of being a high school principal, throughout the research I was able to reflect on my own experiences and how they relate to those of the research participants, as well as how they might have affected the conduct of the research.

**Site and participants.** In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 Israeli principals who have been labeled successful by the Israeli Ministry of Education, on the basis of criteria identified in similar studies conducted in England, Denmark, and Norway (Day, 2005; Moos et al., 2005; Møller et al., 2005). The study was conducted in the district of Tel Aviv, one of the largest districts in Israel, operating 111 high schools (Ben-David, 2010).

Every year, five to seven principals are designated by the superintendent of the district as highly successful. This is done through a process in which the superintendent appoints a professional committee to examine the effectiveness of principals, using criteria of school records, student achievement, on-site visits, and interviews with school personnel.

For this research, 10 highly effective principals were chosen as a representative sample in a process of purposeful data sampling (Creswell, 2007, p. 125) from a list of 25 principals who were identified by the superintendent of the district of Tel Aviv as successful.
during the most recent years. This group of principals was verified as diverse (Johnson et al., 2008) in terms of gender, age, years of experience, and religion, ensuring maximum variation (Patton, 1989). In addition, efforts were made to select a sample that was diverse with respect to the schools at which they work. With careful examination, even a small sample of in-depth interviews can provide valuable information (Bodycott et al., 2001). The number of participants was chosen as 10, so that a variety of principals, with different characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences would be represented. This sample represented 40 percent of the list of 25 principals identified as successful, and it is within the range of the number of participants mentioned by Creswell (2007, p. 126). A complementary interview with the superintendent identified her definition of and perspectives on successful principals. The aim of this project was to tailor a story that combined the experiences, insights, understandings, and perspectives of all 10 interviewees into one coherent account (Wolcott, 2001) of what it takes to be a successful principal.

To acquire an intimate and accurate understanding of this phenomenon, it was imperative that the interviews took place in the “natural setting . . . where participants experience the issue or problem under study” (Cresswell, 2009, p. 175); hence, each principal was interviewed at his or her respective school. It was believed that recounting their experiences in the setting in which they occurred would help the principals to recall their experiences. The principals’ offices also serve as a place where they can retreat in times of crisis and reflect on their experiences and the challenges they face. In a sense, they frame their perspectives in this context, so it was natural to ask them to recall those perspectives in the same context. Finally, the office site was chosen to make the interviewees feel more in control; as the hosts of the interviews, they were expected to feel more confident and trusting
in the interview process. All of these factors in site selection were expected to invite the principals to share their personal and authentic perceptions and to promote experiential accounts that were as wide and deep as possible. It was important that the interviews took place after the end of the school day, a time when principals are free from the majority of their labor and their emotionally intensive tasks.

The interview questions were planned to “evolve over time” (Mertens, 2005, p. 16) and were built on each interviewee’s own experience. The general listing of interview questions and topics to be covered is presented in Appendix A. A pilot interview (Coleman & Briggs, 2002; Seidman, 1991) of one principal provided more understanding of the best practices for conducting interviews. The research findings are intended to increase understanding of how principals succeed in their work and deal with the different risks they face, providing these understandings from their “own point of view” (Mertens, 2005, p. 16).

Data collection. The interviews took place in the principals’ respective offices. The time was determined by the principals via an initial contact phone call (Seidman, 1991). The interviews were conducted in Hebrew. They were audiotaped (Seidman, 1991) and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The audio tapes were transcribed in Hebrew, and relevant portions were translated into English.

The interviews were phenomenological in nature. Such an interview involves an “informal interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). The interviews were conducted in the spirit of epoché (or bracketing), defined by Moustakas (1994) as “setting aside prejudgments and opening the research with an unbiased receptive presence” (p. 180) and accepting as valid only what “enters freshly into consciousness, only what appears as appearance” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 87).
A single interview was chosen for data collection because it was expected that a single extended conversation would best allow participants to explore their experiences in this manner, in a continuous fashion that kept their thoughts near the surface for an extended period of time. Taking into consideration that many principals, and especially those in Israel, feel that they should present a “representative” image, one that reflects their schools, it was expected that if participants were to be offered a second interview, they might take the time between interviews to reflect and plan on what they chose to offer, and therefore not present their most authentic thoughts and feelings. The phenomenological approach is aimed at achieving the essence of experiences rather than fully thought out and guarded representations. The research method was intended to avoid a situation in which interviewees would prepare “politically correct” or otherwise biased and guarded answers to questions. The fact that the interviewees knew that the interview is limited in time to one 90-minute session was expected to make them more open and devoted to the dialogue and to sharing meaningful, authentic experiences.

*Interview opening and interview questions.* Each interview began with a briefing (Kvale, 1996, 2009), explaining that the purpose of the study was to examine the behavioral components of successful principals in Israel. The confidentiality of all information provided in the interview was assured. Each principal was asked to provide a brief biography of himself/herself and some background information on the characteristics of his or her school. The areas of interest were investigated in the interview through a set of open-ended questions. Although some basic questions were to be addressed, the interviews were relatively loosely structured, so that promising areas of inquiry that arise could be explored. Each principal was informed that the interview format was flexible, in that more time would
be spent on areas that seemed particularly promising and relevant and about which the principal felt more strongly or had more experiences to share. Interviewees were encouraged to expand on experiences that they found particularly meaningful. The interviews were intended to be dense with the interviewees’ experiences, probing particular experiences deeply. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), “the most data-dense interviews are those that are unstructured; that is, they are not dictated by any predetermined set of questions” (p. 27).

In this research, interviews were semi-structured, in that a basic set of questions were to be answered, but the structure was far from rigid, allowing for changes in emphasis and deeper exploration of experiences and perceptions that the interviewees present as particularly meaningful. Although the overall length of the interview was more or less fixed, the individual sections could vary in length. During the course of interviewing the principals, some questions that were raised in particular interviews were added to all of the remaining interviews.

The interview consisted of open-ended questions, intended to elicit extended experiential responses and to create a dialogue about the phenomena in question that could take any course that is needed to obtain as thick a description as possible (Geertz, 1973; Moustakas, 1994). Flexibility was used in the order of presentation of the questions, the relative emphasis, and extensions into new areas. Each question was explored to the depth required for a complete answer (within the time constraints of the interview). Moustakas points out, “The deepest currents of meaning and knowledge take place within the individual through one’s senses, perceptions, beliefs, and judgments. This requires a passionate disciplined commitment to remain with a question intensely and continuously until it is
illuminated or answered” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). The general structure of the interviews is presented in Appendix A.

The intent was to use these open-ended questions in a way that would help focus on the theme of the study while allowing enough flexibility for the principals to take the interviews into new areas of inquiry (Kvale, 2009). The purpose of using questions in a descriptive form (”what” and “how” questions) is to allow participants to portray their experiences and perceptions in their own words and in their own contexts, and to “elicit spontaneous descriptions from the subjects rather than to get their own, more or less speculative explanations of why something took place” (Kvale, 2009, p. 58). As Kvale emphasizes, it is important that interviews be conducted in a dynamic and unprompted way that will allow “spontaneous, lively, and unexpected answers from the interviewees” (p. 57). The intent also was for the principals to be made to feel comfortable in sharing their narratives; this was accomplished in part by presenting them with questions that would bring to light the key experiences in their careers. The scope of the interviews was enhanced by making use of silence (Seidman, 1991), ensuring that the principals had “ample time to associate and reflect and then break the silence themselves with significant information” (Kvale, 2009, p. 61). As Seidman (1991) recommends, it was crucial that the interviewer be sensitive to the unintended signals and nonverbal clues that appeared during the interviews, such as nervous or ironic laughter that may have revealed some hidden and deep emotions and reflections. This is part of what Moustakas (1994, p. 114) means by the “informal, interactive process” of a phenomenological interview.

**Interview closure.** The end of each interview was followed by a debriefing (Kvale, 1996, 2009) that summarized the information acquired in the interview and included thanks
to the principal for his or her participation (Creswell, 2009). The principals also were asked for permission to be contacted in the future to gather further information and for member checking (Creswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Member checking is a process that ensures that the participants agree with the interpretations and findings of the study, and it enhances the reliability and validity of a study.

**Field observations and reflective memos.** An important component of the data gathering was field observation logs and reflective memos. All information gathered during visits to the schools where the interviews took place was carefully recorded. In addition to audiotaping the interviews, I took notes of my impressions and insights during the interviews (Seidman, 1991) so as to add context to the interviews and capture some of the subtleties of the interactive interview process.

Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 309) suggest that it might be useful for a researcher to include in research results a brief explanation of his or her perspectives on the research along with personal responses to the research process. This type of statement assists readers in forming opinions concerning whether, and how, the researcher’s personal reactions may have influenced the investigation and may have affected interpretation of the data. Corbin and Strauss (p. 309) suggest that writing reflective memos during the research process will aid the researcher in recalling and analyzing personal experiences and perceptions that occurred during the research process and composing this type of statement.

I arrived at least 30 minutes before the scheduled interviews and stayed 30 minutes after the interviews, allowing adequate time to prepare and wrap up the interviews. This extra time also allowed me to observe the culture of each site. In addition to audiotaping the interviews, I took notes of my impressions, reflections, and insights regarding the interviews
(Creswell, 2009; Seidman, 1991) within a few hours of conducting them. These memos documenting my reflections on the processes of the interviews and observations proved useful in analyzing the data and writing the final report. The research literature on phenomenological studies shows agreement on the necessity for reflexivity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 31). The reflective memos written throughout the study helped me analyze my own perceptions of the phenomena that appeared in the interviews and helped bracket my personal experiences, so that I could provide an accurate phenomenological record. In a phenomenological study, the researcher’s feelings or responses to participants’ statements naturally are conveyed to participants. In turn, participants react to the researcher’s responses by adjusting their attitudes toward the interview and the interviewer, as well as their willingness to disclose information on particular issues. Much of this behavior and attitude adjustment occurs on an unconscious level; therefore, examining the researcher’s influence on the research process is important (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 31).

My prior experiences and knowledge as a school principal helped me make sense of the physical settings in which the principals are working as well as their verbal responses to questions. Although I share some of the background and experiences of the principals, I intended to bring no preconceived notions to the interviews regarding the questions under study. My impressions and associations, however, made me a key instrument in the interview and analysis processes (Creswell, 2009). It was necessary to be extremely aware and reflective concerning personal biases and how they might affect understanding and interpretation of the information provided during the interviews and site visits.

**Data analysis.** Before proceeding with data analysis, I carefully checked the transcripts to ensure that no transcription errors were made (Creswell, 2009). Because the
interviews were conducted in Hebrew, the original analysis was conducted in Hebrew and only later were the relevant data and interpretations translated into English. Using the participants’ native language allowed me to keep the linguistic features of the interview (Kvale, 2009) intact and stay as close as possible to the initial and intended meaning of the interviewees.

After a “general sense of the information” (Creswell, 2009, p. 185) was obtained, a simplified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method discussed by Moustakas was employed (1994). The personal experiences and thoughts expressed by the interviewees were described in a general manner, focusing on how they relate to the research questions. A list of what appeared to be the most significant statements was then developed. These statements were coded using a process that allowed organization of the materials “into chunks or segments of texts” (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). Coding was based on the occurrence and strength of statements made during the interviews (Kvale, 2009). Patterns (Yin, 2003) and main themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were identified in the raw data that related to the research questions, “seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text” (Seidman, 1991, p. 89).

Organizing the formulated meanings of these significant statements into clusters yielded emerging themes that were nested within super-ordinate themes and finally arranged in categories that corresponded to the research questions. The super-ordinate themes were identified as those that were present in the statements of nearly every participant in the study; this condition merited classification as a super-ordinate theme.

Phenomenological researchers generally agree on the importance of reflexivity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 31). The reflective memos written during the data collection
process proved especially useful at this point to remind me of my perceptions of the various and varied contexts in which the principals performed their jobs and assisted me in bracketing my personal experiences in relation to the data.

It is virtually impossible for a researcher, even one who is conscious of the necessity of avoiding preconceptions, to conduct a phenomenological interview without communicating some feelings or responses regarding the interviewees’ statements. Interviewees naturally react, both consciously and unconsciously, to these communications, shaping the nature and content of the interview. Thus, data analysis included the important task (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 31) of examining how the researcher’s role and actions as the data collection instrument may have influenced the content of the interviews. Here again, reflective memos proved valuable.

The final step was to write a composite description of the phenomena related to successful principalship, incorporating the themes identified earlier and weaving in explorations and explanations of what happened and why. This creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1994, p. 19) is intended to incorporate a variety of experiences, perceptions, and beliefs and meld them into a common story that provides the “essence” of the principals’ experiences (Creswell, 2007, p. 159).

As recommended by Strauss and Corbin (2008, p. 309), the data analysis included a brief explanation of my research perspectives and responses to the research process. This explanation is intended to offer readers information needed to judge how my personal reactions may have influenced the data collection as well as interpretation of the data. The reflective memos written during the data collection process proved valuable in composing this explanation of my interaction with the research process.
The most important data sources in the study are the interviews, but patterns also were uncovered in part by analyzing the field note observations. The combination of interviews and field notes allowed me to make a more informed interpretation of the data and find meaning in them (Creswell, 2009, p. 189). Once the data gained from the principals were reduced, it was useful to look at the reduced data through the lens of Leithwood et al.’s (2008) taxonomy of four core practices of effective educational leadership, looking for similarities and discrepancies. Because the principals were interviewed using open-ended questions, it was illuminating to examine their spontaneous answers within the framework of Leithwood et al.’s (2008) established categories. Overall, the intent of the study was to understand what contributes to being an excellent principal and discover what lessons can be learned.

**Reporting the findings.** The information gleaned from the interviews was arranged and presented as clearly and concisely as possible, with selected portions of the transcribed interviews provided to allow readers to analyze and interpret the different narratives on their own. The experiences of successful principals in Israel were related in a holistic way in order to present the subjects’ “spontaneous stories” (Kvale, 2009, p. 133). The patterns and interpretations found in the individual interviews were used to create a unified interpretation that clearly highlights the features that contributed to the successful behaviors of these principals and helped them overcome the challenges they faced (Seidman, 1991; Wolcott, 2001). This allows readers not familiar with the factors confronting principals and their work to get a true feeling and understanding of the challenging role of principalship in Israel, a country striving to improve its educational system.
Validity and Credibility

Because of the unstructured nature of this kind of interview, it was challenging to ensure reliability and validity. To do so, there must be a very “deliberate strategy of treating each participant as a potentially unique respondent” (Coleman & Briggs, 2002, p. 63). Some obstacles to achieving accuracy in the findings are that some of the principals may have treated the interview as “a public relations exercise” (Coleman & Briggs, 2002, p. 144), some may have “prepared ‘talk tracks’ to promote the viewpoints they want to communicate” (Kvale, 2009, p. 71), and some may have tried too hard to offer information and insights they thought I was looking for (Locke et al., 2010, p. 239). With that in mind, when the principals were contacted and their consent to participate in the research was obtained, they were provided with only a brief explanation of the purpose of the interview (see Appendixes C and D).

Two means that have been found to be effective in addressing these obstacles are controlling the length of the interview and selecting the setting in which it takes place (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). Conducting the interviews in a relaxed setting was intended to ease the natural tension that is inherent in the interview situation. Moreover, as Coleman and Briggs (2002) emphasize, the advantage of an in-depth interview is that if it is thoughtfully and skillfully handled, “deep-rooted attitudes or anxieties might emerge” (p. 150). It is essential to truly “engage the participants, to listen closely, and to probe thoughtfully” (Locke et al., 2010, p. 237). The 90-minute interview length was chosen to allow enough time to let the participants become comfortable with me as an interviewer/researcher and to provide sufficient time to draw out the participants’ most relevant experiences in detail. This length
was chosen so as not to be daunting to the participants; they are accustomed, in their work, to extended meetings, such as with school superintendents and leaders of parent associations.

Threats to the reliability, validity, and credibility of the data can also come from the researcher. It was therefore important to clarify any researcher bias from the outset of the study, so that “the reader understands the researcher’s position and any biases or assumptions that impact the inquiry” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208), as well as any orientations that are likely to shape the approach to the study and interpretation of data. Once all the data were gathered, other interpretations (Locke et al., 2010) and rival explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of the raw data were considered. To check for biases inadvertently introduced into the interpretation of the data, an “external auditor” was enlisted (Creswell, 2009, p. 192), who examined the raw data and confirmed or questioned my interpretations so as to enhance the validity of the analysis (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The external auditor enlisted for my project is a scholar who has a PhD in hermeneutic and cultural studies from Bar-Ilan University in Israel. In his academic work, he has experience with phenomenological studies. He reviewed the raw transcripts of the interviews and also provided feedback during the process of data reduction and interpretation.

Another technique utilized to maintain dependability of participant ideas was incorporating “projective techniques” (Coleman & Briggs, 2002, p. 157) during the interviews. Anticipating that some of the issues may cause uncomfortable feelings for some of the principals, questions were crafted so as to be sensitive to this possibility and to facilitate the principals’ ability to give general and projective answers instead of personal and intimate replies. This was intended to allow principals who might be reluctant to share their concealed worries to be more open and to ease some of the tension that could surface. The
interviews also probed for anecdotes that described a principal’s experience of a phenomenon instead of an “intellectual” response to a question to which there might be a “right” answer. At the same time, interviewees’ responses were monitored closely for “surprises exposed by direct and spontaneous interactions” (Locke et al., 2010, p. 227), creating new insights and understandings (Kvale, 2009).

As previously stated, the group of principals who were interviewed was diverse in terms of gender, age, and religion, ensuring maximum variation (Patton, 1989). A sample of 10 successful principals (out of a group of 25 principals officially identified as successful by the Israeli Ministry of Education), chosen for diversity in the categories mentioned, provides a reasonable and representative sample of participants who could offer valuable information and perceptions from which useful conclusions could be drawn (Bodycott et al., 2001; Kvale, 2009; Seidman, 1991).

Because of the nature of the research, there existed a possibility that while sifting through the data, questions might come up that would necessitate collecting additional information to help complete the study. That meant a need to return to some of the interviewees to ask them follow-up questions after the initial interviews were analyzed. However, no such need occurred. The data were constantly evaluated and compared (Keedy, 1992), and insights obtained from that process guided subsequent interviews. As mentioned above, “member checking” was used as a process of soliciting research participants’ views of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Member checking allowed participants to evaluate the analyses, interpretations, and conclusions as they were shaped, and to offer feedback on the accuracy and credibility of the research account as it took shape.

In the member checking for this study, each principal was sent the analysis of his or her
interview and offered the opportunity to provide feedback. Of the 10 principals interviewed, seven responded that they agreed with the analysis, one requested that a point concerning the threat of terrorist activity be sharpened, and two did not respond.

The description of the essence of principals’ thoughts about their work that resulted from this study is intended to be dense in terms of the types of experiences and perceptions included, as well as in the relevant experiential details. Creswell (2007) states, “Rich, thick descriptions allow readers to make decisions regarding transferability because the writer describes in detail the participants or setting under study” (p. 209). The reporting of the results of this study are intended to contain enough details and context that readers will be able to judge for themselves how my own past experiences, my thoughts and perspectives, and my biases may have colored the interpretation of data and results of the study.

**The Researcher’s Role**

The fact that I am a school principal may have had some impact on the participants’ feelings and responses. It may have added some nervousness, arrogance, or competition into the interview process, affecting the interviewees and the interviewer alike. I was aware of this and planned to be highly reflective and critical of my own “biases, preferences, and presuppositions” (Coleman & Briggs, 2002, p. 207) during the interviews themselves and later on, in the narrative analysis stage. In the case of David’s interview, some sense of comparison and possibly competition arose, as David frequently mentioned the school at which I am principal. I did not personally know most of the principals whom I interviewed, and I did not expect to have much or any contact with them after the research was completed. That aspect of anonymity was expected to aid me both in avoiding preconceptions and biases...
and in encouraging the interviewees to share their most profound thoughts about their work, without fear of judgment or repercussions.

I believe that my own experience as a principal aided me in the research. Because I share some of the background and job functions of the interviewees, I was able to relate to the experiences and perceptions that they offered, and my “insider” knowledge helped me in knowing where to probe deeper with questions to obtain the deepest levels and nuances of the interviewees’ thoughts about their work.

I took my own subjectivity into consideration throughout the entire research process and was “aware of where those dispositions lie and how they might be at work” (Locke et al., 2010, p. 237). I am sure that I have some blind spots that could have led me to unintentionally neglect key elements and factors that are crucial to the validity and generalizability (Creswell, 2009) of the research, and I took precautions to avoid projecting my own opinions on the topic. Phenomenology attempts to eliminate all prejudgments and presuppositions, so that the researcher can observe and listen “in an unfettered way” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). To the best of my ability, I practiced bracketing, suspending all biases, beliefs, and opinions (Moustakas, 1994).

Although I have been a principal at two different schools, I know that the successes and problems I have experienced are not necessarily representative of all the challenges that principals face. I did not want to overlook any important areas just because I do not have any experience in dealing with them. As a researcher, I found it necessary to note my own awareness of and perceptions about the phenomena of interest in a reflective manner, throughout the research process, before I could try to understand the perspectives of the interviewees (Moustakas, 1994). Reflective memos were useful in this regard. It was crucial
that I expose my own biases and be cognizant of the ways they might affect my interpretations of the findings (Creswell, 2009, p. 192).

**Competing Explanations**

Member checking was used (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Creswell, 2009; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994), when possible, to reinforce my interpretations of the raw data as part of the process of giving meaning to the information provided in the interviews. This technique contributed to the accuracy of my findings (Creswell, 2009).

Once I gathered all the data and began interpreting them, I considered other interpretations (Locke et al., 2010) and rival explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of the raw data. An “external auditor” was enlisted (Creswell, 2009, p. 192) to examine the raw data and confirm or question my interpretations to enhance the validity of the analysis (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). That auditor was a scholar with experience in phenomenological studies who holds a PhD in hermeneutic and cultural studies from Bar-Ilan University in Israel.

**Limitations of the Study**

Three major factors limit the boundaries of this study and the contributions to be made by it. One limitation is the fact that only a single method of interviewing (in-depth interviewing) was used to collect the data. Although for the purposes of a phenomenological study focused on an individual's experience of effective principalship, in-depth interviews can, and in fact did, yield meaningful information, the fact that the information was collected by this single method limits the study findings.
Second, the size of the sample and the decision to focus only on excellent principals affect the generalizability of the study. Third, and related to the second limitation, the participants were chosen only from the district of Tel Aviv, which has its own special characteristics, as a district situated in the central and well-established portion of Israel. The study findings therefore should be taken with the precaution that they represent only the perspectives of relatively few excellent principals in the area of Tel Aviv. These perspectives and experiences do not necessarily characterize the experience of parallel successful principals in other parts of the country who operate in different circumstances and might be dealing with other challenges. Nevertheless, the perspectives and rich descriptions of the 10 excellent Israeli principals interviewed in the study can still shed light on the phenomena under study and can contribute, when used appropriately, to the field of educational leadership in Israel.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Northeastern University (Appendix B) in order to protect the rights of human participants (Creswell, 2009, p. 177), and its protocols were followed throughout the research and analysis phases. Steps were taken to ensure that all participants understood the procedures, purposes, and goals of the study (Kvale, 2009) as well as their right to end the interview at any stage (see Appendix C). The interviewees were asked for their permission for publication of the information provided in the interviews (Kvale, 2009). Each participant signed a consent document (Appendix D) acknowledging understanding of the research and the interviewee’s voluntary participation (Seidman, 1991).
Because the principals in the research are part of a group who was designated as highly successful, they “have less to fear from examination” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 156). I did, however, take into account that some of the issues expected to arise during the interviews could be painful for the principals and the “interview interaction may be stressful for the participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 90). It is also important to remember that “the openness and intimacy of the interview may be seductive and can lead subjects to disclose information they may later regret” (Kvale, 2009, p. 28). I was, therefore, attentive to the feelings of the interviewees and diplomatically changed the direction of the interviews as necessary to avoid hurting the subjects in any way.

During the data analysis and interpretation stages, it was important to “protect the anonymity of individuals, roles, and incidents” (Creswell, 2009, p. 91). In a small country such as Israel, where people within the educational community tend to be familiar with the prominent leaders of the most successful schools, it was necessary to disguise the names and any identifiable characteristics (Kvale, 2009; Seidman, 1991) of the principals interviewed in the study.
Chapter 4: Report of Research Findings

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the interviews with 10 excellent Israeli principals and analysis of those findings. The chapter is organized into the following sections. First, the research questions and the approach that guided the interview process are reviewed. The approach to the analysis of the data is also outlined. Second, a positionality statement reveals the bracketing of my assumptions and beliefs, along with previous experience with the phenomena under exploration and reflections during the data collection and analysis. Third, demographic statistics on the principals participating in the study are displayed, followed by more detailed descriptions and profiles of the participants, as given by them during their interviews. Fourth, the data analysis and reduction are described, whereby themes and superordinate themes emerged from the data. In the concluding section, the emergent themes are tied together into a combined description and essence that captures the principals’ shared experiences.

Research Questions and Approach to Data Collection and Analysis

Three research questions formed the basis of this research. The theoretical background to the research questions and development of Leithwood’s taxonomy are discussed in Chapter 2, as is the appropriateness of this taxonomy for the current research. The overall goal of the research was to distill the essence of the beliefs, practices, and behaviors that highly effective high school principals in Israel apply to their work. That knowledge is expected to improve understanding of why some principals succeed in their work and others fail, with implications for the training and self-reflection that principals may be able to employ to improve their effectiveness.
Leithwood et al.’s (2008) taxonomy of four categories of effective leadership practices of educational leaders was chosen as a paradigm for understanding effective educational leadership and as a guide to shaping the research and the research questions. This taxonomy is well supported by theory and backed by prior research, as described in Chapter 2. Leithwood and colleagues identified four core practices of effective educational leadership: building a vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching and learning program. The current study focuses specifically on practices and behaviors of highly effective principals in Israel, with answers that shed light on the reasons why some principals succeed in their work and others fail. The research questions are as follow:

1. What behaviors and actions do highly effective principals perceive as promoting their success?
2. What problems and challenges do highly effective principals perceive in their work?
3. How do highly effective principals understand and deal with the problems and challenges they face?

These research questions guided the development of the general framework of interview questions (presented in Appendix A) used in each of the 10 interviews. The interview questions and format provided in that appendix guided each semi-structured interview, but during the interviews participants were encouraged to expand on topics that were of particular interest and relevance to them. Each interview evolved as topics particularly salient to the interviewee became apparent so that the discussion could focus on the key elements of that particular principal’s thoughts and experiences.
Each interview was transcribed shortly after it was conducted, thus beginning the iterative process of extracting meanings and experiences shared by the collective group of highly effective principals. The process of transcription began the process of obtaining a “general sense of the information” (Creswell, 2009, p. 185) in each interview. While transcribing the interviews and making initial notes, I focused on keeping an open mind and identifying “anything of interest,” as suggested by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009, p. 83). What appeared to be the most significant statements from each interview were recorded (Creswell, 2007). This process was useful in organizing the interview material into “chunks or segments” (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). The broad themes and topics that appeared to be the most salient began to be identified, a process that would be iterated on successive readings of the transcripts. The bulk of data reduction occurred after all 10 interviews had been conducted.

The more formal process of extracting meaning from the principals’ statements was initiated following the conclusion of all 10 interviews and their transcription. A simplified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method discussed by Moustakas (1994) was employed. A closer examination was made to identify broad topics that either constituted large portions of the interview time or seemed to be of particular salience for the individual interviewee. With successive readings of the interview transcripts, comparisons were made to see whether principals focused on the same topics and approached them with the same relative emphasis. As broad topics emerged as common among the interviews, those became the focus with exploration of how the principals perceived each topic and how it was situated within their belief sets and approaches to their work. This iterative process (Smith et al., 2009) of reading and rereading the transcripts as a collective source of data gradually allowed themes and
general areas of common interest and experience to emerge. With these themes in mind, the significant statements identified in the transcripts of each principal were separately examined in more depth to explore the specific themes and super-ordinate themes that emerged from each individual research participant. Tables 2-11, one of which accompanies each principal’s profile later in this chapter, illustrate this process of reduction for each participant, in which themes and super-ordinate themes were identified based on the individual experience of each principal.

The process of data analysis thus began to move back again from the specific to the general, with examination of how individual beliefs and experiences fit into larger patterns for the entire group of principals as a whole, describing how effective principals perceived their work and acted in ways that benefited their schools. Following this examination, a list of themes and super-ordinate themes was compiled that emerged from the examination of patterns across all interviews. This list is displayed in Table 12 (which follows the individual explorations of the interviews), a master table of themes for the group. Table 13 illustrates recurrent themes across cases and demonstrates that the final super-ordinate themes chosen appeared in almost all of the principals’ interviews. Table 14 demonstrates the entire process of reduction, from significant statements to emerging themes, super-ordinate themes, and categories.

As patterns (Yin, 2003) and main themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) related to the research questions emerged from the raw data, composite descriptions were drafted of the phenomena related to successful principalship for each theme. Continued deeper examination of the transcripts allowed refinement and fleshing out of these descriptions with explorations and explanations of what happened and why, in a process of creative synthesis (Moustakas,
1994, p. 19). The common story thus created is intended to incorporate a variety of experiences, perceptions, and beliefs that together provide “essence” of the principals’ experiences (Creswell, 2007, p. 159).

This iterative process resulted in the collection of reflections that created a pool of shared experiences that was examined for commonalities and differences. This examination allows the reader to see how the principals perceived and acted upon situations that, in general, they agreed were important in performing their jobs effectively. The specific instances were elements of the larger puzzle of the principals’ thoughts and actions that were pieced together to create an overall picture of their successful work as effective high school principals.

**Positionality Statement and Reflections during Data Collection and Analysis**

It is highly important in a phenomenological study to bracket the experience of the key researcher before analyzing data from the study. As recommended by Strauss and Corbin (2008, p. 309), I present here a brief explanation of my research perspectives and my responses to the research process. Such an explanation is intended to offer readers information needed to judge and reflect on the researcher’s own biases, perceptions, and beliefs that might have affected the ways in which the information acquired in the study was analyzed and interpreted. Moreover, the reflective process itself helps the researcher become more conscious of his/her assumptions, thus leading the analysis toward a more objective path. I made a point of writing reflective memos during the process of collecting and analyzing the data, and I found that this process helped me in summarizing my personal reactions and perceptions about the topic of my study.
With regard to the topic under study, I too have personal experience, having worked as a school principal for the last 13 years. During these years, I worked in two schools that were very different. In 1997, when I was 28 years old, I was appointed to be the principal of the Amit Bar-Ilan junior high school. After three years of work, I was promoted to be the principal of the entire Amit Bar-Ilan high school. The school was well known over the years as a unique school for high-achieving students who came from all over central Israel to learn at a high level. The school was private and religious, and its curriculum was focused on the sciences and high-tech studies. The school’s enrollment was about 570, and most students were very gifted and highly motivated.

In 2004, I was appointed as the principal of Blich High School, which was established 50 years ago and is considered one of the most influential coeducational secular high schools in the Israeli public education system, serving almost 2,000 students. The school has a reputation for academic excellence and in many ways mirrors the demographics of the country, with the majority of students coming from the diverse communities in the central parts of Israel.

As I formulated the research questions and conducted the study, I constantly thought about my work as a principal and used those reflections to guide and influence my work on the study. Going to the different schools and meeting with the excellent principals who agreed to take part in the study was a powerful experience for me. As someone who is always occupied in his daily work with many of the issues involved in the research questions, I found the interviews to be extremely meaningful. I tried to set aside my predispositions and assumptions whenever I began a meeting with one of the participants. Although I was aware of my own biases, I needed to reflect and remind myself during and after the interviews that I
am not the subject of this study. Writing reflective memos was a useful means to make me aware of the necessary distinction between the interviewees and myself.

During the interview periods, I became more aware of the different perspectives that principals hold on various issues. Sometimes these perspectives surprised me, and occasionally they seemed almost obvious to me. I believe that the fact that I am a principal allowed most of the principals to feel comfortable in sharing with me their true moments of agony and despair. In most cases, with one probable exception, I didn’t feel there was any attempt to impress or compete with me. In one interview, the principal repeatedly mentioned the name of my school and seemed to make frequent comparisons between my school and his. This unique occurrence, in the interview with David, caught my attention and made me aware of the possibility that he might see himself as being, for some reason, in competition with me. I tried to eliminate this factor during the interview itself and in my analysis of it.

During the analysis stage, I contemplated my own ideas about the phenomena under investigation. I have come to appreciate the fact that due to my academic background in law school, I am conscious of and anxious about the legal aspects of the principalship. I now understand that my personal inclination toward legalistic thinking is not necessarily typical of the average principal. I now also recognize more than ever that my personal experience in both schools in which I have worked, with high exposure to the media and with self-aware and demanding communities, is not typical for all principals and their schools in Israel. The fact that I began my career as a principal at a relatively young age (28) is another factor that affected the ways in which I perceive the challenges of educational leadership. Some of the principals in my study who came to their position after a very long tenure (as teachers, as administrators in other roles, or both) dealt with somewhat different challenges.
Repeated reading of the interview transcripts taught me much about the multifaceted aspects of the principals’ recollections. I read each interview more than a dozen times, seeking meaningful statements and themes. I was amazed to find on repeated readings the inner meanings that sometimes were hidden in the principals’ words. Once again, my reflective memos were useful in helping me analyze and understand the experiences shared by the principals. I came to appreciate the power of the stories and examples the principals shared. Many times, the key to deciphering the essence of a principal’s experience was in a specific example or story that principal chose in order to explain his/her perceptions. The terms, the metaphors, and the semantic fields the principals used were also meaningful sources for understanding their insights on the research questions under investigation. Lastly, during the writing of the participants’ profiles, I found myself thinking about my role as a principal in relation to each principal in my study. I believe that I successfully isolated each principal’s unique characteristics. I also realized that I myself have something within me that is, in a way, a slight reflection of each characteristic. The recognition that I myself am also sometimes an “enthusiastic bulldozer,” a “devoted mother,” or a “skillful juggler,” as I would characterize some of the principals I interviewed, was eye-opening to me. I now appreciate the fact that even though people and phenomena tend to be perceived in unique and exclusive colors, the real world is one of nuances. The combination of the different perspectives of the diverse participants in this study helped me portray more accurately the full range of the essence of effective educational leadership.

**Demographic Data on Participants**

Table 1 provides a general overview of the characteristics of the 10 principals chosen as the purposeful sample of the research. As explained earlier, the participants were chosen
from a group of 25 principals who were designated as excellent by the Ministry of Education in recent years. They came from different cities in the district of Tel Aviv, and they all worked in public high schools. As can be seen in the table, purposeful attention was given to selecting the participants of the study to ensure maximum variation in terms of their backgrounds, experience, age, and school characteristics.

**Principals’ Profiles**

In order to allow the reader to understand the perceptions outlined by the interviewees of the study, a short profile of each principal was created. The profiles were written using the reflective memos and field observation notes taken during and after the interviews. In order to protect confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms are used for the principals. A table at the end of each principal’s profile (Tables 2–11) illustrates the super-ordinate themes and themes that emerged from that particular individual’s interview (Smith et al., 2009, p. 100). The purpose of these tables is to show how the themes (with short example statements taken from the interview transcripts) are matched to that one person, thus demonstrating which themes are more prominent for that particular principal. This proved useful in comparing the principals.

**Hagar.** Talking to Hagar was a fascinating experience. Hagar is a devoted principal who has been working in her school for almost 20 years. She came to the position of principalship after working in the school in various positions. The main impression obtained from her interview was that she is a person who is, on one hand, a professional who is highly skilled and informed in her work, and at the same time, highly committed to lead the school in a collaborative way. Hagar summarized her views on management and leadership by saying, “As far as I’m concerned, management is the pillar of fire, and we function according
Table 1

Demographic Data on Participants (N = 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years as Principal</th>
<th>School Size (Small, &lt; 500; Medium, 500-999; Big, &gt; 1,000)</th>
<th>Socioeconomic Status of Students(^a)</th>
<th>Level of Achievement of Students(^a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hagar</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>5–10</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salomon</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60–69</td>
<td>30–35</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50–59</td>
<td>5–10</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>5–10</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50–59</td>
<td>25–30</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50–59</td>
<td>20–25</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>5–10</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>5–10</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60–69</td>
<td>15–20</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50–59</td>
<td>20–25</td>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Based on principals’ descriptions.

to its light and behavior, but it is important to note that a principal, if she wants to succeed, has to be a cooperative principal.”

Of all the principals’ offices visited during this study, Hagar’s office was clearly the most striking. The office sends a message of professionalism combined with a delicate taste
in art and interior decoration. It seems that a lot of thought was put into choosing the decorations of the office, yet a visitor does not feel alienated. Hagar delivers a feeling of passion in her work. It seems that she is highly involved in the daily life of the school. Unlike some of her colleagues who were interviewed, she allowed her staff to enter her office during the interview more than once. Each time, it seemed that she truly acted as the “pillar of fire” for her coworkers, who looked at her in admiration for guidance.

Like many of the excellent principals in this study, she is highly devoted to her school and students; however, the fire in her eyes and the passion in her work were quite remarkable. It seems like she feels she always needs to be on top of things. When asked about things that might harm the chances of a principal to succeed, Hagar responded by saying: “For example: A principal who sits in his chair and is uninvolved in what is going on in his school, and is not involved in the details, and is not willing to listen will fail as a principal.”

Hagar’s dedication to her school makes her take things personally. Things that happen in her school or to her students don’t just slip by her. She absorbs the events, takes full responsibility, and dedicates herself to solving problems, even at the risk of paying a personal price along the way. While sharing a story about a difficult challenge her school faced, Hagar said:

I allowed myself to cry for three hours, personal crying time, about what’s going on here, and then I moved like a soldier onto the battlefield . . . like a soldier who had been trained only in that field. Just like that.

Tears in the eyes, along with a soldier’s courage and dedication, truly capture her professional personality, in my mind. I noticed her intensity and seriousness with her staff as she dealt with them regarding the missions that occupied them that day. It was clear to me
that Hagar’s passionate dedication motivated her staff. Hagar makes known her high expectations from her teachers and staff. Talking about her moments of despair, Hagar chose to give an example of people who are not devoted enough, in her opinion, to the school. She said, “Sometimes I do break down, especially in my immediate environment, because of secretaries who are not devoted enough to their work.”

Table 2

*Super-ordinate Themes and Themes from Hagar’s Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building vision</td>
<td>The importance of constantly setting new goals after achieving prior goals.</td>
<td>In my opinion, a principal should set himself new goals each time that he can attest that a significant improvement has been made in each of the goals that he has already set for himself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total commitment</td>
<td>The feeling of constant availability and endless work.</td>
<td>From the morning until evening. You know what, not from the morning until evening—24 hours a day. . . . I also haven’t been in a situation where I go away for the weekend and I say, “Don’t call me.” My telephone is always accessible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal motivation</td>
<td>The feeling of inner passion that leads the way.</td>
<td>As far as I’m concerned, management is the pillar of fire, and we function according to its light and behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super-ordinate Themes</td>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Significant Statement Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading teachers</td>
<td>The importance of backing up the teachers</td>
<td>I back up the teachers, giving them almost total backup. I can deal with a teacher afterwards privately . . . but I will back them up, I will stand behind them. . . . Even when they make mistakes, I will not sit in a meeting, for example, with a teacher and with a parent and let the parent feel that he can humiliate the teacher, no way. I will take care of him and look out for him, and I will try to get the parent to see things in a different way, and if need be I will apologize on behalf of the teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The problem of bureaucracy</td>
<td>The difficulty of working according to bureaucratic procedures</td>
<td>The network manages our funding. If I need to buy a computer, or if I need a pencil, then I need committees. It's difficult, difficult. It is awfully difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different and rival stakeholders</td>
<td>The difficulty of working with numerous stakeholders who pull the school in different directions</td>
<td>This array, which is deployed in front of a school principal, who has to stand opposite three bosses, is absurd in the highest degree, in my opinion—not only for the principal himself, but because of the terrible waste of money which occurs in each one of these places. You are committed to the Ministry of Education, both from a social aspect and from a pedagogical educational aspect, in a different way, but you are committed. . . . Of course they criticize. The Local Authority is the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressiveness</td>
<td>Some parents are using aggressive legal tools in their interactions with principals</td>
<td>It’s difficult. I could have some sort of confrontation with a parent and three minutes later I would find a letter from a lawyer on my desk, for example. Today I am rough, but in the past I was different.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Feelings of vulnerability and insecurity in dealing with the intrusiveness and aggressiveness of the local and national media.</td>
<td>For example, the newspapers, and the media. The media make names every now and again in the education system. For example I have, at school, had the media come at me from every possible direction, in the most private places possible, about us, about the school. . . . I feel exposed to the media, and I feel that I am not getting backup from my supervisors . . . not defended at all. . . . The media have been a very big problem over the past years . . . principals are terribly exposed to the media, for better or for worse, though it is usually for worse. We all know the Israeli media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security concerns</td>
<td>The principal is responsible for events outside school hours</td>
<td>Today you are not only responsible for their studies; you are responsible for their education and for their afternoons. Many times I find myself dealing with all sorts of incidents that are related to the children’s afternoons, whether it is something relating to the scouts, something that happened on the way to school, something that happened with a neighbor in their building. We also deal with these things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of power</td>
<td>The inability of a principal to compensate teachers for their special efforts and achievements</td>
<td>Very difficult, very difficult for me. . . . If I could say that someone did something, contributed so much to a group of students that he has guided or led them up to their matriculation exams, standardized tests, whatever, I would like to compensate him with X hours or I would like to compensate him with X money, to give him some sort of miracle and give him some kind of bonus. I do not have it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Managing in collaboration with others

The importance of including the staff in the decision-making process

[I think] to be as transparent as possible, that is, to present the staff room with the precise work plan, to allow them to take part in writing the work plan . . . to include them in the decision-making process.

Being a politician

Handling the rival factions related to the school using political techniques is an effective way to deal with the school’s challenges

To know how to take advantage of it in the correct way, the way that is good for the school. Obviously only for the benefit of the school; there are no personal benefits here, only the benefit of the school and of the school’s staff. Simply to know to take the strongest thing from each of these places . . . I have to admit, I really have to admit, that we know how to collect all the good things that each of these bosses can give us . . . I try to extract the best from each of them.

Training

Key fields of knowledge in principal’s training: economics, simulations, motivating people, and organization tools

I would teach them economics, simply how to manage the school’s money correctly. . . . I would really give them a long, big lesson on possible situations within the system and do simulations with them. I think that we need to teach them to be human and to know how to motivate employees. I think that we should teach them different tools from different systems. . . . I would teach them about organized management tools, different management practices. . . . I would teach them to survive in the face of the bureaucratic systems.

Hagar has proved to be one of the most successful principals in the district, building her school to become one of the leading schools in the country. This achievement is even more impressive when one takes into consideration the diverse community of students
attending her school and the relatively poor physical condition of the school building in which she works.

**Salomon.** Salomon was the oldest principal interviewed in the study. He is the principal of one of the largest and most successful high schools in the district and is considered by many as one of the most experienced and professional principals in the country. He has worked as a principal for more than 25 years, and over the years, has won many awards in recognition of his leadership. Salomon agreed to participate in the study with some hesitation and seemed reserved throughout the process. During his interview, he gave the impression that he had seen it all and, in some ways, had become exhausted. Moreover, unlike other principals in the study, he resigned himself to some issues and difficulties of the job that other principals in the study still tried to resolve. It seems that due to his age and experience, he has learned that some battles are not worth fighting.

Not surprisingly, he was well prepared for our meeting and maintained a guarded attitude toward the interview questions. It appeared that he perceived his role in the interview as that of a teacher or mentor and that he did his utmost to explain his perceptions on effective principalship. As a principal, Salomon runs his school in a very centralized manner. Although he appreciates the current need to shift to a more distributive and collaborative approach, it seemed that his instinctive inclination to personally control all the details in the school remained dominant.
Table 3

Super-ordinate Themes and Themes from Salomon’s Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total commitment</td>
<td>The task of principalship takes over the whole life of the principal</td>
<td>Basically “all my life.” When my door is closed, people are asking - is he sick?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing people</td>
<td>The principal should educate the teachers that he is in control</td>
<td>The teachers should know and follow the school’s protocols. They all know the right path. They must also constantly report to me in writing, and they know that I actually read everything they write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal as a pedagogue</td>
<td>The importance of leading the teachers toward excellent teaching</td>
<td>I lead the leading professional team of the school in issues of instruction and pedagogy. I believe my role is to push teachers toward excellence and to be a constant catalyst for more efforts in improving the teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The problem of bureaucracy</td>
<td>The burden of dealing with the irrational paperwork workload</td>
<td>The paperwork is just too much. Who needs all these forms? This is making our life so difficult. The amount of memos, instructions, and forms harms the ability of the principal to function. The amount of mail is enormous too. This is too much of a burden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive media</td>
<td>The difficulty of dealing with aggressive parents who use the media attacking the principal</td>
<td>Parents have come to learn to use the media. The Ministry of Education and the Secretary of Education are totally helpless. The newspapers became an extremely threatening factor. “I will blow this story in the media” has become a common chant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with different stakeholders</td>
<td>The principal deals with conflicting demands and expectations</td>
<td>I cannot accept the circumstances in which I need to maneuver manipulatively between the different stakeholders who are pushing me in different directions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of exhaustion</td>
<td>The exhausting nature of principalship</td>
<td>I just got back from abroad totally devastated physically and emotionally. I really feel I am harming my health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading with others</td>
<td>Sharing the workload with the staff as an effective way of dealing with pressure and stress</td>
<td>I must stay and rest more at home and distribute to my assistants some of the issues I am dealing with that cause me so much stress. I feel I am not built for that kind of pressure anymore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals’ training</td>
<td>Key themes in principals’ development programs</td>
<td>The following topics for principals’ professional development programs: Decision making, leading change, and team building are important topics for principals’ preparation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Salomon shared his feelings regarding the burden of leadership and the physical effects of the stressful task on his health. Several times, he emphasized the load of paperwork and the difficulties of working with the complicated bureaucracy. Lately, he revealed, he has come to understand that in order “to survive,” he must give away some responsibilities to the people who work with him. Salomon explained:

I just got back from abroad totally devastated physically and emotionally. I really feel I am harming my health. I must stay and rest more at home and delegate some of the issues that cause me so much stress. I feel I am not built for that kind of pressure anymore.

Another issue that was a key theme in Salomon’s interview was his perception of the conflicting demands and expectations that he as a principal needs to deal with. Salomon, who has an honest and ethical character, cannot accept the circumstances in which he needs to maneuver manipulatively between the different stakeholders who are pushing him in different
directions. In a sense, it seems that he is not willing to adapt himself to the need to develop and deploy political skills. Salomon is highly committed to his school and staff, and he presents an image of a leader who serves as an example for his community in terms of professionalism, ethics, and hard work. One could not avoid sensing the feeling of disappointment he often referred to when talking about the lack of backup and respect he feels from authorities, some parents, and the media.

**Sharon.** Sharon is a principal of one of the largest high schools in the district. She has been working in education in various positions for more than 20 years and as a principal for the last 6 years. She shared with me that through these years, she has won a reputation as a devoted professional who will push things forward until they are done. Her perception of her job as a principal reflects an attitude of total commitment. She works hard and demands hard work from the people surrounding her. Although she treats her staff with warmth and support, I could not avoid noticing during the interview, which was interrupted several times, that the people who work under her treat her with respect and even, in a way, seem fearful and anxious about disappointing her. This kind of relationship was evident in a story she told about the way she handled one of her problematic teachers:

There was this teacher who was also the union’s representative in my school. She was constantly working against me. If I announced something, she would immediately denounce it. I would tell my teachers to do something, and she would tell them the opposite. She even brought one of the union’s officials to support her publicly. I remember telling him on his arrival that no matter what he thinks, this negative person will not be working in my school any more. And once I made it clear to the entire
community that I had decided to fire her, all the other teachers understood and accepted the fact that their school has a [boss]. This is my leadership.

Table 4

Super-ordinate Themes and Themes from Sharon’s Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building vision</td>
<td>The importance of setting clear and measurable goals for the school</td>
<td>From the very beginning, I defined clear and measurable goals for the school. These goals were pedagogical in nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total commitment</td>
<td>Working in a high-stakes mode</td>
<td>I am a real work addict. People cannot imagine. I am a total doer, constantly working on a high-stakes mode.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing people</td>
<td>The key task of casting in the role of the principal</td>
<td>I have the talent of choosing the right people for the job. In my view, this is one of the most important characteristics of a successful principal. You need to know the strengths and weaknesses and match the abilities to the different tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal as an administrator of pedagogy</td>
<td>The importance of using enforcement techniques over teachers in order to ensure effective teaching</td>
<td>I supervise the teachers’ work. The teachers know that, and they also know it will be very unpleasant if I catch one of them being sluggish. . . . You must check all the time if things are being done. These are the basics of management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building motivation</td>
<td>The importance of creating energy and motivation within the staff</td>
<td>The basis of leadership should be charisma and the ability to lead people, but a necessary part must also be motivating people energetically and powerfully. I know that some people do not like my energies. In any case, I am a great believer in systematic enforcement.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complicated structure</td>
<td>Creative ways of compensating hardworking teachers</td>
<td>I found a way to compensate hardworking teachers. First of all, I let them know verbally my appreciation. But I also cut them some slack. If this hardworking teacher plans to take a day off, I allow this and ignore it. They know there is a give and take dynamic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>Feelings of vulnerability and humiliation due to media attacks</td>
<td>These moments are extremely difficult when you find yourself in the newspaper. The journalists are attacking us personally. It is almost impossible to cope. It’s difficult, extremely difficult. The feeling of shame and humiliation hurts you really badly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress and Aggression</td>
<td>Aggressive verbal attacks by parents</td>
<td>One of the things that is really difficult is the behavior of some of the parents; their verbal violence to our staff is undermining teachers’ authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with threats</td>
<td>PTA threats aimed at the principal</td>
<td>I had some major clashes with the PTA regarding the field trips. They have made it clear that they will not let me intervene in the ways they are handling it. They made it clear to me that they will be the only ones making the decisions. I didn’t know how to react. They really crushed me. They threatened that they will make sure that I will lose my job if I dare to interfere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting authority</td>
<td>The importance of being obedient toward authority figures</td>
<td>I have learned to be obedient regarding my bosses. I have learned politically not to become stubborn. They tell me, and I obey. It doesn’t happen much, though. This is part of the strategy I took in order to be able to be promoted in the future. I don’t want them to say, “she is not somebody who you can work with” or “she is inflexible.” This is the decision I have made, and it is evident that it’s working.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managing in collaboration with others</td>
<td>The tension between centralism and delegating responsibilities</td>
<td>I have a centralistic personality. It is truly hard for me to delegate my responsibilities, but I have come to learn that there is really no other way - I can’t, in reality, do it all by myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a politician</td>
<td>Knowing which battles are not worth fighting is an important surviving strategy</td>
<td>I have left the battle. I remember telling myself this is not your nature - you are a person who fights for her principles. Nevertheless, I decided I cannot fight on all frontiers and realized that as a principal I must learn to be more of a politician. I then said, you know what, if that’s what you want, that’s how it’s gonna be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of power</td>
<td>A sense of meaning as a source of empowerment</td>
<td>I feel I am leading something meaningful . . . more than all other achievements, the fact that I have succeeded in transforming my school from a place that was characterized as alienated and unfriendly to a place that is much more human and personalized and full of values of mutual support, is empowering me.</td>
</tr>
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Sharon knows exactly what her goals are and is highly focused toward achieving them. Her vision is simple and clear, and she puts a lot of effort into verifying that all members of the school community will be motivated to accomplish it.

Sharon explained her dominant belief in data-driven management and seems to use technology in a very effective way in communicating managerial and pedagogical tasks. As a principal, she sees her main role as being an instructional leader focusing on the improvement of learning and teaching conducted in classes and on raising students’ levels of achievement. Although her school has a highly diverse student population with a large proportion of low-
performing students, she has succeeded in raising student outcomes to one of the highest levels in the country.

Sharon revealed that even though many people perceive her to be tough and firm, she often truly feels vulnerable and powerless. These feelings appear at times of crisis, when she understands that ultimately, she is on her own. She does not feel protected by her supervisors on many occasions, and in times of personal exposure to local media criticism, she perceives that the pressure laid upon her is almost unbearable.

At the end of the interview, Sharon spoke of her wish to find a new path for her career. It was both fascinating and gloomy to hear her talk about the fragility of her success and her hope to move to a less risky profession. Sharon shared with me the fact that as she reflects on the advantages and risks of her authoritative leadership practice and style, she is starting to recognize its limitations and challenges and therefore the need to seek change.

Rebecca. Rebecca was one of the youngest principals interviewed in my study. She leads a medium-size school that, according to her, is generally considered by the community to be average in its performance and achievements. Nonetheless, Rebecca was recently recognized by the Ministry of Education as an excellent principal, mainly due to her ability to improve her students’ level of achievement dramatically and rapidly. Rebecca shared with me her perspectives on educational leadership and was the only one among the interviewees who led me on a tour all over her school after the interview. Rebecca believes in the necessity of a clean and spotless educational environment, and it was apparent that she puts a lot of effort into achieving this goal. Like many of the principals interviewed in my study, she demonstrated a meaningful commitment to her students and staff.
Rebecca dedicates a large portion of her time to mentoring and supervising teachers in her school, helping them improve their teaching and effectiveness. She says that she relates well to numbers and therefore makes constant use of data in her daily work as a principal. Rebecca shared with me her frustration with the enormous amount of paperwork she needs to deal with, although it seemed that she handles it quite effectively. She recognizes and highlights the need of a principal to constantly learn and gain knowledge on educational and pedagogical topics as well as on managerial practices and skills.

One of the repeating themes in her interview was her feeling of responsibility for the safety and well-being of her students. Reflecting on her immense accountability, Rebecca shared with me a humorous parable she enjoys telling.

Table 5

Super-ordinate Themes and Themes from Rebecca’s Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to build vision</td>
<td>Setting realistic goals</td>
<td>The principal must first examine her own worldview and design the school’s vision accordingly. She must verify that she is not trying to achieve too much at a time. It is very important to plan only a few specific goals that can be achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal motivation</td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>What is that you’re doing? What is this enthusiasm? Stop it! But what can I do? I have this gene of enthusiasm. I cannot avoid it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building motivation</td>
<td>Creating a sense of urgency</td>
<td>You need to create a sense of urgency. People should know that we don’t have time. This is extremely important.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
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<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building motivation (cont.)</td>
<td>Getting teachers on board</td>
<td>The principal must conquer the teacher’s soul completely. I believe that the way to do it is through respect. You must treat your teachers with respect and win their support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
<td>Focus on improving instruction and teaching practices</td>
<td>Educational leadership is all about instructional leadership. This is where we are these days. In practice, it means that you as a principal should be occupied mainly in teachers’ professional development regarding teaching and instruction practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The limits of power</td>
<td>Knowing your place in the system</td>
<td>The bottom line is that I should know my place. I recognize the fact that there are people above me to whom I am accountable. This is my spot in the system. I am not operating completely in autonomy. I understand this and accept it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different stakeholders</td>
<td>Problematic interference of different factions in the work of the principal</td>
<td>There are some moments of frustration in which I feel that although I believe in a certain educational principle, some officials of the municipality and the Ministry of Education try to interfere. I am forced to deal with this problematic situation. Sometimes I fight against it, and sometimes I try to create a positive dialogue with these different stakeholders to find an agreed solution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security concerns</td>
<td>The concern of protecting the students from terror attacks</td>
<td>I always bear this scenario in my mind. God forbid, if a terrorist will ever raid my school. I know it and feel it in my body and soul; I will be the first to be on the line and jump at him, no matter what the price will be for me personally. This thought is constantly in my mind. I do try repressing it, but it is always there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super-ordinate Themes</td>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Significant Statement Examples</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of control over teachers’ compensation</td>
<td>Inability to reward excellent teachers</td>
<td>I have a team of teachers who are amazing. They work very hard. They do not look at their watch but rather choose to work more than expected. I really want to give them more, in terms of salary. Since I can’t do that, I try to give them other benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive leadership</td>
<td>Tension between centralism and collaborations with the staff</td>
<td>In my first year as a principal, I was quite centralistic. It took me time to learn how to stop this tendency of mine and to create an organizational environment of complete transparency and collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political thinking and negotiation</td>
<td>Give and take relationships with superiors</td>
<td>I think that my superiors know I am completely loyal to their agenda. So many times they are willing to accept my view, too. I have made many concessions along the way. We found the right balance of mutual compromise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals’ development</td>
<td>Fields of knowledge in principals’ training</td>
<td>Principals should be knowledgeable in staff development, in areas of effective practices of instruction and teaching, along with general organizational management tools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Every evening, a police officer stops my car on my way back home, astonished by the ridiculous number of passengers that I allow in my car, which can sometimes exceed a thousand. This is the life of a principal. You drive home every day with hundreds of students, their parents, and the staff along with you. You carry them in your mind. This is a huge strain.

Rebecca emphasized the stress she feels regarding security and safety issues that are part of her job. She perceives this particular source of stress as almost intolerable.
Regarding her relations with Ministry of Education officials and municipality representatives, it seems that she holds a very practical approach, recognizing her dependency on them and the limitations of her authority. As she explained:

The bottom line is that I should know my place. I recognize the fact that there are people above me to whom I am accountable. This is my spot in the system. I am not operating autonomously. I understand this and accept it.

At the end of the interview, she voiced her aspiration for more power and backing that would make her task more achievable.

David. David is an experienced principal in his late fifties who heads a middle-size high school. According to David, the students in his school are medium to low in terms of learning potential. During his term of nearly 10 years as a principal, he has succeeded in raising the students’ level of achievement dramatically. David was very pleased to share with me his insights and perceptions on school leadership. He made it clear to his staff members prior to the beginning of the interview that he expected no disturbances during our session.

“Principalship,” according to David, “is another form of managing a large firm. Education is a serious business. We must use in education and principalship the same parameters that are used in running a high-tech company successfully.” This notion arose repeatedly throughout the interview. David clearly believes that principals should look at themselves as business leaders and managers, and that the entire community should treat them as such. He believes that a principal should start by creating a clear vision for his organization and then dedicate much of his time to mentoring his staff and supervising their work to see that it is in accordance with the clear vision that he set for them. As he explained:
The first key question I constantly ask myself is where do we want to go? What is our vision? This is what leads me in my daily work routine. This is the only thing that we should focus on.

David shared with me his strong belief in the importance of visibility in running a school. He described his daily routine of walking around the building, visiting the different sites, and sending a clear message of presence and control. The physical appearance of the facility is also very important according to David, and he devotes significant resources to maintaining the school and its grounds. The principal needs to be attentive to public relations issues and to personally oversee all aspects related to them. He emphasized repeatedly that the way the school is perceived by the public i.e. parents, students, and the community, is an important component of the school’s potential to thrive.

Regarding the issue of managerial power that is given to principals, David holds a pragmatic approach, unlike many of his colleagues who shared with me their protest and frustration concerning their lack of power. David instead acknowledged and accepted his need to be involved in some “give and take” maneuvers with his superiors in order to achieve the support he needs in different situations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistency and vision-oriented management</td>
<td>The importance of the constant focus of the principal on the end goal</td>
<td>The first key question I constantly ask myself is where do we want to go? What is our vision? This is what leads me in my daily work routine. This is the only thing that we should focus on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balanced commitment to the school</td>
<td>Putting limits on the intensity of the task of principalship</td>
<td>I will tell you the truth. I am not doing faculty meetings in the evenings. There are no such meetings in my school. I am not going to sit here at school until 7:00 P.M. every day, like some principals who are trying to impress others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal relationships with the staff</td>
<td>Interpersonal relationships with the teachers as a promoter of motivation</td>
<td>The interpersonal relationship with your teachers is highly significant. You must put your soul into that. This allows you to activate your people and empower them, too. One cannot overemphasize the importance of this part of our work as principals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational leadership focused on students’ achievements</td>
<td>The importance of the principal’s involvement in students’ assessments</td>
<td>I think that the principal should be involved in the systematic process of students’ mapping. Not all students are the same. Some of them are ranked to be at risk in terms of graduation or test failures. Once you map your students, you know where you need to focus your instructional efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different stakeholders</td>
<td>Wasting time while maneuvering between the Ministry of Education and the municipality</td>
<td>What is the rationale in expecting the principals to work with the Ministry of Education and the municipality at the same time? This is a complete waste of time. In order to conduct the maneuvers between them, you already waste half of your energy.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Super-ordinate Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terror concerns</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The inability to prepare and deal with the threat of a terror attack</td>
<td>Nobody can prepare you for an event of a terror attack that happens near your school. I remember it was extremely difficult for me.</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The lack of control over teachers’ staffing</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The inability to fire failing teachers</td>
<td>I have some teachers here who are problematic. They have been here for 30 years. Unfortunately, unlike parallel high-tech organizations, I cannot create a new leadership or recruit fresh teachers. I have to live with what I have.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distributing power and responsibility</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating an organizational structure that encourages empowerment and accountability</td>
<td>My general idea was that in each section of the school, I will have somebody who will be the manager who runs the show. This person is empowered by me to lead this chapter of the school. I will support them and give them everything they need, in terms of staff, financial resources, and more. Now they are accountable and responsible to deliver results.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negotiation</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manipulating the different factions involved</td>
<td>We have the ability to maneuver and manipulate wisely between the factions and influence the happenings significantly. Our influence remains meaningful.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral dilemmas</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with the moral question of keeping failing students in school</td>
<td>I have some groups of students in my school that I think we are not helping. Our troubling dilemma is the following question: Do we really need to keep them in our school, or maybe should they be reassigned to a different learning organization? I think this is a question of our values and morals.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Themes</td>
<td>Significant Statement Examples</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>The importance of learning from an experienced colleague</td>
<td>I think that principals can gain a lot just from getting some guidance from experienced principals who can show them in practice how this work is done. If a principal is open to learning, he can truly learn how principles of management come to life in the real world of a principal</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Ron.** Ron is a principal who has been working in education for more than 30 years, 20 of them as a principal. He leads a small school for high-achieving students. In acknowledgment of his ability to maintain a long-standing record of excellence, he received official recognition as an excellent principal several years ago. In his interview, Ron provided a colorful description of his work as a principal. Through the years, he developed a somewhat cynical attitude toward the educational system, an attitude that he says helps him to survive. Ron was sarcastic in describing the bureaucracy of the Ministry of Education and the multiple and overlapping authorities he needs to deal with as a principal. He commented:

You write one annual program for one authority and another program for the other.

You let everybody hear what they want to hear and eventually you do the educational work that you think is best for your students. They think you are doing what they wanted when you are actually doing what you want.

Without any embarrassment, he illustrated how he takes advantage of the overly bureaucratic situation and uses the confusing maze of the system and the ignorance of the authorities’ different representatives from what really goes on in the school in order to gain more resources and managerial independence.
Ron is an expert in using technology to manage information about his school and demonstrated during the interview his ability and skill in making effective managerial usage of data to better the outcomes of the students and accomplish his goals. Ron explained the importance he places on having a clear vision and implementing it in the school’s culture. As a principal, he maintains a rather centralistic approach, keeping most of the “cards” very close. Ron believes that as a principal, he is the one who personally needs to intervene in any cases of misunderstanding or conflicts related to the school. He emphasized this by saying, “I tell my teachers: I am your anchor here. You do your job and stay calm, and I will do what needs to be done.” He shared the idea that because he has total control over the resources and the knowledge of the school, he can “magically” and effectively persuade the rival parties in various disputes to withdraw or solve their mutual grievances.

Table 7

*Super-ordinate Themes and Themes from Ron’s Interview*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building vision</td>
<td>The creation of the school’s vision is an ongoing process that starts with the principal and stretches to the surrounding world</td>
<td>First of all you need to think. You need to think of your vision. You need to see how you make the best usage of your resources. You need to lead entrepreneur, be very open, attentive, and listen. Things that are happening all the time in your surrounding environment and that should always inform your vision building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading teachers</td>
<td>The principal’s role is to provide assurance and confidence to teachers</td>
<td>I tell my teachers: I am your anchor here. You do your job and stay calm, and I will do what needs to be done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super-ordinate Themes</td>
<td>Themes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal as a pedagogue</td>
<td>The importance of being the school’s expert in pedagogy and curriculum</td>
<td>You, as a principal, have to be an expert in the curriculum of the school, the different academic demands, and the graduation requirements. You must be the expert of the school in that field. You should become the highest authority in your school regarding all instructional issues related to it. You should be the pedagogical inspector of the school, oriented in data-driven managing and leading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicated structure</td>
<td>Taking advantage of confusion in the system to create managerial flexibility</td>
<td>From my experience, you can really take this built-in confusion of the system and allow yourself some flexibility in the way you use your resources. We are constantly breaking the structure creatively. We have learned that they really get confused with what we are doing. This has become a real advantage for us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different and rival stakeholders</td>
<td>The different factions involved in the school have different agendas</td>
<td>I am working with too many stakeholders. Each of them is responsible in principle on different issues. . . The thing is that they overlap and tend to deliver conflicting instructions, since they have different visions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security concerns</td>
<td>The constant stress of being responsible for safety and security issues that the principal cannot control</td>
<td>There are some safety and security issues in each school that can result, God forbid, in a disaster. I might find myself legally accountable for these occurrences that I have no real control over. This is completely irrational.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of power</td>
<td>Creative ways are needed to compensate teachers according to their efforts</td>
<td>It is true that we have the problem of staff compensation. However, we found creative ways; we scratch from here or there, and we get something at the end. (continued)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super-ordinate Themes</td>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Significant Statement Examples</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a politician</td>
<td>Bending the truth in order to survive the problematic structure of the system</td>
<td>Once you succeed in creating trust, the sky is the limit. . . . It’s no secret. Everybody is dishonest; this is the way the system is built. It cannot function without some cheating. You write one annual program for one authority and another program for the other. You let everybody hear what they want to hear and eventually you do the educational work that is best for your students. They think you’re doing what they wanted when you’re actually doing what you want.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>The constant struggle with the ethical aspects of the principal’s actions in manipulating the system</td>
<td>I learn quickly the borders and limits of the system. I try to see if there is a chance for change. If I recognize that change is impossible, I then examine the system in depth and learn how to manage within it. . . . I believe it is our prerogative as principals to be flexible. I don’t care if the actions I take are exactly according to the published regulations. . . . The main beneficiaries of your actions must be the students. If you have validated it, you are honest enough, in my view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals’ training</td>
<td>Key fields of knowledge in principals’ training should be pedagogy and data-driven management</td>
<td>Principals should be taught how to become a professional in pedagogy. The principals must learn to understand the system, with all its complexities. They need to know how to lead their staff, how to deal with conflicts, and how to handle them. They also have to become experts in data-driven management. Principalship is all about data and not just gut feelings.</td>
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</table>
### A repeating theme during Ron’s interview was the issue of ethics. It seems that although he tries to illustrate a cheerful outlook regarding his creative ability to handle the burdens of principalship, he is still aware and conscious of ethical concerns related to his conduct. Ron revealed that “When I know an audit is coming, I do my best to learn what they are looking for, and since I am confident in the honesty of my deeds, I will make the needed adjustments in the required places.”

Although Ron was not asked direct questions about the issue, he kept coming back to his moral justifications for his manipulative maneuvers. Ron believes that because the system creates so many obstacles to the work of principals, the only effective way to respond is to use the vagueness and ambiguity of the bureaucratic system for the benefit of his students. As questionable as it sounds, he concluded, the end result of delivering high-quality education justifies the sometimes problematic means he has used as a principal.

**Ben.** Ben is a young principal who has been working in this position for the last six years. The school he is heading is medium in size, with a diverse population of students. Ben believes he was recognized as an excellent principal due to his success in improving student achievement and in creating a supportive educational climate in his school. He explained

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<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>Complicated structure</td>
<td>The problem of bureaucracy harms the ability of the principals to plan properly</td>
<td>Dealing with a complex bureaucratic system is really a challenge. The system doesn’t know what it wants. One day you hear about a new program. Two years later, you learn that it was canceled. They drive us mad. How can we prepare ourselves for next year? This is, to my mind, a huge obstacle for a principal, not to be able to know in May what will be his resources in September.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
during the interview, which could be characterized as pleasant and enjoyable, that he believes that his main task as a principal is to support his staff emotionally and professionally in order for them to do the same to their students. He relies on his warm and sympathetic personality in his interactions with the teachers in his school and has succeeded in creating a dialogical environment that encourages people to share their thoughts, failures, challenges, opportunities, and successes.

Ben believes that he needs to juggle the demands and perspectives of the different members of his community, both inside the organization and outside. He commented:

You need to know how to juggle correctly. And I mean that literally. You need to be able to throw the balls in the air and to know when to catch them. You need to know when to contain what needs to be contained, when to cut corners, and when to let go.

You must create this constant movement all the time.

He perceives that his key job is to maintain respectful and meaningful relations with his staff, colleagues, parents, students, and superiors. Managing the different interactions is sometimes overwhelming for him, as he seeks to devote adequate time and energy to each faction of the school’s community.
Table 8

_Super-ordinate Themes and Themes from Ben’s Interview_

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building vision</td>
<td>The importance of honesty, imagining the future, and practicality in creating the school’s vision</td>
<td>You need to start by analyzing the position your school currently is in. You must be extremely honest here in identifying its crucial needs. Then, you should portray an outline of the image that is desired for the school within a few years. The last stage is to list the things that need to be done in order to achieve this preferred future and start moving to that direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total commitment</td>
<td>The need to set painful example to the teachers</td>
<td>The principal needs to put himself on the line. You are the model. You are the compass. You cannot expect your teachers to do things that you are not willing to do. You work with them as a partner and have to set them the right example.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading teachers</td>
<td>The role of professional dialogue in creating a sense of commitment</td>
<td>In order to create a sense of commitment, I must generate dialogue between the different people in my school. I have created several mechanisms that encourage professional dialogue between the teachers. Once we started to talk, we got to the point at which teachers began to talk about our school and our students. They were now obligated and committed.</td>
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<td>Super-ordinate Themes</td>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Significant Statement Examples</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building motivation</td>
<td>Sharing dilemmas openly with the staff creates motivation</td>
<td>My staff members are really my partners. I bring them the issues at stake and share with them the dilemmas. I do put clear borders to the subject, but once the lines are clear, it is totally for the group to decide. I believe it is important to allow things to be created in a mutual and shared process. People are more connected and attached to the mission that way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal as a pedagogue</td>
<td>Focus mainly on the improvement of test scores, especially in this era of accountability</td>
<td>The Ministry of Education is interested in merely three assessment factors: graduation rates, test scores, and army recruitment statistics. This is exactly where we should be focused. And it isn’t really that difficult. It is actually what I would call instructional techniques. We know how to do it, and we know what it should look like in practice. Still, you need to care about it and devote yourself to it. You also need to create a monitoring system that will help you achieve your tangible goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The problem of bureaucracy</td>
<td>The difficulty of dealing with unnecessary paperwork and constant changes in external demands</td>
<td>They all annoy me. The Ministry of Education expects us to file boring reports. Nobody understands what they want from us. Not only that, I don’t know if you have noticed, but the science curriculum has changed seven times in recent years, and now they changed it again. What do they want from us?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different and rival stakeholders</td>
<td>The difficulty of dealing with different priorities of the different factions</td>
<td>The difficulty for me is enormous whenever the priorities of the Ministry of Education do not fit the priorities of the municipality you are working with, and both of them do not agree with the priorities of the network that owns the school.</td>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>The stressful challenge of dealing simultaneously with the media and the happenings in the school</td>
<td>You are always working under stress. Just now something happened in the school. So, first of all you take care of it, but at the same time you become stressed that it will not leak out to the media, which are so anxious for such stories. You are aware of the damage it can cause to your school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of power</td>
<td>The gap between high expectations and inability to terminate teachers with tenure</td>
<td>They demand that I deliver excellence, achievement, and progress, but they don’t give me the autonomy to decide on dismissal of certain teachers who truly should not be here anymore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing in collaboration with others</td>
<td>Distributing tasks is an important managerial technique that demands the special attention of the principal</td>
<td>There are times in which you really feel you are drowning from all the demanding tasks. This is when I try to delegate. The problem is that they are not always doing things at the high level you could have done it. This is when you find yourself going over their work and redoing it. I try to teach them the level of the work for which they should be aiming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a politician</td>
<td>Knowing how to handle all the different tasks and how to make necessary compromises when needed</td>
<td>You need to know how to juggle correctly. And I mean that literally. You need to be able to throw the balls in the air and to know when to catch them. You need to know when to contain what needs to be contained, when to cut corners, and when to let go. You must create this constant movement all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>The importance of learning from an experienced principal</td>
<td>Working as an apprentice can serve the education of a principal more than many other professional development programs. The only condition is that it be done for a meaningful period of time.</td>
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</table>
Ben emphasized the importance of setting a personal example for his teachers in practicing what he preaches by personally leading innovative instructional initiatives. He remarked that over the years, he has taken on the task of teaching in classrooms with the most challenging students, setting an example for his teachers and expecting them to embark on similar challenges. Ben clarified:

The principal needs to put himself on the line. You are the model. You are the compass. You cannot expect your teachers to do things that you are not willing to do. You work with them as a partner and have to set the right example.

Sharing his struggle to balance his professional life with his family obligations as a young father and husband, Ben concluded the interview by revealing his wish to spend more time with his family. He did, however, highlight his persistence in maintaining a clear distinction between his total dedication to the school and its needs, which needed to be maintained during office hours, and his need for private time, in which he clears himself completely from the daily demands of his school.

Sarah. Sarah leads a small and unique school that serves dysfunctional families in one of the cities in the district of Tel Aviv. Sarah is in her late forties and has been working as a principal for the last nine years. She explained that she was designated as a successful principal because of her effective ability to lead in a creative and supportive fashion a school that has exceptional challenges. Most of the students in her school dropped out of the normative system, and some are living outside their family homes, in dormitories or with fostering families. Sarah perceives her task as a principal as becoming the meaningful adult in the lives of the children in her school. Many of them, she testified, do not have any
experience of healthy interactions with their parents; therefore, she sees her main role as nurturing and taking care of them. As she clarified:

When you deal with children such as mine, you must be totally devoted. I feel that it is my obligation to fulfill all their needs, not only to help them study and learn. The reason they failed in previous schools is related to their problematic background and not to their supposed lack of abilities. Most of them are actually flowers that could have flourished beautifully if only they were planted in better gardens.

Sarah shared with me her total commitment to her job. She explained that being a principal in the school plays a dominant role in her personal life. She never feels that the work day is over and is therefore always attentive and accessible to her staff and students. It

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<tr>
<td>Total commitment</td>
<td>The nature of the work with underprivileged children demands total devotion</td>
<td>When you deal with children such as mine, you must be totally devoted. I feel that it is my obligation to fulfill all their needs, not only to help them study and learn. The reason they failed in previous schools is related to their problematic background and not to their supposed lack of abilities. Most of them are actually flowers that could have flourished beautifully if only they were planted in better gardens.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal motivation</td>
<td>Strong belief in the importance of the task creates</td>
<td>I think you must believe in what you do. You must love the things you do, and you have to do it in the best possible manner. I don’t perceive the things I am doing to be insane. This is my role. This is my mission. You cannot avoid it. Even if they will wake me up in the middle of the night for one of my students, I will be there. Not to get a thank-you note but merely because it the mission I have taken.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>passion and enthusiasm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading teachers</td>
<td>Supporting the teachers</td>
<td>What really helps me are my personal relations with my teachers. This is, I believe, my strongest part. I succeed in getting out of people what others might not. I think this is the one thing I do really well. If you ask my staff, they will tell you that this is what I do. I always smile to them, and I always will be available to pay attention and listen to them.</td>
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<td>encourages motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building motivation</td>
<td>The need to support and encourage the teachers is</td>
<td>I think my role is to be extremely attentive to the staff’s needs. . . . They are in a sense exactly like the children of the school. They have their needs. They need the attention, the encouragement. They need to know they are appreciated by me and meaningful to our school.</td>
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<td>crucial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with staff disputes</td>
<td>The need to arbitrate between rival factions within</td>
<td>Sometimes there are tensions between members of the staff. One teacher is pushing to one direction, and another one disagrees. This is where I need to intervene between them and help them come to an agreement in which each of them takes into account the other’s perspective. It is always like walking between the raindrops.</td>
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<td>the school</td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security concerns</td>
<td>The high level of responsibility for the well-being and safety of the students</td>
<td>You cannot work here in a different way. You just can’t. These children cannot be treated simply as paperwork that can wait until tomorrow. Here, every minute counts. When a student is trying to commit suicide, you cannot avoid being there with him. Your responsibility in such cases is almost overwhelming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Lack of control creates stress</td>
<td>Most of the time, I feel I am in control. Sometimes when things get out of control, I truly lose it. It is rare, but it happens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of power</td>
<td>The inadequate resources given to the school harms the effectiveness of the school</td>
<td>I don’t have enough of a budget. The authorities are making our lives very difficult. They don’t understand our special needs. They have their regulations, but we are a unique school, and they are not completely open to understanding our necessities. I feel we could have achieved much more with our kids if we would only get more understanding of the things we need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing in collaboration with others</td>
<td>Excellent principalship cannot be achieved without the distribution of responsibilities</td>
<td>You cannot be an excellent principal if you don’t create a team that works together with a feeling of joint responsibility. This is not my sole work here. My team is as committed to the school as I am. I think I’ve helped in creating this kind of commitment, but there is no doubt that without their total commitment and responsibility, we could have not achieved what we have achieved and I would have not been considered a successful principal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Super-ordinate Themes | Themes | Significant Statement Examples
--- | --- | ---
Relationship with the parents | Positive and respectful interactions with the parents | Parents of our students, if they are present at all, look at us as their saviors. Our interactions with them are always complicated but are based on enormous mutual respect.

Sense of meaning | The strong belief in the importance of the task helps in dealing with feelings of frustration | My devotion, my dedication to this work and the fact that I am so involved in the things that happen here, are all based on the very strong belief I hold regarding our work. . . . If you don’t have the spark in your eyes, I guess this job is not really for you. Sometimes there is a lot of frustration, but if you truly believe in what you do and how you do it, you will not give up.

Mentoring and collegial support | The importance of getting external support from an advisor or mentor | I meet regularly with a professional advisor and mentor, who is helping me tremendously in coping with all the things I need to deal with.

Sarah is a principal who is highly involved in the daily occurrences of her school. During the interview, she stopped the session five times for long periods of time to take care of phone calls. It is not rare for a phone call to wake her up late at night with news that demands her immediate attention and care. One example she gave concerned a student who had been arrested; she was the one who needed to bail him out of jail. Sarah put in plain words her total commitment to her job by saying:

> You cannot work here in a different way. You just can’t. These children cannot be treated simply as paperwork that can wait until tomorrow. Here, every minute counts.

> When a student is trying to commit suicide, you cannot avoid being there with him.

> Your responsibility in such cases is almost overwhelming.
calls and various events that came up. Sarah revealed that sometimes she feels overwhelmed by the intensity and severity of the things that happen in her school. This feeling was evident to me in my interactions with her both prior to the interview, in trying to schedule it, and during the interview itself.

Fulfilling her perceived role as a principal, Sarah often finds herself involved in missions such as fund-raising in order to create tangible solutions for some of her students. At the end of the interview, Sarah shared her feelings of frustration that she is taking responsibility for and dealing with issues that are supposed to be taken care of by the welfare department of the municipality. As a truly devoted person, she cannot avoid intervening and embarking on challenging and complicated tasks, even though technically they are certainly not her responsibility.

**Ruth.** Ruth is a principal of a medium-sized school that she characterized as serving a diverse range of students. Ruth is in her early sixties and has been working in her school for more than 30 years, half of them as a principal. Ruth believes she earned the recognition of being an excellent principal from the Ministry of Education mainly because of her success in creating a school that has an atmosphere of support and care.

A repeating theme throughout her interview was the notion of the school as a family. Ruth perceives her role as a principal as being the head of a family, totally responsible for the well-being and nurturance of its members. Patience and love are the key tools she thinks every principal must use in her daily routine. “Patience, patience, and more patience” are needed in dealing with students and teachers. They are her children, and she portrays and demonstrates complete fusion with them. Ruth believes that it is her responsibility to set an example for the rest of the adults in the school regarding the level of love and affection.
Table 10

Super-ordinate Themes and Themes from Ruth’s Interview

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<tr>
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<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total commitment</td>
<td>The inner need to be in control of events</td>
<td>I once tried to take a day off and get some rest. I found myself eventually sitting at home looking anxiously at the phone, waiting for a call. So why bother? I might better be off at school, ready to take care of things instead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading teachers</td>
<td>Setting a personal example as a key leadership practice</td>
<td>A principal cannot ask the staff to go to places she is not willing to go. She should be able to demonstrate intensely, in person, what the actual realization of the vision looks like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal motivation</td>
<td>The perception of total devotion to the school as to a family as an inner motivator</td>
<td>I don’t look at my watch. I don’t mind the time. This is my personal family here at my school. I dedicate myself completely, with a lot of love. I work endlessly in total devotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal as a pedagogue</td>
<td>Focus on students’ achievements as the key factor in the principal’s work</td>
<td>I think that first of all I am focused on academic achievement. There is no doubt that achievements are the most critical factor in my work. I constantly lead along an educational path that will verify the continuous promotion of the students’ achievements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The problem of bureaucracy</td>
<td>The inconsistency in the system’s regulations is an enormous obstacle</td>
<td>Inconsistency of the general system is a huge obstacle for us. We are witnessing too many revolutions at the Ministry of Education. Everyone comes with his own fresh agenda. This inconsistency causes us to be in constant motion. This is not healthy.</td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Extreme events that happen in school are causing tremendous stress</td>
<td>I remember sitting with one of my students who tried to commit suicide, here at school. We were lucky to find her in time. She was sitting in front of me with her hands covered with cuts. I remember telling myself, dear God, no more, I can’t take it anymore, I just can’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of power</td>
<td>The inadequate resources given to the school harms the ability to take care of the student population</td>
<td>There is such a huge gap between the characteristics of the student population, in which some have learning disabilities, and some come from non-functioning families . . . and all other things our school needs to what you actually get. The resources in terms of staff, budgets, and funds are far from what I need here to do my job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing in collaboration with others</td>
<td>Tension between centralistic inclination and distributing responsibilities</td>
<td>I started my career as a very centralized manager. I did it all by myself. It was all about me, myself. Today, I am still in control over everything, but on the other hand I allow myself to release some of my responsibilities to others. It is a process I am still in. I learn gradually to rely on others. It took me some time to realize that doing it all by myself is causing the system severe damage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a politician</td>
<td>Establishing give and take relations with the school’s stakeholders</td>
<td>I constantly take advantage of my good and personal connections to the different authorities to ask and demand, again and again, without giving up. . . . I succeeded in creating very good relations with the union representative of my area, too. I work with him in a give and take method. . . . I admit I take advantage of this ability of mine.</td>
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</table>
students should get from them. She explained in detail the ways in which, as a devoted mother might, she fights for larger budgets that will be allocated to her students, using all her personal connections and credibility. “I fight for every computer that is bought,” she said. “I fight for funds for my students. I fight for better teachers and for better staff for the benefit of my dear students.”

Ruth shared that in her early years as a principal, she maintained a rather centralistic approach, dealing personally with each detail related to the school. In recent years, she came to acknowledge the advantages of a shared approach, distributing power to key members of her school. Nevertheless, even during the interview itself, it was evident that Ruth is highly involved in details related to specific and particular pedagogical issues concerning her students.

Reflecting on her challenges as a principal, Ruth complained about the constant changes in demands and programs of the Ministry of Education and the lack of consistency resulting from rapid changes of governments in Israel. Like many of her colleagues in this study, Ruth cannot accept the seeming irrationality of the enormous amount of paperwork
expected from principals in recent years. Ruth shared with pride the fact that she works six
days a week, almost without breaks. She concluded the interview by saying:

When I once tried to take a day off and get some rest, I found myself eventually
sitting at home looking anxiously at the phone, waiting for a call. So why bother? I
might better be off at school, ready to take care of things instead.

**Esther.** Esther is a principal of a large inner-city school. She has been working as a
principal for more than 20 years in two different schools. She is in her late fifties and has had
a long and successful career as an educator. Esther believes she earned recognition by the
Ministry of Education as an excellent principal because of her devotion and perseverance in
achieving meaningful changes in students’ learning habits and achievements in a tough and
challenging environment. The school she heads is characterized by a student body that is
challenging in terms of socioeconomic background and learning abilities.

Esther perceives the main role of a principal as being the leading catalyst for change
in the system. Principals should first analyze the school with its challenges and pitfalls. Then,
they need to identify the need for change and the nature of this change. Last, they need to
create a working plan, to implement it, and to do the utmost to push their community toward
the necessary adjustments and modifications.

Esther shared her own experience in leading change in her school, emphasizing the
level of resistance she needed to deal with. She recalled challenging interactions with some
teachers whom she chose to call the “tough nuts.” She described her experiences with
terminology taken from the battlefield: “I had a real war with the teachers in my school who
accused me of being too stubborn and inflexible. They arranged a rebellion against me,
claiming that I degrade them, harm their autonomy, and do not trust them.”
Although she eventually gained the upper hand, she appears to continue to carry the scars of such battles. Esther explained that the process of leading change in Israeli schools today is extremely difficult because principals lack proper support. She highlighted the complexity of working with different stakeholders who push her in different directions and are not there for her whenever she needs their support. Esther claimed that this situation causes major obstacles in her work, stumbling blocks that must be shattered: “Everybody is throwing a wrench in the works. The Ministry of Education, the municipality, and here at home, at my school it is also not simple.”

Table 11

Super-ordinate Themes and Themes from Esther’s Interview

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<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
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<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning-based management</td>
<td>The significance of dedicating sufficient time and energy for planning</td>
<td>I dedicate significant time and energy to plan the educational program for each school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total commitment</td>
<td>Total commitment to the task has its price</td>
<td>Principals must be totalistic in their approach. I know I am paying a high personal price for my total commitment and diligence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing people</td>
<td>The importance of emotional dialogues in person and in groups</td>
<td>There is a genuine emotional dialogue in the school. This is truly important. I dedicate lots of energy and time in many personal dialogue sessions but also in lots of group meetings. I regularly take part in it because I believe it is extremely important.</td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading the pedagogical program of the school</td>
<td>The principal’s personal involvement in designing the educational program is crucial for creating change</td>
<td>I started a dialogue with my teachers regarding the existing educational program. After analyzing its advantages and pitfalls, we decided to create a new advanced program. All teachers were part of this new creation. By the end of that year, I knew we were at the verge of a true breakthrough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading in an unclear system</td>
<td>The difficulty of leading a school with unclear resources</td>
<td>The municipality cannot tell me if I will have the needed resources or not. It is always unclear. We don’t get accurate answers. This is so difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different and rival stakeholders</td>
<td>The involvement of too many factions is harming the school</td>
<td>Everybody is throwing a wrench in the works. The Ministry of Education, the municipality, and here at home; at my school it also is not simple.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressful accountability</td>
<td>Feelings of being personally attacked by auditing interrogation</td>
<td>Suddenly, I found myself in a situation in which I was personally attacked for supposed misconduct regarding the school’s money. It was really devastating. All I did were things for the benefits of my students, and here I am questioned on technically insignificant issues, as if corruption has spread in my school. I remember asking myself, why are you doing this to yourself? For me, it was a terrible heartbreak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of power</td>
<td>The difficulty of not being able to provide answers to the staff</td>
<td>How can I handle the school that way? My teachers don’t care about my problems with the municipality. They want answers, and I can’t provide them.</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managing in collaboration with others</td>
<td>Sharing the responsibility and accountability with the staff</td>
<td>I remember an incident in which I was speaking to my staff. Suddenly, I stopped my speech for a moment and started all over again, saying to them, do you really think that I will be the only one who will have sleepless nights? You are part of this task, and you share the responsibility with me. I will not be the only one awake at nights stressed because of the intensity and severity of our tasks. This is yours, too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a politician</td>
<td>The importance of knowing how to read the map politically</td>
<td>I know how to read a map. It helps me understand the school’s environment and how should I act accordingly. Reading the map politically is crucial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial support</td>
<td>The importance of collegial advice in strengthening the principal to lead change</td>
<td>I am part of a group of female principals who meet regularly. We really support each other. I am also participating in group therapy consisting of various principals from different backgrounds. We deal jointly with parallel problems. I can tell you without hesitation that in the last five years, the most meaningful and effective changes I have presented in my work at school were the outcomes of these sessions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflecting on her personal sources of power, Esther smilingly described a close group of female principals who meet on a regular basis to share their professional struggles, to consult with each other, and to offer mutual support. It seems that this peer interaction and group support contributes to her ability to thrive in her difficult and challenging position. She concluded the interview by stating that nothing is more important than the support and good advice you get from a colleague.
Findings and Analysis

After getting a “general sense of the information” (Creswell, 2009, p. 185) in each interview, I began the process of text reduction, which in part involved developing a list of what appear to be the most significant statements (Creswell, 2007), allowing me to “organize the materials into chunks or segments” (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). The next step was to apply a simplified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, as discussed by Moustakas (1994).

From the transcripts of the 10 interviews, I extracted 144 significant statements. Organizing the formulated meanings of these significant statements into clusters yielded 14 emerging themes (see Table 12), which were nested within six super-ordinate themes and finally arranged in three categories in accordance with the research questions guiding the study: effective practices, challenges, and coping strategies. Table 12 is a master table of the six super-ordinate themes that illustrates the patterns identified across all interviews, indicating the way the “themes are nested within super-ordinate themes and illustrating the theme for each participant” (Smith et al., p. 101). Table 13 illustrates recurrent themes and shows in visual terms how the super-ordinate themes were relevant (or not) for each person.

Table 12

Master Table of Super-ordinate Themes for the Entire Group of Principals

A. Vision and Planning

1. Building vision
David: The first key question I constantly ask myself is where do we want to go? What is our vision?
Ron: First of all you need to think. You need to think of your vision.
Ben: You should portray an outline of the image that is desired for the school within a few years.
2. **Planning and Goals**
Rebecca: It is very important to plan only a few specific goals that can be achieved.
Esther: I dedicate significant time and energy to plan.
Sharon: From the very beginning, I defined clear and measurable goals for the school.
Hagar: In my opinion, a principal should set himself new goals.

3. **Total commitment**
Ruth: I dedicate myself completely, with a lot of love.
Esther: Principals must be totalistic in their approach.
Sarah: When you deal with children such as mine, you must be totally devoted.
Salomon: Basically “all my life.”
Sharon: I am a real work addict. People cannot imagine. I am a total doer, constantly working on a high-stakes mode.
David: I will tell you the truth. I am not doing faculty meetings in the evenings.
Ben: The principal needs to put himself on the line. You are the model.
Hagar: From the morning until evening. You know what, not from the morning until evening—24 hours a day.
Ruth: I might better be off at school, ready to take care of things instead.

**B. Leading teachers**

4. **Managing people**
Rebecca: You must treat your teachers with respect and win their support.
David: The interpersonal relationship with your teachers is highly significant.
Esther: There is a genuine emotional dialogue in the school.
Sharon: I have the talent of choosing the right people for the job.
Ron: I tell my teachers: I am your anchor here. You do your job and stay calm, and I will do what needs to be done.
Ben: I have created several mechanisms that encourage professional dialogue between the teachers.
Hagar: I back up the teachers, giving them almost total backup.
Salomon: They must also constantly report to me in writing, and they know that I actually read everything they write.
Sarah: What really helps me are my personal relations with my teachers.
Ruth: She should be able to demonstrate intensely, in person, what the actual realization of the vision looks like.

5. **The principal as a pedagogue**
Ruth: I think that first of all I am focused on academic achievement.
Ron: You should become the highest authority in your school regarding all instructional issues related to it.
Rebecca: In practice, it means that you as a principal should be occupied mainly in teachers’ professional development regarding teaching and instruction practices.
Salomon: My role is to push teachers toward excellence and to be a constant catalyst for more efforts in improving the teaching. (continued)
Ben: The Ministry of Education is interested in merely three assessment factors: graduation rates, test scores, and army recruitment statistics. This is exactly where we should be focused.

David: I think that the principal should be involved in the systematic process of students’ mapping.

Esther: I started a dialogue with my teachers regarding the existing educational program. Sharon: I supervise the teachers’ work. The teachers know that, and they also know it will be very unpleasant if I catch one of them being sluggish.

C. Complicated structure

6. The problem of bureaucracy

Ron: Dealing with a complex bureaucratic system is really a challenge. The system doesn’t know what it wants.

Salomon: The paperwork is just too much. Who needs all these forms?

Ben: The Ministry of Education expects us to file boring reports. Nobody understands what they want from us.

Esther: The municipality cannot tell me if I will have the needed resources or not.

Ruth: Inconsistency of the general system is a huge obstacle for us.

Rebecca: I am not operating completely in autonomy.

Sharon: If this hardworking teacher plans to take a day off, I allow this and ignore it. They know there is a give and take dynamic.

Hagar: If I need to buy a computer, or if I need a pencil, then I need committees. It’s difficult, difficult.

7. Different and rival stakeholders

Hagar: This array, which is deployed in front of a school principal, who has to stand opposite three bosses, is absurd in the highest degree.

David: What is the rationale in expecting the principals to work with the Ministry of Education and the municipality at the same time?

Ron: they overlap and tend to deliver conflicting instructions, since they have different visions.

Salomon: The different stakeholders who are pushing me in different directions.

Rebecca: There are some moments of frustration in which I feel that although I believe in a certain educational principle, some officials of the municipality and the Ministry of Education try to interfere.

Esther: Everybody is throwing a wrench in the works.

Ben: The difficulty for me is enormous whenever the priorities of the Ministry of Education do not fit the priorities of the municipality.
D. Powerlessness

8. Stress and aggressiveness
Ben: You are always working under stress.
Sharon: The journalists are attacking us personally. It is almost impossible to cope.
Ruth: I remember telling myself, dear God, no more, I can’t take it anymore, I just can’t.
Esther: I found myself in a situation in which I was personally attacked for supposed misconduct regarding the school’s money.
Hagar: I feel exposed to the media, and I feel that I am not getting backup from my supervisors . . . not defended at all.
Salomon: The newspapers became an extremely threatening factor. “I will blow this story in the media” has become a common chant.
Sarah: Sometimes when things get out of control, I truly lose it.

9. Security concerns
Rebecca: I always bear this scenario in my mind. God forbid, if a terrorist will ever raid my school.
David: Nobody can prepare you for an event of a terror attack that happens near your school.
Ron: I might find myself legally accountable for these occurrences that I have no real control over.
Hagar: Many times I find myself dealing with all sorts of incidents that are related to the children’s afternoons . . . something that happened on the way to school.
Sarah: Your responsibility on such cases is almost overwhelming.

10. The lack of managerial power
Ben: They demand that I deliver excellence, achievement, and progress, but they don’t give me the autonomy to decide on dismissal of certain teachers.
Hagar: I would like to compensate him . . . I do not have it.
David: I cannot create a new leadership or recruit fresh teachers. I have to live with what I have.
Rebecca: I would really want to give them more, in terms of salary.
Esther: My teachers don’t care about my problems with the municipality. They want answers, and I can’t provide them.
Ruth: The resources in terms of staff, budgets, and funds are far from what I need here to do my job.
Sharon: I have learned to be obedient regarding my bosses.
Ron: It is true that we have the problem of compensating our staff.
Sarah: I don’t have enough of a budget. The authorities are making our lives very difficult. They don’t understand our special needs.
E. Leading with others

11. Managing in collaboration with others
Sharon: I have come to learn that there is really no other way—I can’t, in reality, do it all by myself.
Sarah: You cannot be an excellent principal if you don’t create a team that works together with a feeling of joint responsibility.
Ruth: I allow myself to release some of my responsibilities to others.
Rebecca: It took me time to learn how to stop this tendency of mine and to create an organizational environment of complete transparency and collaboration.
David: Now they are accountable and responsible to deliver results.
Esther: You are part of this task, and you share the responsibility with me.
Salomon: I must stay and rest more at home and distribute to my assistants some of the issues I am dealing with that cause me so much stress.
Ben: There are times in which you really feel you are drowning from all the demanding tasks. This is when I try to delegate.
Hagar: to include them in the decision-making process.

12. Being a politician
Esther: Reading the map politically is crucial.
Sharon: I decided I cannot fight on all frontiers and realized that as a principal I must learn to be more of a politician.
Rebecca: We have found the right balance that is built on mutual compromises.
David: We have the ability to maneuver and manipulate wisely between the factions and influence the happenings significantly.
Ben: You need to know when to contain what needs to be contained, when to cut corners, and when to let go.
Ron: You let everybody hear what they want to hear and eventually you do the educational work that you think is best for your students.
Hagar: To know how to take advantage of it in the correct way, the way that is good for the school.
Ruth: I work with him in a “give and take” method. . . . I admit I take advantage of this ability of mine.

F. Sources of power

13. Sense of meaning, values, and ethics
Ruth: I am so captivated by the significance and meaning of what I do.
Sharon: I feel I am leading something meaningful.
David: I think this is a question of our values and morals.
Ron: I believe it is our prerogative as principals to be flexible. I don’t really care if the actions I take are exactly according to the published regulations.
Sarah: if you truly believe in what you do and how you do it, you will not give up.

(continued)
14. Training, mentoring, and collegial support

Ben: Working as an apprentice can serve the education of a principal more than many other professional development programs.

David: I think that principals can gain a lot just from getting some guidance from experienced principals.

Rebecca: Principals should be knowledgeable in staff development, in areas of effective practices of instruction and teaching, along with general organizational management tools.

Salomon: Decision making, leading change, and team building are important topics for principals’ preparation.

Ron: Principals should be taught how to become a professional in pedagogy.

Hagar: I would really give them a long, big lesson on possible situations within the system and do simulations with them.

Esther: I am part of a group of female principals who meet regularly. We really support each other.

Sarah: I meet regularly with a professional advisor and mentor, who is helping me tremendously in coping with all the things I need to deal with.

This table also shows the reasoning behind the process of reduction of themes to the final six super-ordinate themes. As can be seen in this table, the super-ordinate themes that were identified are present in the statements of nearly every participant in the study. This condition was what merited classification as a super-ordinate theme. It is important to note as Smith and colleagues (2009) write, “Different participants may manifest the same super-ordinate theme in different themes” (p. 107). That certainly was evident in this study. In a number of cases, different principals reflected on experiences of the same super-ordinate theme, such as powerlessness, while discussing different themes, such as stress or security concerns.

Table 14 shows the process involved in arriving at the categories capturing the core of meaning that runs through the 10 interviews. It shows the reduction process from significant
Table 13

*Identifying Recurrent Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Hagar</th>
<th>Salomon</th>
<th>Sharon</th>
<th>Rebecca</th>
<th>David</th>
<th>Ron</th>
<th>Ben</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>Ruth</th>
<th>Esther</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision and planning</td>
<td>Building vision</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning and goals</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total commitment</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading teachers</td>
<td>Managing people</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The principal as a pedagogue</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicated structure</td>
<td>The problem of bureaucracy</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different and rival stakeholders</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>Stress and aggressiveness</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security concerns</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The lack of managerial power</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading with others</td>
<td>Managing in collaboration with others</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being a politician</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of power</td>
<td>Sense of meaning, values, and ethics</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training, mentoring, and collegial support</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

statements to themes that emerged out of those example statements and then to super-ordinate themes that became apparent within those themes. These super-ordinate themes are organized into three categories, using the research questions as formatting tools.
Table 14

*The Process of Reduction from Significant Statements to Final Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Super-ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Significant Statement Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective practices: What behaviors and actions do highly effective principals perceive as promoting their success?</td>
<td>Vision and planning</td>
<td>Building vision</td>
<td>It is very important to plan only a few specific goals that can be achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning and goals</td>
<td>It is very important to plan only a few specific goals that can be achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total commitment</td>
<td>When you deal with children such as mine, you must be totally devoted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading teachers</td>
<td>Managing people</td>
<td></td>
<td>You must treat your teachers with respect and win their support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal as a pedagogue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I lead the leading professional team of the school in issues of instruction and pedagogy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories</td>
<td>Super-ordinate Themes</td>
<td>Emerging Themes</td>
<td>Significant Statement Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges: What problems and challenges do highly effective principals perceive in their work?</td>
<td>Complicated structure</td>
<td>The problem of bureaucracy</td>
<td>The paperwork is just too much. Who needs all these forms?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different and rival stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
<td>What is the rationale in expecting the principals to work with the Ministry of Education and the municipality at the same time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>Stress and aggressiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td>I remember telling myself, dear God, no more, I can’t take it anymore, I just can’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td>I always bear this scenario in my mind. God forbid, if a terrorist will ever raid my school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The lack of managerial power</td>
<td></td>
<td>How can I handle the school that way? My teachers don’t care about my problems with the municipality. They want answers, and I can’t provide them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories</td>
<td>Super-ordinate Themes</td>
<td>Emerging Themes</td>
<td>Significant Statement Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping strategies: How do highly effective principals understand and deal with the problems and challenges they face?</td>
<td>Leading with others</td>
<td>Managing in collaboration with others</td>
<td>You cannot be an excellent principal if you don’t create a team that works together with a feeling of joint responsibility. This is not my sole work here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being a politician</td>
<td>Reading the map politically is crucial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of power</td>
<td>Sense of meaning, values, and ethics</td>
<td>I am so captivated by the significance and meaning of what I do, so I guess my moments of distress are really very few.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training, mentoring, and collegial support</td>
<td>I think that principals can gain a lot just from getting some guidance from experienced principals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Findings**

As shown in the preceding discussion, the principals interviewed in this study shared a variety of perspectives on how they achieved excellence in their work. Their experiences tended to cluster around several repeating themes. In the following paragraphs, a combined description of the super-ordinate themes that emerged from the 10 interviews will be presented, and similarities and differences will be highlighted between individual descriptions. The themes are summarized in the order mentioned earlier, as they were described by the entire group of participants.
Vision and planning. The principals as a group saw building a vision for their school as one of the key and initial components of their work. Vision was seen as an ongoing process as well as the basis for later success. The principal can help teachers see and appreciate the vision using the following steps: First, the vision should be translated into a plan and a setting of goals. Secondly, the principal should set a personal example, modeling the ways in which the central image of the goal can be actualized. Showing a strong sense of commitment to their schools and students was one such personal example modeled by principals. Although all the principals saw commitment as an integral component of success in their work, they varied on the degree of commitment. The levels of commitment ranged from an almost total and constant commitment to a more limited one.

Leading teachers. Good interpersonal relationships are important in working together toward a common vision. The principals noted the importance of building a sense of common purpose with teachers, so that teachers felt inspired by the principal’s vision and acquired a sense of urgency in achieving it. Most of the principals stressed the importance of maintaining meaningful and supportive dialogue with teachers, whereas others stressed a more authoritative approach, emphasizing supervising and control as key methods to manage their teachers.

Principals saw pedagogy as a primary practice in their work. They perceived a need to be experts in the fields of pedagogy including instruction and to lead the teachers in their schools in adopting the best practices. They put an emphasis on measuring achievement and on mapping students’ continuous progress. Because of the importance that they placed on pedagogy, they dedicated large portions of their time and energy to actions associated with promoting learning and student achievement.
Complicated structure. According to the study participants, the complex structure of the Israeli Ministry of Education has created a complicated, sometimes unclear and frequently changing maze that they must navigate. A few of the principals nevertheless revealed that they sometimes turn to their advantage the very inconsistencies and constant shifting of the rules and priorities within the bureaucracy. They do this by finding loopholes and interpretations of vague or inconsistent rules that benefit their schools.

Not only do principals have to cope with the convoluted rules and regulations of the Ministry of Education, but they must deal with many different entities as well. The stakeholders in the school include teachers, parents, the community, the municipality, the Ministry of Education, and possibly other entities. The entity in charge of education at the municipality level does not always agree with the edicts of the Ministry of Education, and teachers and parents do not always see eye to eye. Dealing with multiple and often rival stakeholders can result in confusion among the conflicting loyalties the principals hold. Considerable amounts of energy must be spent in maneuvering between the rival forces. This usually impedes school progress.

Powerlessness. The various stresses involved in the principals’ jobs often create intense and severe anxiety at levels that can be nearly intolerable. In some schools, parents become contentious and even litigious, threatening or carrying out legal action and airing their complaints in the media. Related to this, several of the principals noted the negative influence of the media intruding into the business of running schools. Media coverage can heap shame and humiliation on school administrations deemed as underserving their student populations. Principals noted a sense of powerlessness regarding security issues that pose problems of stress perhaps unique to Israel. The nation deals with terror threats on a daily
basis, and many of those threats potentially involve schools. Israeli principals often feel they can do little to protect their students from security problems, and that inability acts as another source of stress.

The principals expressed a desire to reward good teaching and somehow punish, or at least not reward poor teaching. However, their hands are tied both by budgetary constraints and by the power of the teachers’ union that makes it nearly impossible to terminate the contracts of teachers who perform poorly. In response, some principals have created inventive incentives to reward hardworking and talented teachers, such as offering flexibility concerning work rules and scheduling. Budget constraints also have broader repercussions that make it difficult for principals to exercise power and to implement their visions for their schools.

**Leading with others.** Recognition that they hold the ultimate responsibility for their schools led many of the principals to tend to engage in top-down, centralized control. Maintaining full control, however, led to drowning in multiple tasks and demands and sometimes resulted in ineffective and inefficient practices. The principals recognized the potential benefits of delegating tasks and responsibilities and of engaging in collaboration with their staffs, though they varied in their actual practices of top-down versus cooperative leadership. It is important to note that some of the principals saw distributing the leadership as a value, while others saw it as a necessity.

The principals indicated that to survive in their jobs, they needed to be adept politicians, brokering deals and forming alliances. Their political skills involved analyzing the situations in which they work in terms of who holds power and where favors can be traded. They also recognized the need to determine which battles are and are not worth
fighting. The principals shared their experience that being able to use sophisticated political maneuvers helped them to acquire resources and administrative powers. It also helps them find the right path through the maze of different stakeholders and their interests.

**Sources of power.** A sense of meaning and importance is necessary in the principals’ work, and a sense of values reminds them that their work is valuable. Constant wrestling with ethical dilemmas and with issues involving their values clarified those values and strengthened their ability to handle the various difficulties involved in their work. Most of these excellent principals gained strength and improved their ability to do their jobs by defining and living by strong sets of values.

The principals in the study all indicated belief in the power of constant learning and professional development to help them cope with the various challenges of being a principal. They identified a wide variety of training elements, including mentorship and collegial support, as valuable in their experience as successful principals. An overriding theme was the importance of continual learning from others and working with others, both through apprenticeship and mentoring programs and through networks of collegial support and sharing of ideas.

**Essence.** I intended to capture the essence of the perceptions and reflections, the “lived experiences” (Van Manen, 1990), shared by these excellent principals. As I thought about how to summarize the thoughts and feelings of the principals and their joint experiences as succinctly as possible, I came up with a list of different phrases that could identify the one essence that is at the core of the logic and emotion of their descriptions. These phrases included *power, change, difference,* and *effectiveness.* These words were repeated almost endlessly in the principal’s descriptions of their work and their thoughts on
their role as principals. They spoke repetitively about their daily struggle to cope with the ambiguity of their power relations and their efforts to make a difference and change the system. The ambiguity is built into the system because there is no clear chain of command. The principals must cater to the wishes of the Ministry of Education, the municipality and in some cases, to the heads of their school network. This reality creates an uncertainty as to the source of the principals’ authority and power and to whom they are held accountable. The principals spend valuable time and resources trying to gauge and to negotiate correctly the ever-changing power constellations. They all spoke about their wish to become more effective in the ways they put their leadership into action in their schools. After careful consideration of these ideas, themes and super-ordinate themes that emerged from the interviews, I believe the following phrase expresses the essence of the experiences of the excellent principals interviewed in this study: *negotiating power and providing effective leadership to create quality schools*. This phrase captures the experience of struggling with insufficient power and the need to provide effective leadership within the complex environment in which they operate.

**Conclusion**

Reflecting on this essence of the experience described by the excellent principals interviewed for the study, I conducted a creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1994, p. 19) that incorporates the variety of experiences, perceptions, and beliefs and melded them into a common story that provides the “essence” of the principals’ experiences (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). As I performed this process intuitively, the literary image that came to my mind was that of Don Quixote. The novel known best by the title *Don Quixote*, written by Miguel de Cervantes (first published in two parts, in 1605 and 1615), tells the story of a hero who went
on a sacred journey to save his beloved lady. The relevance of Don Quixote’s story to education and leadership has been noted by March and Augier (2004).

In Western culture, the dominant image of Don Quixote is his battle with windmills. That image has been interpreted in various ways, including fighting a futile battle and a struggle against imaginary enemies. It is considered by many as one of the most powerful images in literature of the struggle of an individual with “the system” (Duran & Rogg, 2006). Much like the bureaucracy faced by the principals in this study, windmills serve as obstacles in the path of the hero toward his noble goal. The windmills in the novel represent the “power structure” and are responsible for sustaining the larger system by producing energy for the milling of wheat. Human culture at the time depended heavily on windmills for its existence, and today’s culture might be said to similarly rely on power structures/bureaucracies. However useful these windmills may have been, Cervantes chose to present them as enemies of his hero. People today similarly see bureaucracies sometimes as useful but often as enemies and obstacles. The principals interviewed in this study described their daily struggle with the system’s bureaucracy in ways that reminded me of Don Quixote and his tilting at windmills. Rather than being imaginary enemies, however, bureaucracies of the education system are very real obstacles, and the principals’ quixotic quest can be seen as a futile battle against them. The principals acknowledged the necessity of bureaucracy for creating and manufacturing nutritious “energy” for their schools but also noted that the bureaucracy often functions as a huge barrier to their success. The principals saw the bureaucracy of the education system as crucial in creating common values and abilities such as control, responsibility, and accountability. At the same time, they all noted that it creates obstacles,
distortions, and difficulties that harm the ability of leaders who wish to positively affect the complex environment in which they operate.

The barrier of bureaucracy was amplified by the descriptions of feelings of powerlessness. As modern-day Don Quixotes, these excellent principals go on their daily journeys to save their own beloved ladies, their schools, and students, knowing that their power is limited and they will never defeat their bureaucratic overlords.

The principals of the study yearn for support, power, and appreciation that would be as “wind beneath their wings,” while in real life they face “clouds and wind without rain” (Proverbs 25:14). They fight against windmills that exhaust and dry up their energies and enthusiasm. The metaphor of the noble knight on an extremely difficult journey, armed mainly with his strong belief in his values of justice and courage, captures the essence of the excellent principals’ constant struggle in negotiating their power to affect the system and create sustainable positive change. Like Don Quixote, they empower themselves with the vision that they are involved in a noble struggle. They described their ability to survive in their extremely difficult job in relation to their belief in the sacred meaning of their work.

The descriptions of the principals’ experience revealed an uncertainty in their actual managerial power to lead their schools to success. Although occasionally rewarding, the principals described their encounters with different stakeholders to be confusing, time-consuming, and difficult. They all shared recollections of ironic and sometimes aggressive situations in which they were torn between these different factions. The principals shared a perception of insecurity and vulnerability due to threats from multiple arenas. These feelings are intensified by the instability of the security situation in Israel and the constant threats of terror and war. Principals, being human, need to have means that can help them in dealing
with their stressful situations and dilemmas. Many of the principals reflected on the importance and/or necessity of sharing the burden of leadership with their staff. They also noted the importance and effectiveness of mentoring and collegial support. Extraordinarily, through their naïve belief in their mission and their noble and ambitious actions, these excellent principals eventually succeeded in their mission.

The next, and final, chapter will discuss the meaning and significance of the research findings. The findings will be analyzed through the lens of the theoretical framework and the literature on educational leadership. In addition, the implications of the study findings will be considered in relation to educational leadership policy making, educational leadership practice, and future research on the practice of educational leadership.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings

This research study focused specifically on practices and behaviors of highly effective principals in Israel in order to understand why some principals succeed in their work and others fail. The research questions of the study are as follows: 1) What behaviors and actions do highly effective principals perceive as promoting their success? 2) What problems and challenges do highly effective principals perceive in their work? 3) How do highly effective principals understand and deal with the problems and challenges they face?

Using phenomenological research protocols, elements from the interviews were extracted, analyzed, and compared in order to determine how successful principals perceived their jobs, the obstacles and successes they experienced in their work, and the coping strategies they found helpful in dealing with various challenges and obstacles. The findings of this research show that successful Israeli principals depend on the following common practices and behaviors in their work: building a vision, planning and setting goals, total commitment and devotion, managing people, and emphasizing pedagogy. These findings strengthen the conclusion that effective principals in general rely on the same set of practices discussed by Leithwood et al. (2008), though principals combine and apply them in varying ways, depending on the different contexts and challenges they face (Day & Leithwood, 2007). Regarding the obstacles they face, the Israeli principals interviewed for the study repeated most of the challenges mentioned in the literature. There was, however, a clear emphasis on some particular obstacles facing these principals that resulted from characteristics unique to the Israeli educational system. These include the lack of control principals have over the hiring, firing, or continuous training of teachers, on the one hand, yet being held responsible for the school’s academic achievements on the other. Along with the
heightened security concerns in Israel, these obstacles, in combination, induce a sense of powerlessness, stress, and isolation among Israeli principals. The principals’ aggregate descriptions highlight a few effective coping strategies such as collaborating with others, being a politician, collegial support, a focus on values, and a sense of meaning in their work.

Each country has a unique environment and culture. This unique milieu gives rise to different educational challenges in different countries. In each country, the educational leadership must deal with that country’s specific educational context. There is a lack of scholarly research on the perspectives, practices, and behaviors of effective principals in Israel. This research attempts to fill this gap. This study strengthens the scholars’ call (Dimmock & Walker, 2002; Ewington et al., 2008; Oplatka, 2007) for investigating educational leadership in different contexts in order to “illuminate our understanding of how leadership practice is enacted and negotiated in different contexts” (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 420). Because this study is specific to the contextual factors of Israeli educational leadership, the findings can be used to develop new methods for preparing Israeli principals for their role as leaders, for support throughout their careers, and to challenge current policies in Israel’s educational discourse.

This chapter is composed of the following sections. The first section discusses the implications of the findings from the perspective of key leadership practices highlighted in the theoretical framework. The second section considers the similarities and discrepancies between the research findings and the existing literature on educational leadership. The third section presents the implications of the findings for educational leadership practice. The final section outlines the implications of the findings for future research and scholarship in educational leadership.
Although the purpose of the study was primarily to describe the experience of successful principalships as they are portrayed by excellent Israeli principals and not to validate the knowledge gained by parallel international studies, it is still useful to compare the similarities and discrepancies between the findings here and the existing literature on educational leadership.

**Implications of Findings Based on the Theoretical Framework.**

As noted in the first chapter, the leadership practices model developed by Kouzes and Posner (2007) is a valuable way of assessing effective leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2007) focus on five essential practices of excellent leadership. These practices are: “model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart” (p. 3). The current study confirms that the practices identified by Kouzes and Posner (2007) are crucial in the work of effective principals. There is, however, a discrepancy between the study findings and Kouzes and Posner’s (2007) work regarding the nature of collaborative work in schools. Kouzes and Posner (2007) stress the need to involve teachers in the early stage of the development of the school’s vision. The principals of the study saw this task to be the responsibility of the principal but mentioned the involvement of the teachers only in the late phase of vision implementation.

This difference may be explained by the following characteristics of the Israeli educational system. First, in the current legal structure of the Israeli educational system, the principal is held solely accountable for the workings of the school and events that occur within it (Oplatka, 2002). In such an environment, it is understandable that principals prefer the top-down approach regarding decisions on crucial resolutions and school direction. Second, the Israeli high school teachers are all represented by a single teacher’s union. This
union holds tremendous powers in negotiating the teachers’ work conditions. One such condition is that teachers do not have to stay any longer than they are required for teaching purposes. Because of this rigid regulation and others in the teachers’ collective bargaining contracts in Israel, the ability of the principals to assemble their teachers is limited and does not allow the time needed for meaningful brainstorming and decision-making sessions (Tamir, 2009). Third, the atmosphere of a constant sense of urgency in which Israeli principals operate, as was apparent in their descriptions, may affect their willingness to convene lengthy collaborative sessions on areas such as vision building.

Although the theoretical perspective of Kouzes and Posner (2007) provided a valuable lens, the theoretical framework of this investigation was drawn mainly from the work of Leithwood et al. (2008). Their summary and analysis of quantitative and qualitative international studies conducted in recent years in the field of educational leadership led to the delineation of a set of four effective practices of successful educational leaders: building a vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching and learning program. It is also important to note that Leithwood et al. (2006) emphasize that the “core practices are not all that people providing leadership in schools do. But they are especially critical practices known to have significant influence on organizational goals” (p. 19).

**Building vision.** The first category of effective practices identified by Leithwood et al. (2008) is “building vision and setting directions,” which includes “building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and demonstrating high-performance expectations (p. 30). The descriptions portrayed by the principals in the current study clearly repeated this category to be one of the key elements of their success as principals. Most of
them described the essence of this activity to be one of the first and most important things they have done as principals, as described in Theme A.1 in the previous chapter. The principals interviewed in the study highlighted the need to personally demonstrate the school’s vision. Reflecting on their success in shaping the school mission, most of them emphasized their personal role in designing the vision and incorporating it into the school’s culture. It is vital to take with caution the conclusion regarding this category. One cannot avoid suspecting that some of the principals interviewed for this study were speaking about the crucial role of building vision as a result of learning of its importance in professional development programs rather than out of their authentic reflections. It seems reasonable to assume that some of them were quoting popular sayings on vision due to its stated importance among school administrators. In the preview interview conducted with the district superintendent, instilling a culture of vision-based management was often repeated. This strengthens the possibility that the unanimous agreement among the excellent principals interviewed in this study regarding the role of vision is, in a sense, an expression of their desire to give a “right” answer rather than a spontaneous description of their authentic experience. Nevertheless, the fact that they all highlighted this category is still remarkable and noteworthy. Vision is one of the ways in which a school defines itself making it unique and different from surrounding schools. Therefore, another reason that all the principals discussed the importance of vision was their urge to portray a glorified view of their actions as principals in making their schools a success. This might be related to the marketing environment of the educational system, especially in the Tel Aviv region. As shown by Oplatka (2002b), this phenomenon is particularly strong in cities such as Tel Aviv, which have school choice policies.
Understanding and developing people. The second category of effective practices identified by Leithwood et al. (2008) is “understanding and developing people.” This includes “providing individualized support and consideration, fostering intellectual stimulation, and modeling appropriate values and behavior” (p. 30). The Israeli principals in the current study spoke repeatedly about the experience of managing people.

A major distinction to note is that Leithwood et al. (2008) emphasize the development of teachers and staff, whereas almost all of the principals involved in this study overlooked the aspect of teacher development in their work and focused mainly on the way they manage teachers. One hypothesis regarding this difference is based on the unique structure of the Israeli educational system, in which teachers’ professional development is the responsibility of the central Ministry of Education rather than the principals. Moreover, current teachers’ collective bargaining contracts allow teachers to stay in school only for actual teaching in classes. Therefore Israeli principals cannot organize nor finance meaningful teachers’ professional development programs (Tamir, 2009). In this environment, it seems reasonable to assume that principals, who both lack the resources needed and are accustomed to relying on institutional and national development programs, chose to minimize “developing teachers” in their descriptions.

As noted in Theme B.4 in the previous chapter, a major component of managing teachers is to back up teachers in their work. The principals also talked about their role in building motivation among their staffs. The principals shared their perception on the importance of dedicating meaningful time and energy to inspire the people who work in the school. Some of the principals highlighted the role of the principal in creating meaningful dialogue among the staff and maintaining interpersonal relationships. The Israeli principals
spoke with passion about their dedication to the needs of their teachers and staff. They also explained that their investment in dialogue with the teachers helps to empower those teachers.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that two different models of managing staff appeared in the descriptions of the Israeli principals interviewed in this study. The first model is an experience of managing people through emotional caring and support, similar to Leithwood et al.’s (2008) definition of “providing individualized support and consideration” (p. 30). Some of the principals mentioned their willingness to make special considerations for their teachers as a means to compensate hardworking teachers. Other principals described their concern for the wellbeing of their teachers as based purely on love and affection. Another model expressed by some principals reflected a different form of managing people. These principals emphasized mainly authoritative actions they take such as supervising and controlling.

Regarding the need to model “appropriate values and behavior” (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 30), almost all the principals interviewed in the study, as described in Theme A.3 in the previous chapter, spoke about their total commitment to their work as a means to inspire their teachers regarding the way they expect them to behave. Besides being administrators, Israeli Principals are obligated to teach as well (Tamir, 2009). Taking on challenging classes was one way that these principals became an example of taking on added responsibility. They all agreed that to do as I do is much more effective than do as I say. Last, it is important to observe that although Israeli society is commonly perceived as characterized by creativity and entrepreneurship (Senor & Singer, 2009), none of the principals interviewed in the study mentioned the component of “fostering intellectual stimulation” mentioned by Leithwood et al. (2008, p. 30). All of them ignored the need to cultivate a culture of creative and critical
thinking. One possible explanation might lie in the fact that the Israeli principals, as became apparent from their reflections, face a major challenge of leading a complex system in an extremely stressful environment. They, therefore, may tend to rely more on their staff’s conformism rather than on challenges to traditional ways of thinking (Byron, Khazanchi, & Nazarian, 2010).

**Redesigning the organization.** The third category of effective practices identified by Leithwood et al. (2008) is “redesigning the organization,” which includes “building collaborative culture, restructuring the organization, building productive relations with parents and community, and connecting the school to its wider environment” (p. 30). The information obtained from the principals in the current study strengthens the conclusion stated by Leithwood et al. (2008) regarding the importance of this category. As described in Theme E.11 in the previous chapter, the Israeli principals described their experience of managing with the collaboration of others and distributing some of their power as one of their effective practices. Nevertheless, some of the principals described ambivalence regarding the tension between the willingness to build a collaborative culture and their inclination towards a centralized involvement in many or most of the details of work in their school.

Regarding the need to build “productive relations with parents and community” (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 30), the reflections shared by the principals in the current study revealed somewhat different experiences, as portrayed in Theme D.8 in the previous chapter. Some of the principals stated that the recent social and cultural Israeli trend toward over-litigation has affected their interactions with angry parents. Too often, they said, principals are over-occupied in handling aggressive demands and legal suits aimed directly at them by parents. Moreover, some of the principals revealed their anger over being dragged into the
position of “marketing agents” who need to devote emotional resources and time to “sell” their schools to the parents, particularly in cities such as Tel Aviv (Oplatka, 2002). It is also important to observe that principals who work in schools in which students come from challenging socioeconomic or personal backgrounds told positive stories regarding their fruitful and constructive interactions with parents.

Relationship with the community appears to be a source of stress for many of the principals because of the negative role the media played in recent years by creating unhealthy attention to schools and exaggerated expectations of principals (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010). Analyzing their reflections reveals that the Israeli principals of the study are finding it hard to create constructive dialogues with the surrounding community because of the intrusiveness and aggressiveness of the local and national media. Instead of the parents coming to the principals and expressing their grievances directly, the parents elect to go to the media. Thus, the media plays the role of aggressive intermediaries for many of the interactions between the schools and the surrounding community.

*Managing the teaching and learning program.* The fourth category described by Leithwood et al. (2008) is “managing the teaching and learning program,” which includes “staffing the teaching programme, providing teaching support, monitoring school activity, and buffering staff against distractions from their work” (p. 30). The principals in the study perceive pedagogy to be the main core practice of their work as principals. All of them identified measured achievements of their students as a key compass they follow. The Israeli principals believe they are held particularly accountable for performance regarding graduation rates and matriculation test scores. Accordingly, they dedicate large portions of their time to actions associated with promoting learning and student achievement. It is
important to note that the district’s superintendent revealed in the preview interview that following the dramatic decrease in the national test scores (Tamir, 2009), the Ministry of Education gave special attention to the importance of improving the level of learning in schools. The importance of national test scores was further emphasized when in recent years, the Ministry of Education decided to monitor each school and to publish the schools’ test scores (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010). Regarding “monitoring school activity” (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 30), some principals in the study highlighted their intensive involvement in creating a monitoring system that would help them achieve the school’s learning goals. These principals perceive this as being one of their central tasks.

It is important to note that most of the Israeli principals in the study criticized the current situation that results in their lack of power, specifically regarding their ability to improve the level of teaching in their schools. The fact that they feel that they are being held ultimately accountable for the students’ test scores strengthens their frustration created by their inability to influence fundamental factors that could allow them to be successful. Most of those interviewed specifically stressed their lack of power to compensate the hard work of some of their teachers and their almost complete inability to terminate the contracts of some of the teachers who do not perform well. Regarding the need to emphasize staffing the teaching program (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 30), some of the principals interviewed for the study mentioned their personal involvement in skillful recruitment and casting of teachers as one of the most important characteristics of a successful principal.

To summarize, the current research findings strengthen the conclusion that effective principals generally rely on the same set of four practices identified by Leithwood et al. (2008), though the principals combine and apply them in varied ways, depending on the
different contexts and challenges they face (Day & Leithwood, 2007). The study reveals that several aspects that are endemic to Israel, such as the ambiguity in the educational power structure between the country’s Ministry of Education and the local municipalities (Gibton & Goldring, 2001; Gonen, 2009), the role of teachers’ unions (Gaziel, 1994; Tamir, 2009), parents’ involvement in schools (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009), and constant security concerns (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Zelniker, 1995), affect the way the set of four effective practices are implemented. This is especially true regarding the involvement of teachers in designing the school’s vision, professional development of teachers, and relations with the parents and the community.

**Implications for the Literature on Educational Leadership**

In the following paragraphs, I will evaluate the implications of the current study in light of the knowledge that already exists in the literature on educational leadership, as described in Chapter 2. The current study strengthens the scholarly trend that focuses specifically on the *behavioral components of educational leaders* (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006; Elmore, 2000; Evans, 2010; Whitaker, 2003b). This study shows that a careful investigation of reflections, even in a diverse group of principals, each with their individual personalities and special traits, can yield a common essence of experiences that has substantial meaning for the practice and training of school leaders. It is also important to note that the paradigm of practices, as was explored in this study, is particularly useful for helping educational leaders reflect on their educational agendas. By carefully dissecting the interviews, unconscious approaches and attitudes were revealed that were not apparent at first glance.
Another key trend found in the literature is the evolving role of the principal, from building manager to instructional leader. The current study reveals that this transformation has occurred in the Israeli educational system. This shift was initiated directly by the Israeli Ministry of Education through the introduction of several reforms that encouraged and guided principals toward a focus on instruction and pedagogy. It seems that the most effective motivator was the decision made by the Ministry of Education to annually publish schools’ matriculation achievements in the media (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010).

The literature review identified another major shift in the way principalship is being discussed, toward the acceptance of a distributive approach to educational leadership. There is an acknowledgement that it takes more than one individual to manage a school effectively (Portin, 2009). On the surface, the current study supports this trend in the literature, as most of the principals repeated this theme in their descriptions. Nevertheless, two discrepancies are notable in the study’s findings. First, not all principals spoke about distributive leadership as their desired way of leading their school. Some saw it instead as an inevitable necessity they are forced to accept. Moreover, even the principals who were in support of sharing their power and distributing their leadership with their staff spoke mainly about the actual management of the school and not about the parts of leadership that involve shaping the school’s vision. As stated previously, the reasons for these differences are due in part to the sole responsibility that the principal has on school performance and the limitations that the teachers unions put on teachers spending additional time for lengthy planning sessions. The study findings, therefore, join the current debate among scholars concerning the real substance and practicality of the distributed leadership perspective (Spillane & Orlina, 2005).
More investigation is needed on how collaborative models can be implemented successfully in complex environments such as the Israeli educational system.

The findings of this research are not in total agreement with the transformational and moral leadership models found in the literature. It was found that principals who focus on values have a strong moral compass that can be used to harmoniously combine their values, decisions, and actions (Sergiovanni, 2005). This helps them in their struggle with the complexities and difficulties involved in their work. However, the study revealed that some of the principals are driven to questionable and unethical actions due to the perceived stressful and powerless position they face.

This study joins the arguments made in the literature regarding the assessment of principals, noting “the movement toward assessing behaviors instead of traits” (Goldring et al., 2008, p. 8). A useful implication of the current study may be its suggestion to incorporate into the literature the investigation of effective practices, obstacles, and coping strategies in the different assessment tools that are being developed for educational leaders. Allowing principals to reflect on their experiences in relation to practices, obstacles, and coping strategies, as this study shows, can prove to be an effective learning tool for the improvement of currently residing principals and for the creation of professional development programs that will train the next generation of school principals.

Obstacles and coping strategies. In surveying the literature, three major obstacles to principals’ success were identified: powerlessness, isolation, and dealing with multiple stakeholders. The following paragraphs compare these three obstacles with the descriptions given by the Israeli principals of their obstacles and their effective coping strategies as described in the current study.
Powerlessness. One common complaint that was ubiquitous among the Israeli principals was their feelings of powerlessness. Many of their anecdotes were about constantly struggling with this difficulty. There seems to be a huge gap between the levels of achievement expected from the principals and the actual managerial tools that are at their disposal. In their descriptions, the principals confirmed a finding from international studies (Adamowski et al., 2007) concerning the existence of such a gap between sole responsibility and managerial authority.

Based on interview responses, it appears that the near inability of principals to terminate the contracts of teachers who do not perform well is a particularly difficult obstacle in the Israeli educational system. This situation is not unique to Israeli principals, but the level of frustration shown by these principals directly corresponds to their almost complete powerlessness in this matter. The synthesized essence of the experience of powerlessness identifies one of the toughest barriers affecting educational leadership in Israel. A possible explanation for this acute situation is that Israeli principals are operating in the aftermath of the large-scale teachers’ strike that took place in Israel in 2008 and resulted in overwhelming power for the union (Tamir, 2009). Using alternative and inventive ways to compensate good teachers is the small measure of power that these principals have left. It is important to note that these alternative means are legally questionable. Therefore, if these principals must resort to using questionable tactics, it is because they are frustrated by the strong constraints this obstacle imposes, thus entertaining artificial and problematic solutions.

An indirect way that these principals were able to motivate teachers was by showing total commitment. This total devotion was helpful in inspiring others to act in certain ways despite the lack of tangible motivators such as salary increases. In addition, this dedication to
work was helpful in ameliorating their frustration and letting them live more peacefully with their aggravation due to lack of power.

**Isolation.** The general literature on educational leadership indicates that principals face tremendous pressure and experience feelings of loneliness and stress (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004). Most of the subjects of this study described the intensity and severity of their anxiety that is brought on by constant stress and loneliness. Although the descriptions seem identical to those in parallel studies, there are also unique factors contributing to the Israeli experience. One crucial aspect that appeared in the descriptions of the Israeli principals is the negative role that parents play in some schools. Harsh demands and verbal attacks from parents, aimed at the principals or at their staff, increase the principals’ feelings of isolation and vulnerability. Israel has been living for many years under constant security concerns and is in a state of war with many of its neighboring countries. This state of affairs has resulted in increasingly aggressive and violent behavior (Bhavnani, Miodownik, & Hyun, 2011) that, in recent years, has spilled over to community facilities such as schools and hospitals (Natan, Hanukayev, & Fares, 2011).

The fragile state of affairs of security in Israel seems to have another negative effect on Israeli principals. According to the findings of this research, principals act under constant stress that is driven by their feelings of responsibility for the lives of their students in a situation that is far from being peaceful and safe. The inability of these principals to secure the safety and wellbeing of their students due to constant terror threats leads to an acute source of isolation and stress.

Israeli society is becoming more litigious. Angry parents threaten to sue schools and principals over conceived wrongs. This trend has a major impact on the principals’
interactions with the pupils’ parents. As noted earlier, principals who work in schools in which students come from lower socioeconomic or challenging personal backgrounds had much more positive interactions with parents.

The key role of the Israeli media in Israel’s political and societal discourse (Peri, 2004) results in the media acting as a negative catalyst, adding pressure to an already volatile environment (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010). The principals described the unconstructive role the media play in creating negative attention and inflated expectations of principals.

In dealing with this environment of magnified stress and isolation, the principals described a few coping strategies that they found to be effective. These effective coping strategies are similar to those found in the literature on international educational leadership. Among the key strategies mentioned by subjects in this study, as shown previously in chapter 4, are the following: peer supportive relationships (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Izgar, 2009); constant emphasis on values, ethics, and a sense of meaning (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009); distributive and collegial leadership (Harris, 2002); reliance on family support and personal hobbies as a source of strength (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002); and constant learning, professional development, and the help of a guiding mentor or coach (Krüger et al., 2005).

Dealing with different stakeholders. Dealing with different stakeholders is a problem mentioned repeatedly in educational leadership literature (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Goodwin et al., 2005). This problem appeared in almost all the interviews in this study. The principals described the difficulty of working with numerous stakeholders who often intervene unprofessionally in the management of the school, each having different agendas. The principals bemoaned the waste of time and energy this problem creates. The notion of
different stakeholders facing the principal has usually been described in the literature in relation to the different factions involved in the school, such as students, teachers, parents, and the community. It is important to note a meaningful discrepancy between the study findings and the literature, one that may be unique in the experiences of the Israeli principals. This problem is exacerbated in Israel because of the unstructured sharing of power among the different authorities in the Israeli educational system (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010; Gonen, 2009), referred to by one of the participants as “built-in chaos.” In many countries, the principal works within a clear hierarchical structure. He knows to whom answers have to be given and whose directives have to be carried out. In Israel, the principal has to answer to the Ministry of Education, the Education Department of the municipality, and if the school belongs to a network of schools, then the principal is beholden to it as well. All these bodies have a say in the school’s financing and critical decisions (Nir, 2006). It is not possible to satisfy both the Ministry of Education and all the other constituents. This makes it extremely difficult for Israeli principals to develop their schools effectively. A common message delivered by all participants was one of confusion between the conflicting loyalties they hold and the waste of energy expended in maneuvering between rival forces that influence events and decisions at their school. Like their peers in other countries (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005), Israeli principals complained about the enormous amount of paperwork expected of them. This burden is created in part by having to answer to many different bureaucratic bodies governing the schools.

In parallel to findings from international studies (Boleman & Deal, 2007; Deal, 2009), the principals in this study indicated that the following political tactics were effective in dealing with this obstacle: handling rival factions and ambiguities in power to the benefit of
their schools, being able to connect to people as a means of getting more resources for their schools (Goodwin, Cunningham, & Eagle, 2005), using a process of negotiation and bargaining (Bush, 2002), being able to analyze politically the terrain in which they work, understanding that some battles are not worth fighting, and relying on their potential to broker deals between rival stakeholders as a means of bettering their schools (Deal, 2009).

**Implications for Educational Leadership Practice**

We live in an era in which principals are placed in situations where it is almost impossible for them to succeed (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010). This is true for both Israel and the rest of the world. New educational laws have been enacted, such as the No Child Left Behind Act in the United States, which emphasized standards, tests, and assessments (Fusarelli, 2004), and other countries have adopted school accountability policies (Crum et al., 2009). This has dramatically raised the level of expectations for school principals. At the same time, it seems that less power is being granted to principals to achieve these expectations. This gap between expectations and accountability versus authority has made the work of principals extremely challenging. This is true for Israel as well, whose gap has been created by the prevailing bureaucratic and legal situation (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010).

A key implication of this study for policy makers in the Israeli educational system is the urgent need to empower principals. If better school performance is demanded, then principals must be given more managerial authority and independence, for instance in the hiring and firing of teachers. Instituting merit pay (Lavy, 2007) is another manner in which principals can positively influence the level of learning in their respective institutions.

A recommendation has been made in Israel to adopt a school-based management (SBM) reform, in which the principals are given some authority in handling the school’s
budget (Dror, 2006). This policy, which underwent small-scale experiments in the Israeli educational system 15 years ago (Dror, 2006), gives principals more freedom and flexibility in the actual allocation and use of their school funds. Although the principals of the study did not mention this specific reform, it seems that the current study’s findings strengthen the reasoning behind expanding SBM as one solution to powerlessness, which is one of the major obstacles identified by principals. An additional significant recommendation that can be drawn from the current study is rearranging the different authorities involved in the Israeli educational system. In the current situation, too many levels of power are involved in leading a school (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010). This is a source of inefficiency and a waste of the taxpayer’s money. Moreover, it puts the principals in a situation in which much of their time and energy is spent on finding ways to acquire resources needed to do their jobs. It seems reasonable to expect that if principals face less bureaucracy, their effectiveness may increase dramatically. One reorganization model that was suggested in Israel a few years ago (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010) is the unification of the Ministry of Education and the local municipality in each city into a single authority that would oversee all the schools of the area.

Another important conclusion of the study is that a significant part of the principals’ work must be focused on improving learning in their schools. Most of the principals agreed that pedagogical improvement is one of the crucial tasks of a principal. The principals in this study stated that the principalship is one of the most noble and rewarding jobs one can hold. Many of them reflected on the opportunity to affect children’s lives and contribute to their healthy growth. They also saw as remarkable the opportunity that is given to them to lead the direction of their schools and affect the way teachers teach, students learn, and the entire community thrives. Some of the principals thought that the main task of an effective principal
is to create a supporting educational environment based on meaningful, relevant, and respectful dialogue between teachers and students. A principal who succeeds in achieving this goal will likely be successful in other aspects of the job.

Just as they discussed the rewards of their position, the principals also identified multiple stressors. The security and safety of the students is an issue that is paramount in the state of Israel and is of major concern to all principals. Such situations are stressful for all those dealing with these issues and are even more stressful for the principals who are the decision makers. Many of them experienced situations in which they needed to make critical and immediate decisions that might have dire consequences for the lives of their students. Another source of stress is the aggressive manner in which the media cover the principals’ work. According to the study, effective coping mechanisms to counter the feelings of stress, isolation, and vulnerability are the support offered by peers, mentors, and family, and the ability to constantly develop leadership, knowledge, and capabilities. Principals need a sense of meaning and importance in their work as well as a sense of values that reminds them why what they are doing is valuable. Constant wrestling with ethical dilemmas and with issues involving their values strengthens their ability to handle the various difficulties involved in their work as they refine and solidify their vision for their schools and their chosen methods for running them. Some of those dilemmas involve defining the mission of the school, what it can accomplish, and when it should pass on responsibilities to other people and other institutions. Others involve cases in which following one set of values can mean defying another set, such as when to acknowledge that every rule, even a good rule, has exceptions.

Parental involvement in schools is a subject of controversy within the Israeli educational community (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010). The feeling shared by principals in the
study is that allowing more power to parent councils would lead to more manipulative actions and demands and would eventually cause discord rather than serve the school’s interests.

However, parents are no longer willing to send their children to school without having a say in shaping the educational content and methods of learning. Therefore, successful principals must accommodate parents without sacrificing educational excellence by making some adaptations to their techniques and methods of leading their schools.

Israeli society is evolving to a new era of civil awareness (Eyal & Berkovich, 2010). Parents’ involvement has become a public issue in different arenas. Even the Israeli army has confronted the issue and has established means of allowing some level of parental involvement by forming channels of communication with soldiers’ parents. A powerful push for involvement in schools by the students’ parents therefore seems unavoidable. In as much as greater parental involvement seems inevitable, the reality is much more complex. The teachers’ union and major budget constraints present obstacles to many new programs that are suggested (Tamir, 2009). Therefore, not all the creative ideas suggested by parents can be implemented. Parents must face their own limits of power and competence. Furthermore, parents must take some responsibility for their children’s academic progress and become a positive example in showing respect to the principal and the school staff. No progress is likely to be achieved without some basic changes in the relationship between parents and the educational staff. Establishing a joint partnership based on mutual respect is key to any progress.

Regarding the rivalrous environment that often can be found in schools, this study strengthens the notion of implicit and explicit expectations that it is the job of principals to lead the disputing parties to a resolution as soon as possible. These disputes may involve
various groups of stakeholders: parents vs. teachers, students vs. teachers, administrative staff vs. teachers, and even individual teachers and groups of teachers in conflict with each other.

In many cases, principals tend to offer a reasonable solution that will bring an end to the conflict, and it is tempting for them to act as a judge or deciding arbitrator. This can be detrimental in the long run. This authoritative, top-down approach helps in achieving the desired solution swiftly, but the different factions in the organization learn to expect that only the principal can solve disputes. The involved parties don’t see that they can and should attempt to find their own resolutions. This hidden message increases the number of cases that are brought to the principal. In the Bible, Jethro dissuades Moses from being the sole arbitrator for Israel by saying to him that “you shall wither away both you and your nation for this is too heavy a burden for you” (Exodus 18:18). So too, many principals tend to solve all the problems in their schools as soon as they can, without enlisting the aid of others. Most of them are quite skilled in delivering efficient and quick fixes to the problems that are thrown at them. They tend to disregard other people’s abilities to help and often find consulting with colleagues a waste of their time. It seems that many of them are not ready to give up being the heroic lone warrior who saves the day.

To improve their leadership performance, it seems that principals need to avoid quick fixes and instead to delegate authority in an effective way that will allow some “positive ambivalence” (Piderit, 2000, p, 790) to arise. Opening debates to the entire community, sharing problems with the whole staff, and then implementing some mechanism of committees for dealing with problems are all positive steps towards helping the school design a working solution (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004). By taking these actions, the principals would put work back to where it belongs (Heifetz, 1994). A principal should serve as a bridge or a
moderator for the process, demonstrating by his or her presence and confidence that the community can deal with the challenge and thrive.

This study’s findings can be used by the Israeli Ministry of Education which designs professional development programs aimed at improving principals’ job performance and helping them succeed. Individual principals seeking to provide the best education possible to students may find useful insights and perspectives from this study.

**Implications for Future Research and Scholarship**

This current study has endeavored to fill a gap on data regarding the effective practices used by successful Israeli principals. However, more studies are needed in order to obtain a more complete picture. The following are four suggestions for future studies:

1. *Expanding the scope of participants and vicinities*. The current study has focused on ten effective principals in one geographical area in Israel, the Tel Aviv area. Future studies should include more principals and be expanded to other parts of Israel. Similarities and discrepancies should be noted between the different locations in Israel. One such uniqueness of the Tel Aviv district is that it generally caters to the higher socioeconomic strata and therefore higher performances in the schools are expected. Interviewing principals operating in other regions in Israel, especially in the periphery, could shed light on the variance of experiences and perspectives held by Israeli principals in different contexts. In addition, a follow-up parallel research project in Arab schools in Israel should be conducted. The Arab sector has different challenges and characteristics (Nir & Inbar, 2003) from the Jewish population. This could reveal important insights into how principals of those schools perceive the experience of educational leadership.
2. **Comparing successful and unsuccessful principals.** Not all principals are successful in achieving excellence in their schools. Some lack talent, others lack the skills needed, and others are not able to handle the stumbling blocks that are intentionally or unintentionally put in their way. Another interesting area to explore would be the perceptions and experiences of principals who quit the system as a result of failures or frustrations. If there are common grievances among the principals that left the educational system, steps can be taken to address them and thus avoid further attrition. The information from such a study would provide interesting comparisons with the results of the current study.

3. **Comparing principals at different stages in their career.** Another promising avenue for future research is an exploration of Israeli principals at different stages of their careers, as was studied in other parts of the world. Researchers of early stage principals such as Earley and Weindling (2004) describe the different stages principals pass in their first two years of office. Daresh and Male (2000) focus on the principals’ immediate support needs such as mentoring and consulting. Nelson, De la Colina, and Boone (2008) investigate how current trends of accountability affect their socialization. Other studies have investigated later stages in principals’ careers. Researchers of mid-career principals such as Ashby (1991) find that these principals are inclined toward either professional burnout or self-renewal because they are unable to envision future promotion within the educational system. Oplatka (2002a) describes four different coping and renewal patterns of mid-career female principals. Clark, Martorell, and Rockoff (2009) find a “positive relationship between principal experience and school performance” (p. 4). Investigating late-career principals, Macmillan (1998) concludes that they become somewhat disengaged and therefore take minimal risks. Mulford et al. (2009) claim that late-career principals have more social awareness and vocational ethics than
their younger colleagues. Woods (2002) finds that they tend to be more open for consultation, and Assor and Oplatka (2003) stress that experienced principals “have learned to give up the high level of control they once wished to exert and are now more willing to tolerate some ambiguity, unpredictability, and imperfect performance” (p. 482). Some of the perceptions gained from the late-career principals interviewed in this study strengthen the claims made by Ashby (1991) and Assor and Oplatka (2003). It seems worthwhile to investigate these conclusions more fully in a study that would focus specifically on late-career principals, possibly in conjunction with a comparative study of Israeli principals at other career stages.

4. **Gender differences.** Most research on educational leadership does not take gender differences into consideration (Gates, 2003). However, differences between male and female principals exist. Marshall (1995) and Stronge et al. (2008) claim that female principals are more comfortable with instructional leadership than men seem to be. Coleman (2002) shows that female principals have a greater tendency than male principals to use distributive leadership. Therefore, an additional aspect worthy of further investigation is the possibility of distinctions between the different perspectives and experiences of male and female principals. Another aspect that can be studied is how the different genders perceive their leadership. Such a study could yield new insights and understandings for developing effective school leadership.

**Conclusion**

One of the key factors to a school’s success is having an excellent principal at the helm. Many failing schools were able to turn things around due to the dedicated efforts of a successful principal. Running a school as a principal involves a multifaceted set of tasks that have become increasingly complex and challenging as a result of changing societal needs and
expectations. Studying the work of principals is of interest to many scholars because of the principals’ crucial role and their major contribution to school effectiveness.

A comprehensive review of the literature on educational leadership highlighted effective behaviors and actions of successful principals as well as the main obstacles they face. The review identified the current state of research regarding practices of effective principals, including “some quite important things that we do know, and claims that we can now make with some confidence” (Leithwood et al., 2008). This review also highlighted areas of research that have yet to be addressed or are in need of corroboration. One such area identified as needing additional research concerns the perspectives, practices, and behaviors of effective principals in Israel. This research study helps address that gap.

As Day et al. (2008) conclude, there is still much to learn about how successful principals act and behave in different countries, cultures, and contexts. Current knowledge regarding effective practices of principals should be compared with new data collected in different cultural settings. Israel is an interesting educational setting due to the role of teachers’ unions, Israel’s distinctive cultural milieu, parents’ involvement in schools, constant security concerns, political issues such as decentralization policies, and other social and cultural factors. This study focused specifically on how Israeli principals function in this unique context. Although this study is limited to a specific context and sampled a relatively small number of principals, it fills a gap in the research literature and may assist other researchers in future studies on educational leadership and the principalship.
Appendixes

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Biographical/experience questions

   Tell me about your professional background: career path, years of principalship.

   Tell me about the school you are heading: number of students, teachers, school population, and other significant characteristics.

2. Successful behaviors

   What does a successful principal do? What are some of the behaviors and actions that define your role as school leader?

   What are a few things you are proud of accomplishing as a principal, and why?

   What do you perceive as the most crucial factors for success in the work of a principal?

   In your experience, what key skills or tools of leadership and administration are crucial for a principal’s success?

   What do you do differently from your peers, and how do you think this contributes to your success as a principal?

   Describe the moment in your work experience at which you perceived yourself as a successful principal.

3. Problems and challenges

   What do you perceive as the major challenges in your work as a principal?

   Describe an experience in your career, if there is one, after which you felt you no longer wanted to be a principal, and why.

   Why do you believe that some principals fail in their positions - for what reasons?
4. Dealing with problems and challenges

How do you deal with the stress created by your work?

What strategies and actions help you meet the challenges you face?

What training do you think principals should receive so they can thrive in their role?
Appendix B: IRB Approval

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: June 28, 2010
IRB #: 10-06-06

Principal Investigators:
Sandy Nickel
Gil Pereg

Department:
Education
College of Professional Studies

Address:
40 Belvidere
Northeastern University

Title of Project:
The Makings of a Successful Principal

Participating Sites:
N/A

DHHS Review Category:
Expedited #6, #7

Informed Consents:
One (1) signed consent form

Monitoring Interval:
12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: JUNE 27, 2011

Investigator’s Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when
recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or
new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses
must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month
prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to
any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection
Appendix C: Telephone Recruitment Script

Telephone Recruitment Script:

"Hello, my name is Gil Pereg. I am a student at Northeastern University conducting a doctoral research on successful high school principals in Israel. You were designated by the superintendent of the district of Tel Aviv in the Ministry of Education as an extremely successful principal, and therefore I want to ask you if you would kindly agree to participate in my research.

The goal of my research is to gain knowledge on the factors that contribute to the success of high school principals in Israel. I am examining the actions and behaviors that have made excellent principals so effective, and how these principals deal with problems they encounter.

If you agree to participate, we will determine a date, according to your schedule, in which I will come to your school and conduct a 90 minutes interview with you. The interview will be recorded for transcription and analysis purposes only. I will ensure confidentiality all along the process of transcribing and writing my report. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you, your school or any individual as being of this project. Your decision to participate or not to participate in the study will be kept confidential and will have no effect on your standing in the Tel Aviv school system.

APPROVED
 Valid 10-05-20
 Through 11-05-20
Appendix D: Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Department of Education, Boston, MA 02115, U.S.A.
Investigator Names: Gil Pereg, EDD candidate; Dr. Sandy Nickel, Principal Investigator
Title of Project: The Makings of a Successful Principal

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask the researcher any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. Your choice to participate is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You have been selected to participate in this study because of your designation as a highly successful principal by the Ministry of Education. You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of the study is to identify best practices of successful Israeli principals as well as the challenges and problems they confront.

What will I be asked to do?
At the beginning of the interview, you will be asked to give a brief description of your biography and some background on the characteristics of your school.

The research questions to be investigated in this study are:
1. What behaviors and actions do highly effective principals identify to explain their success?
2. What problems and challenges do highly effective principals identify in their work?
3. How do highly effective principals deal with the problems and challenges they face?

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
The interview will take place in your school at a time to be determined by you and will last approximately 90 minutes. It will be audio taped for transcription and analysis purposes only.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort for you. However, if you wish to stop for any reason let the researcher know and the interview will end immediately. If you decide to withdraw from the interview, any data that had been collected or recorded will not be used as part of the research.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, your answers may help us learn to more about successful school leadership. It is hoped that the findings
of this study can be used to develop new methods for preparing Israeli principals for their leadership positions and supporting them throughout their careers.

**Who will see the information about me?**
Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you, your school or any individual in any way. The audiotape will be held in a secured location and will be destroyed following transcription.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee of the Tel Aviv school system.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Gil Pereg at 972546555901 or gilpereg@hotmail.com, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Sandy Nickel at 978-369-6884 or s.nickel@neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115, U.S.A. tel. 617-373-4588 email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

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**Signature of person agreeing to take part**

**Date**

---

**Printed name of person above**

---

**Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent**

**Date**

---

**Printed name of person above**

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APPROVED

NU IRB# 10-05-06
VALID: 6/23/10
THROUGH: 6/22/11
References


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