



LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT &  
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

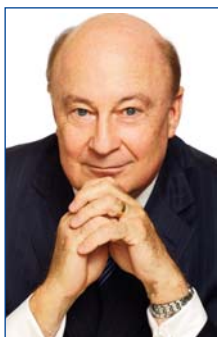
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## EXTRACT - FEATURE ARTICLE

# Commentary on the positioning of the FRLM / MLQ in the marketplace



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We in this network know the research tradition behind the MLQ360 sets the world benchmark in assessments of leadership and management influencing styles. Establishing such a position takes many years of independent validation and replication. In the case of the MLQ360 assessment of the **Full Range Leadership Model** (FRLM) now over 25

years! Moreover, unlike other competitors for the leadership assessment “space” this has been done at the high impact, well respected journal level – with more journal publications about this theory of leadership than any other.<sup>1</sup> The challenge, which we roundly embrace,

is to have this premier research positioning recognised and accepted universally in the marketplace of the leadership industry in businesses, governments and organisations alike.

### Just another tool in the kitbag?

So the MLQ5sx scale is certainly not just another “tool in the kitbag”. The transformational – transactional *full range theory* is, as Professors Antonakis and House have proposed, the backbone of any grand theory of leadership in the making.

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emerging countries like India, China and Brazil. Rather than in any sense “invalidate it”, these may result in refinements about how we interpret the data collected by the MLQ5x scale.

In July 2010 I presented in a symposium entitled *Executive assessments across cultures* with Dave Bartram, Principal Researcher for the SHL Group and others, at the **International Test Commission** (ITC) biennial conference in Hong Kong. I argued<sup>2</sup> that recently published studies about a “Chinese and Indian MLQ” have a long way to go research-wise if they are to match the standard accomplished in the strong FRLM / MLQ research tradition – admittedly mainly in the Western countries so far. I was encouraged when the Professor

They argue that all other theories of leadership should be related to this now validated assessment throughout the western world. True there is “extension room” for possible adjustments for *cross cultural applications* in important

I venture to say that very few other assessments of leadership have had anything like this level of transparent scrutiny – if any.

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Discussant for the Symposium from the University of China agreed with me! Accordingly, MLQ International, in partnership with Deakin University, is targeting this important research and publishing area in the next twelve months.

It is still surprising how often clients have not even heard of the FRLM/MLQ.

How do you handle these situations?

Early this century Professor Antonakis led the way with his important research on local context variables (like 'sense of hierarchy' and 'gender') which can moderate (but not invalidate) the way the MLQ360 5x scale of 36 items works in diverse local

organisational settings. <sup>3</sup> I venture to say that very few other assessments of leadership have had anything like this level of transparent scrutiny – if any. There is no hiding behind proprietary protection walls here! Ever the true researcher, Professor Bruce Avolio recently suggested in our international network communications, that such inadequate studies in fact create the opportunity for new and better research to ensure the MLQ5x scale is truly *understood* and *utilised* as the global assessment of leadership and management when unique country cultural factors are also taken into account.

### Having an 'objective independent opinion' and advocating use of the FRLM / MLQ360.

Given all representations that fight (often with big \$ marketing spends) for space and a share of the leadership marketplace, we sometimes hear consultants and coaches being in a *bit of a bind* about recommending, or aligning with, one leadership product / "tool" (ugh!). I myself transact this space with clients in my own consulting and coaching activities through OEC: Organisation Enhancement Consultancy.

In academic and professional papers and presentations I routinely practice disclosure of my various roles and interests and let others make the decisions about any advocacy I might make (for anything in principle). I am an independent thinker and also prize my own integrity – as I am sure many of this Accredited Network also do. However in leadership

assessment and development I am convinced that the FRLM / MLQ360 is the *international benchmark* following its careful development and validation through hundreds of studies and publications in blind peer-reviewed journals, many many PhDs and a range of books. It is still surprising how often clients have not even heard of the FRLM/MLQ.



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How do you handle these situations? My response is to educate the clients and get them interested. This is not to say that the MLQ360 is the *only* leadership measure reference point. Sometimes I will recommend the ODQ or MLQTeam as the best starting point. Additionally, the MLQ

does need to be augmented with other assessments and relevant knowledge from education, leadership theories <sup>4</sup>, psychology, business systems, sociology and yes ... even philosophy regarding effective core values (and what supports those).

### Has the MLQ360 been replaced by Authentic Leadership?

We hear echoes of these questions and comments sometimes from our Accredited Network as you engage with the business, government and wider communities. So let me take a minute or two to address this quite directly.

**First**, Professor Avolio and co-researchers, now working at **Authentic Leadership** (AL) do not see it this way; rather they regard the transformational-transactional theory and its MLQ assessment as a crucial part of their own evolution of leadership theory into the ethical and inner transparent dimensions of AL <sup>5</sup>.

**Secondly**, Professor Avolio and co-researchers are the first to admit that the reliable assessment of AL has a long, long, way to go in terms of validation at the MLQ standard. If you would like an up-to-date reference for that see Avolio, Griffith, Wernsing & Walumbwa (2010) <sup>5</sup>.

**Thirdly**, we are promoting to our Network the **Authentic Leadership Questionnaire** (ALQ) as an *inexpensive adjunct* to the MLQ 360 in most cases. However, in some cases and from a consulting perspective, AL could be a place to start with a client to lead into the MLQ360 and other FRLM assessments subsequently.

**Fourthly**, we have long known and trained that *ethical leadership* (as opposed to *pseudo transformational leadership*) is important (refer: Bass & Steidlmeier (1999) <sup>6</sup> – a paper I was asked to review by Bernard Bass prior to its publication. What the AL research is doing is extending into this important area which, so far, has eluded sound psychometric measurement.

**Fifthly**, the enthusiasm for emotional intelligence shows a market awareness of the need for coming to grips with the

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inner side of leadership – even if linking this to external behaviours and predictable outcomes is problematic.<sup>7</sup> So AL, with its drive towards personal and emotional transparency is coming at this from another trajectory which is perhaps more sensitive to the substantial scholarly research such as the FRLM/MLQ which exists about leadership at the behavioural end of the spectrum.

What is “latest” is not automatically “best” or “better”.

So for these and other reasons I welcome the attention to Authentic Leadership since, as most of you know, I have personally held strongly that ethical behaviour and authenticity is so important, especially in professional life.

### The impact of post-modern philosophy in the leadership marketplace.

It is great that we have so much research going on – people chasing PhDs right left and centre! Additionally in the rough and tumble of the marketplace, new ideas frequently get embraced with enthusiasm. As I recently argued in a paper at the International Congress of Applied Psychology (July 2010, Melbourne<sup>8</sup> - about to be published in the International Coaching Psychology Review ICPR<sup>9</sup>) - in the robust leadership assessment and development industry, where squillions of \$s are spent – what is “latest” is not automatically best or better. What is needed are sound evaluation criteria and measured judgements to properly assess any contributions to new knowledge from research.

I predict that it will take some time for any serious commentator to argue that the *Full Range Leadership Theory* - as assessed by the MLQ360 - and other assessments at group and culture levels - had been replaced by a new theory that suggests it is now “out of date”! These are the quick echoes of postmodern assumptions that reject philosophical realism and elevates the subjective judgements of “me-ism” to be the arbiter of all things ... a form of individual radicalism bred in the West. Nevertheless I acknowledge that these kinds of discussions are sometimes necessary and appropriate with clients in this

fast-paced searching world. Do listen for the deep assumptions in the positions encountered and engage with them critically! In my ICPR article (Elliott, 2011) I have tried to do just that by challenging scholarly leadership research to engage with the emergent coaching psychology evidence-based literature so that both break out of their respective silos about how *leadership* is developed.



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If you have got to the end of this feature piece in *360 degree Feedback* – congratulations! It is rare that I write these given my role also as ‘editor’. However, I have taken this opportunity to again share some of my perspectives, deep convictions and yes passions about the leadership scene ... and to reflect on some fundamental values associated with our professional practice. If you wish to write a 250 word response with your own perspectives regarding things which are important to you in your profession and business, we will be happy to receive and publish them.

Do listen for the deep assumptions in the positions encountered and engage with them critically!

Go well in 2011 and remember I and the MLQ International Team now of some eight specialist dedicated consultants are here to support your success! Thanks for being part of the exciting journey.

<sup>1</sup> For example, Judge, T.A. & Piccolo, R.F. (2004). Transformational and transactional leadership: A meta-analytic test of their relative validity. *American Psychologist*, 89(5), 755-768.

<sup>2</sup> Elliott, R.H. (2010b). *The MLQ transformational – transactional scale and cross-cultural assessment: A research-driven platform for global leadership development*. Symposium presentation and paper, International Test Commission Biennial Conference, Hong Kong.

<sup>3</sup> Antonakis, J. A., Avolio, B.J., & Sivasubramaniam, N. (2003). Context and leadership: An examination of the nine-factor full-range leadership theory using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14, 261-295.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief review of twelve leadership theories and an account of the positioning of the transformational-transactional FRL theory in relation to them and coaching psychology see Elliott, 2011, pp.49-53.

<sup>5</sup> Avolio, B. J., Griffith, J., Wernsing, T. S., & Walumbwa, F. O. (2010). What is authentic leadership development? In Linley, P. A. Harrington, S. & Garcea, N. (Eds.), (2010). *Oxford handbook of positive psychology and work* (pp. 39-52). New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Bass, B.M., & Steidlmeier, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behaviour. *Leadership Quarterly*, 10(2), 181-217.

<sup>7</sup> Antonakis, J. (2004). On why “emotional intelligence” will not predict leadership effectiveness beyond IQ or the “big five”: An extension and rejoinder. *Organizational Analysis*, 12(2), 171-182. See also the interview and review in *360 degree Feedback Newsletter*, Vol 7(1), 2005 February: available in the MLQ Network Member’s area – free!

<sup>8</sup> Elliott, R.H. (2010a). *Getting the balance right: Utilising psychometric assessment inputs and evidence based theories in the coaching ‘reflective space’ for leadership development*. Symposium presentation and paper, International Congress of Applied Psychology, Melbourne.

<sup>9</sup> Elliott, R.H. (2011)(In Press). Utilising evidence-based leadership theories in coaching for leadership development: Towards a comprehensive integrating conceptual framework. *International Coaching Psychology Review*. 6(1), 46-70.

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