

NELSON MANDELA'S VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: The primary purpose of this study was to present a comprehensive analysis of Nelson Mandela's leadership style, focusing on his transformational approach. The study also aimed to critically examine the criticisms of Mandela's leadership to provide a more nuanced understanding of his legacy.

Research Method Used: The study approach included document analysis of Mandela's speeches, policies, and autobiographical sources, as well as a secondary analysis of scholarly literature and historical documents.

Findings: The findings suggest that while exceptional and inspirational, Nelson Mandela's leadership faced significant challenges. These challenges were particularly prominent in addressing long-standing socioeconomic inequalities and managing the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Conclusion: The conclusion drawn from the study is that Mandela's transformational leadership style, characterised by a compelling vision, inclusivity, and commitment to long-term change, still offers valuable insights for contemporary and future leadership approaches. However, the study also suggests that future leaders should be aware of the challenges that Mandela faced and be prepared to address them in their leadership journeys.

Recommendations: The study recommends that future leaders learn from the strengths and weaknesses of Mandela's leadership. Key areas for consideration include: establishing a compelling vision, fostering inclusivity, focusing on economic transformation, being responsive to crises and committing to long-term change.

Keywords: *Nelson Mandela, Visionary, Leadership*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a complex concept studied and analysed from different perspectives (Northouse, 2016). Warren Bennis, a well-known authority on leadership, defines it as the capacity to articulate a compelling vision and translate it into action while sustaining it (Bennis, 1999). This definition emphasises the significance of having a clear vision, executing it appropriately, and ensuring it lasts longer (Bennis, 2009). Throughout history, most leaders have shown exceptional qualities and achieved remarkable success in their respective fields (Daft & Lane, 2015). One renowned leader whose success can be evaluated using the statement by Warren Bennis is Nelson Mandela. Nelson Mandela provides a remarkable case study of transformational leadership in action. Throughout his life, he illustrated a profound and remarkable leadership qualities. That is through fighting against apartheid, promoting equality, and fostering reconciliation in South Africa (Coovadia, 2020). By analysing Mandela's leadership through the principles of transformational leadership theory, we can identify the vital attributes that contributed to his success.

Mandela was born on July 18, 1918, in Eastern Cape province, South Africa. His father served as a local chief, and he was descended from a Xhosa royal dynasty. He attended law school at the University of Fort Hare (Shone & Reed, 2007). Mandela was a revolutionary against apartheid, political leader, and philanthropist. He was instrumental in abolishing apartheid, the former system of ethnic segregation and discrimination in South Africa (Meyer, 2018). Nelson engaged in anti-colonial politics and joined the African National Congress (ANC) party in the 1940s. As apartheid policies became more oppressive in the 1950s, Mandela rose to prominence as a leader through the ANC. He recommended nonviolent resistance earlier but later considered militant tactics as peaceful avenues for change that were met with violent repression (Rodriguez, 2015).

Mandela was arrested in 1963 and accused of sabotage and a plot to overthrow the government. Most of his 27 years spent in incarceration were served on Robben Island. Despite his imprisonment, he never stopped to be a symbol of resistance and defiance against apartheid (Pollack & Hq, 2013). According to Nelson (2013), international pressure on the South African government and internal unrest led to negotiations for political reform in the 1980s. Mandela was then released from prison on February 11, 1990, after the ban on the ANC was lifted. He effectively negotiated, which led to the tearing apart of apartheid and the first multiracial elections in South Africa in 1994, and he was elected as South Africa's first black president the

same year. Nelson Mandela was in office from 1994 to 1999. He focused on reconciliation and nation-building, healing the country's deep racial and social divisions. Mandela's leadership and commitment to forgiveness and unity earned him widespread admiration in South Africa and globally.

After leaving office, Nelson Mandela became an influential leader and dedicated his time to various humanitarian causes, particularly addressing HIV/AIDS, poverty, and education. He established the Nelson Mandela Foundation, which promoted social justice and human rights. He died at 95 on December 5, 2013. His legacy as a champion of freedom, equality, and justice continues to inspire individuals around the globe. Mandela's determination, resilience, and commitment to democracy and equality made him iconic in the fight against injustice (Boehmer, 2008).

Mandela's Leadership

Based on transformational leadership theory, Mandela showed crucial leadership characteristics. First, he had a compelling vision of a unified South Africa free from apartheid and discrimination. A compelling vision guides individuals to work towards a common purpose (Antonakis et al., 2004). Mandela articulated this vision through justice, equality, and reconciliation. Other authors suggest that Mandela effectively communicated through speeches and writings, inspiring millions to join the struggle for equality (Pollack & Hq, 2013). In his leadership, he established a clear and ambitious vision resonating with various government leaders and citizens. His ability to inspire others was central to his leadership success. He showed humility, and resilience, symbolising hope for people in South Africa and worldwide. He connected with individuals from diverse backgrounds and inspired them to work together towards a common goal vital in achieving the peaceful transition to democracy in South Africa. Mandela's charisma and moral authority inspired people globally to join him in pursuing a just and inclusive society. The vision motivated followers and instilled a sense of purpose and direction (Mandela, 2019). According to Cicak (2019), the following statistics illustrate Nelson Mandela's vision of a united and democratic South Africa. Under Mandela's leadership, South Africa had the first democratic elections in 1994, with an unprecedented voter turnout of approximately 85%. Mandela's emphasis on reconciliation and healing can be seen in establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which allowed victims of

apartheid-era crimes to testify and seek amnesty. The TRC recorded over 20,000 statements and granted amnesty to around 1,500 individuals.

Translation of Vision into Action

Translating a vision into action needs proper planning, implementation, and resource allocation (Northouse, 2016). Mandela demonstrated exceptional skills in translating his vision into action by strategically thinking and making appropriate decisions. He strategically set goals and objectives aligned with the vision, that is, by providing a guideline for South Africa's success. Mandela mobilised resources built cross-functional teams, and established clear accountability measures to ensure progress toward the vision. He was also a persuasive orator and an intelligent strategist (Bell et al., 2011). He used various means, like negotiations, peaceful protests, and international pressure, to challenge the apartheid regime and advance his vision. According to Bell et al. (2011), Nelson Mandela's ability to translate his vision into action was evident through the following.

Social Reforms

Mandela's government implemented various social reforms to address the imbalances created by apartheid. This included the provision of housing, healthcare, education, and social welfare programs to uplift marginalised communities.

Economic Growth

Mandela rooted for policies promoting economic growth and attracting foreign investment. South Africa's GDP grew by an average of 3.2% per year during his presidency, contributing to job creation and poverty reduction.

Sustaining the Vision

Sustainability is vital to leadership success, as it entails maintaining strength, adapting to changes, and ensuring long-term growth (Quigley, 1993). Quincy also says that Mandela's leadership showed a remarkable ability to sustain his vision. Though he faced many challenges, including 27 years of imprisonment, he remained firm in his commitment to justice and equality. Mandela's resilience and determination were instrumental in sustaining the drive of the anti-apartheid movement and eventually bringing about the democratic South Africa he had envisioned. He further encouraged learning and a continuous improvement culture, embracing innovation and change. By empowering and developing future leaders, Nelson established a

foundation for sustained success beyond the people's expectations. Mandela's commitment to sustaining his vision is reflected in the long-term outcomes below.

Constitutional Legacy

Mandela was crucial in drafting South Africa's post-apartheid constitution, which remains in place today, safeguarding democratic principles and human rights.

Global Impact

Mandela's leadership and advocacy for justice and equality extended beyond South Africa. His influence on the international stage led to increased recognition of the anti-apartheid movement and inspired similar struggles for freedom worldwide. Moreover, he used his influence to advocate for human rights, peace, and social justice internationally. Promoting efforts in fighting poverty and HIV/AIDS and promoting education made him a respected and influential figure on the world stage.

Transformational Leadership Theory

This leadership theory was introduced by James MacGregor Burns, who focused on how leaders inspire and motivate their followers to exceed their self-interests and achieve collective goals (Hurd, 2012). Leaders who inspire and motivate their followers can bring about significant positive changes. This theory identifies four essential dimensions of transformational leadership (Northouse, 2016). By applying these transformational leadership tenets, a person gains a deeper understanding of Nelson Mandela's leadership concerning Warren Bennis' description of leadership.

Transformational Leadership and Nelson Mandela

Below are four dimensions in which Nelson Mandela demonstrated transformational leadership. The idealised influence was a vital aspect of Nelson Mandela's leadership style. Mandela's steady commitment to his principles and willingness to lead by example made him a robust and influential leader. His integrity and moral character were unmatched, as he consistently demonstrated honesty, transparency, and authenticity in his actions and words (Morris et al., 2014). Mandela's selfless nature and his firm belief in the pursuit of justice and equality resonated deeply with his followers and made him a role model for individuals across the globe. Morris adds that Mandela's ability to inspire and motivate people through his actions and personal sacrifices solidified his position as an iconic leader in the fight against oppression

and injustice. Mandela's idealised influence continues to serve as a guiding light for leaders and individuals aspiring to make a positive and lasting impact.

Inspirational motivation is a significant component of transformational leadership (Nurdin & Ismaya, 2017). Nelson Mandela showed an aspect of his remarkable leadership journey. Mandela inspired and motivated his followers, driving them to extraordinary performance. His exceptional communication skills allowed him to effectively convey his vision for a united and inclusive South Africa, and he skilfully fostered a shared sense of purpose among his people. According to Nurdin & Ismaya, Mandela understood the significance of aligning individual objectives with those of the nation, enabling his followers to recognise the significance of their contributions. His passion and unwavering faith in the potential of his nation instilled in South Africans a sense of self-assurance and zeal, empowering them to exceed expectations and strive for greatness. The motivation of Nelson Mandela was instrumental in transforming both individuals and the nation.

By challenging the status quo, Nelson Mandela exhibited intellectual stimulation and encouraged creativity and critical thinking in his adherents (Alahmad, 2016). He created an environment that valued new ideas, challenged the status quo, and promoted intellectual stimulation by providing opportunities for growth and professional development. Alahmad continues by stating that Nelson Mandela's intellectual stimulation improved the nation's problem-solving abilities and increased its adaptability. He emphasised education and encouraged the pursuit of knowledge to overcome adversity and establish a better future. Mandela empowered individuals to assume responsibility for their positions in the transformation of South Africa through this strategy.

Transformational leaders immediately grasp their followers' goals. Mandela cared for each disciple (Beukman, 2005). He listened and built trust and respect. It rallied his fans. Nelson Mandela mentored people. Trust, openness, and respect promoted collaboration and growth. Mandela addressed citizens' strengths and weaknesses to promote belonging and development.

Warren Bennis' Leadership Statement and Transformational Leadership Theory

When examining Bennis' statement regarding transformational leadership theory, we can draw connections between the two (Seijts et al., 2018). First, the ability to create a compelling vision corresponds to the transformational leader's capacity to establish a clear and inspiring trajectory for the organisation or team. This vision is a guiding force that motivates and instils a sense of

purpose in its followers (Northouse, 2016). Secondly, Northouse also observed that translating the vision into action aligns with the transformational leader's capacity to communicate the vision effectively, showcasing the necessary steps and strategies to achieve the desired goals. By articulating the vision and establishing attainable goals, the leader empowers and motivates followers to take actionable steps toward its realisation.

Thirdly, according to Northouse, sustaining the vision entails the transformational leader continually reinforcing its significance and ensuring its endurance. This involves consistently communicating and reinforcing the vision, recognising accomplishments, and adapting strategies to surmount obstacles and maintain force. Therefore, Warren Bennis' statement on leadership regarding creating a compelling vision, translating into action, and maintaining is consistent with the transformational leadership theory's guiding principles. Both emphasise the role of the leader in inspiring and motivating followers, providing them with clear direction and continually reinforcing the vision to achieve exceptional results.

Criticism of Mandela's Success

While Nelson Mandela was and is still widely regarded as an iconic figure and a symbol of hope and reconciliation, some criticisms and challenges have been raised regarding his success (Lyman, 2013). The criticisms do not diminish his legacy but provide a more comprehensive view of his impact. According to Lyman (2013), some potential criticisms of Mandela's success include.

Mandela's presidency focused on political reforms and reconciliation, but some critics argue that his administration failed to address the deep-rooted economic inequalities in South Africa. Despite the dismantling of apartheid, the majority of black South Africans still faced significant socio-economic challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and limited access to resources. Critics argue that Mandela's government could have done more to promote economic transformation and address these disparities.

Truth and Reconciliation Process

Mandela's approach to reconciliation, exemplified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), has been praised and criticised. While the TRC was instrumental in creating a sense of justice and forgiveness, some argue that perpetrators of human rights abuses were not entirely made accountable. Critics state that the amnesty granted through the TRC may have compromised the pursuit of justice and undermined the healing process for victims.

Slow Pace of Land Redistribution

Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) promised land reform as a critical component of addressing historical injustices, yet progress in land redistribution during his presidency needed to be improved. The slow pace of land reform has frustrated many South Africans, particularly those who were dispossessed of their land during apartheid. Critics argue that Mandela's government needed more to prioritise and accelerate land redistribution in South Africa today.

HIV/AIDS Crisis

Mandela's presidency coincided with the increase of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa. His leadership was criticised for its slow response to the crisis and reluctant to acknowledge the epidemic's severity. While Mandela himself later became an advocate for HIV/AIDS awareness, some argue that his early response was inadequate.

Continuing Social Inequalities

Despite Mandela's efforts to promote equality and social justice, South Africa struggles with significant social inequalities. The country still faces high poverty levels, unemployment, crime, and unequal access to education and healthcare. Critics argue that while Mandela's leadership laid the foundation for a more inclusive society, the challenges of addressing systemic inequality were vast and required sustained efforts beyond his presidency.

Recognising that these criticisms do not negate Mandela's achievements or his enormous impact on South Africa and the world is essential. Instead, they highlight the complexities and ongoing challenges any leader faces striving for transformative change in a deeply divided society.

In conclusion, Nelson Mandela was a successful leader. His achievements and leadership are well evaluated through the application of the statement by Warren Bennis and utilising transformational leadership theory. He created a compelling vision, translated it into action, and sustained it throughout his life, exemplifying his exceptional leadership. He inspired, motivated, empowered, and showed humility to his followers, and his strong commitment was significant in achieving a democratic South Africa.

The application of transformational leadership theory by Nelson Mandela was evident in his ability to articulate a compelling vision for a democratic and inclusive South Africa. He

emphasised the need for shared values and collective goals, creating a sense of unity among diverse groups.

The transformational leadership theory used by Mandela and the definition of leadership by Warren Bennis remain relevant and applicable today. Transformational leadership theory highlights the need for leaders to empower individuals and create a sense of purpose and ownership. Mandela's approach is a powerful example of how leaders can drive change by emphasising moral values, integrity, and a focus on the greater good.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Nelson Mandela remains one of the most revered figures of the 20th century, and his legacy continues to inspire leaders and individuals across the globe. Through his charismatic and transformational leadership style, Mandela created a compelling vision for a democratic and inclusive South Africa, uniting a nation deeply divided by decades of apartheid. His emphasis on shared values, collective goals, and integrity made him the epitome of transformational leadership. However, as this study points out, Mandela's leadership was not without criticism. Issues related to economic inequalities, the Truth and Reconciliation Process, land redistribution, the HIV/AIDS crisis, and ongoing social inequalities mark areas of challenge and critique. These criticisms offer a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Mandela's legacy and the complexities of leading a country through such profound change. Despite these challenges, Mandela's unwavering commitment to democracy, reconciliation, and social justice remains an enduring testament to his leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that future leaders learn from the strengths and weaknesses of Mandela's leadership approach. Leaders should endeavour to: establish and articulate a compelling vision: As Mandela demonstrated, effective leadership requires a clear and inspiring vision. Leaders should strive to communicate this vision in a way that unites and motivates followers. Foster inclusivity and reconciliation: Leaders should actively promote inclusivity and reconciliation in contexts marked by division, acknowledging past injustices while working towards a shared future. Address socio-economic inequalities: Leaders should not overlook the importance of economic transformation in achieving social justice. Policies and measures should be implemented to tackle socio-economic disparities and promote equal opportunities. Be responsive to crises: Leaders should demonstrate proactive leadership in

response to crises. This includes acknowledging the problem, taking swift action, and mobilising resources to address the issue. Commit to long-term change: Leaders should recognise that real change takes time. They should remain committed and resilient in the face of setbacks and criticism, understanding that true transformation is often lengthy.

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