YOUR LIFE'S STORY: Past and Future

This Self-Assessment exercise has four parts. It should take you about an hour to complete. We'll explain the theory behind the instrument after you've generated your data.

Step 1: My Life's Story in 400 Words or Less

Write your life's story in 400 words or less. This will require you to condense, focus on the highlights and major events. You can use the blank space below if you wish or you can write elsewhere, e.g. in your computer. Do this now and **before** reading the other steps of the assignment. Remember, 400 words or less.

Step 2: Key Events Table

In the table below, list the **key events** you mentioned in the 400-word story in the left hand column, one event per row.   Then note the extent (from -5 to +5) to which each event was an emotional "up" or "down" or neutral (0). Then try to summarize the **key learning** from that event in the third column. What did this event teach you about life and living? What was your "takeaway" from this event?

KEY EVENT	EMOTIONAL IMPACT (-5 -- 0 -- +5)	KEY LEARNING OR INSIGHT

Step 3: Charting Your Emotional Impact Scores

Use the blank chart below to chart the key events in your life in terms of their emotional impact chronologically from left to right. Then, label the peaks and valleys with the events they represent.

Life Story Emotional Impact Chart

+5

0

-5

Time →
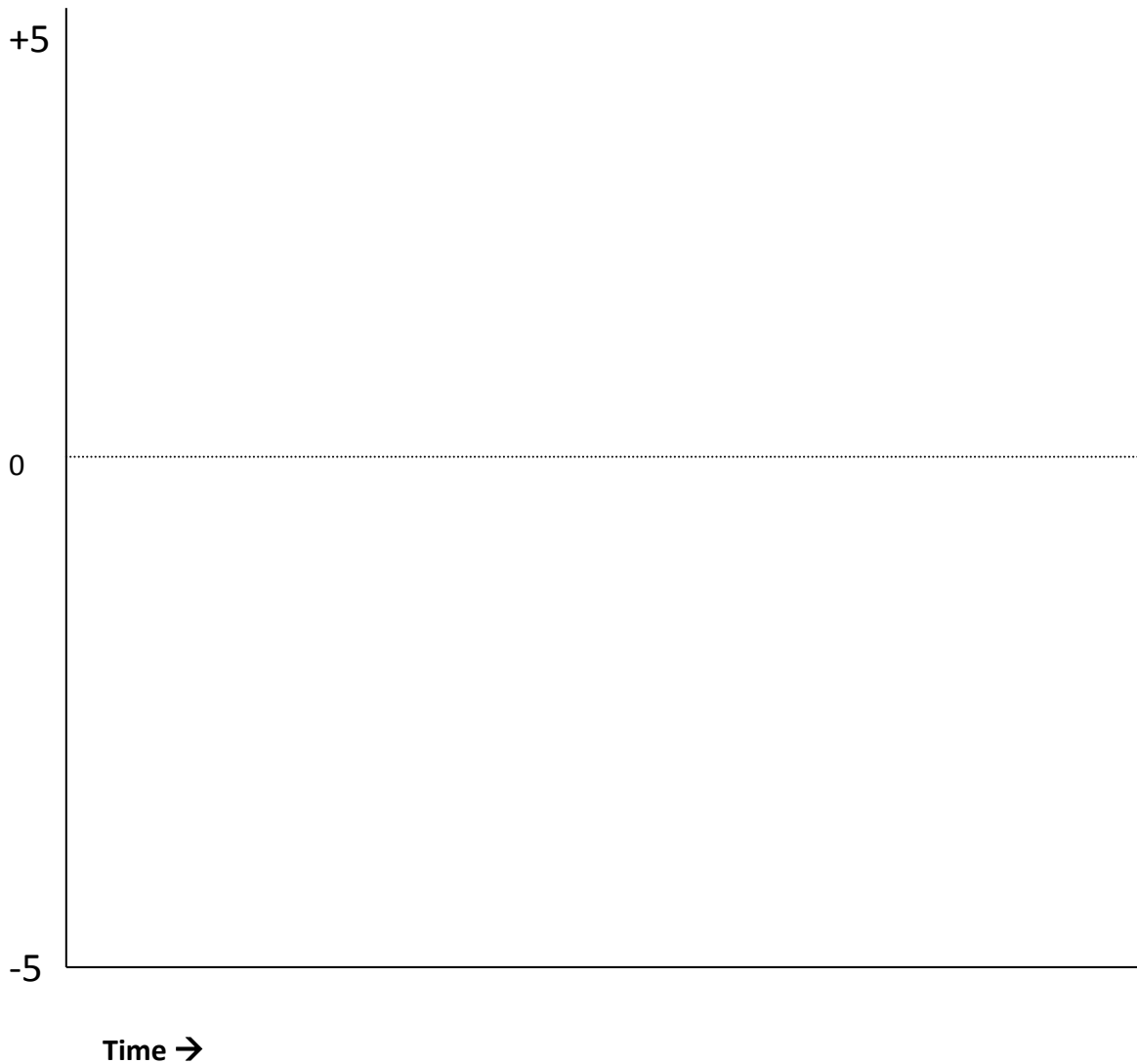
Step 4: Your Future

Write your preferred future professional scenario in 200 words or less in the space below. Begin with today and end with your death. Again, only 200 words.

Feelings Record

Having completed your data generation above, take a moment and make an entry in your Feelings Record, that is, write a short paragraph about your immediate reactions to taking this instrument. Did you like it? Not like it? Why? Why not? Did anything jump out at you as you were working through the steps above?

Theory

This is a projective exercise in that you have only a blank page facing you as you begin. The theory of projective tests (including the *Thematic Apperception Test* or the *Rorschach Inkblot Test*) is that given ambiguous stimuli, people can only make sense of them from within, that is, from the conclusions about life that they have already drawn. One cannot copy or imitate what others are writing. While your answers to a projective instrument may be colored by your immediate context (recent events, the assignment, etc.), they can only come from within you. Hence, projective data tells us something about who you are and how your personality and views of the world have been shaped thus far in your life.

Scoring Your Data

We will work through the scoring protocol in class.

Interpreting your Data

This exercise will give you a rich data pool to analyze. Your life's "lessons" in column three of your Key Event table might be themes in your life. How do they match up with the demands that various jobs place on people? (See for example the *Self Awareness Assessment* tool.) Do you begin to see patterns emerging from these data that match other data sets you may have like diaries or past performance reviews?

What does your Emotional Impact Chart look like? Does it trend up? Does it trend down? Is it wildly oscillating? Does it start high and stay high? Does it start low and stay low? I've seen all of these patterns and more as I've examined hundreds and hundreds of these charts. What does your overall pattern suggest to you about your emotional profile/patterns? How might these affect your ability to work in various kinds of jobs?

People who are willing to share their life's story with others often find that this simple approach has powerful results. These short, biographical sketches help associates and subordinates understand the leader's background and "where they are

coming from." These sketches also tend to be easy to remember and strong communicators of the storyteller's basic beliefs. In this sense, telling your life's story can be a powerful leadership tool. For the moment, though, we invite you to use these data to gain more insight into your personal patterns, your Life Themes, and how those themes might predict your probability of success in this job or that career.

Use the data from this instrument as we have the data from all instruments in this course, cautiously. We don't want to *jump* to conclusions, rather we want to make tentative inferences that will gel into the patterns we call "life themes" only when those tentative inferences are substantiated significantly by data from other sources.

REMEMBER: No single instrument is accurate enough or comprehensive enough to place our complete faith in.

We invite you to make some notes now on the following questions:

What patterns do you see in *your* life's story?

What patterns do you see In your professional forecast?

What patterns do others see?

Do your insights match?

What are the implications of your tentative patterns for the kind of work you should be seeking?