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**EVALUATING MAHATMA GANDHI'S SUCCESS AS A  
LEADER THROUGH THE LENS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL  
LEADERSHIP THEORY**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the Study:** This study critically evaluates Mahatma Gandhi's leadership through the lens of transformational leadership theory, shedding light on his effectiveness and impact on India's struggle for independence. Known for his nonviolent approach and ethical conduct, Gandhi embodied the qualities of a transformational leader, including moral authority, visionary leadership, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Despite numerous challenges, such as adapting to various cultural environments and facing racial discrimination, Gandhi's leadership journey underscores his capacity to inspire and mobilize masses toward extraordinary achievements.

**Research Methodology:** The methodology employed in this study is a literature-based review, focusing on Gandhi's personal experiences, actions, and the broader socio-political context of his leadership.

**Research Findings:** Common findings across the reviewed literature highlight Gandhi's strong ethical foundation, his ability to articulate a compelling and inclusive vision for India, and his adeptness in inspiring and motivating individuals to participate in the independence movement.

**Conclusion:** The analysis concludes that Gandhi was a successful transformational leader, supported by his visionary outlook, his ability to engage followers emotionally and intellectually, and his commitment to addressing individual followers' needs. Gandhi's leadership not only contributed to India's independence but also left an enduring legacy that continues to inspire leaders and movements around the world.

**Keywords:** *Mahatma Gandhi, Success, Leader, Lens of Transformational, Leadership Theory*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Leadership is a complex and multifaceted concept, extensively studied and analyzed from various angles. Warren Bennis (1999) succinctly defines leadership as the capacity to create a compelling vision, translate it into action, and sustain it over time. This definition underscores the essence of effective leadership. In this essay, we will critically evaluate the success of Mahatma Gandhi, a renowned leader, through the lens of transformational leadership theory. By applying this definition to Gandhi's leadership journey, we aim to uncover insights into his effectiveness and the significant impact he had on India's struggle for independence. Moreover, an examination of Gandhi's leadership qualities and actions will provide a deeper understanding of his role as a transformational leader and the lasting influence he exerted on the independence movement.

## **MAHATMA GANDHI'S BACKGROUND**

Mahatma Gandhi, born on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1869 in India, an Indian lawyer, politician, social activist, and writer who became the leader of the nationalist movement against the British rule of India. He was further considered for his doctrine of nonviolent protest to achieve political and social progress. He was a “great soul” in the eyes of many Indians. His fame spread worldwide during his lifetime & only increased after his death. The name Mahatma Gandhi is now one of the most universally recognized on earth. Gandhi took his studies seriously and tried to brush up on his English and Latin by taking University of London matriculation examination. But, during the 3 years he spent in England his main preoccupation with personal and moral issues rather than with academic ambitions. He struggled to adjust from the half-rural atmosphere of Rajkot to the cosmopolitan life of London. He became a member of vegetarian society, attending its conferences and contributing articles to its journal.

After moving to South Africa, Gandhi was quickly exposed to the racial discrimination practiced. He went through many humiliations that were the daily lot of Indian traders and laborers in Natal. However, in July 1984 when he was barely 25, he blossomed almost overnight into a proficient political campaigner. He drafted petitions to the Natal legislators and British government and had them signed by hundreds of competitors. He could not prevent the passage of the bill but succeeded in drawing the attention of the public and the press in Natal, India and England to the Natal Indian's

grievances. He was persuaded to settle down in Durban to practice law and to organize the Indian community. He also founded the national Indian congress, of which he became the secretary. Through that common political organization, he infused a spirit of solidarity in the heterogeneous Indian community. He finally exposed to the view of the outside world the skeleton in the imperial cupboard, the discrimination practiced against the Indian subjects of Queen Victoria in one of her own colonies in Africa. It was a measure of his success as a publicist that such important newspapers editorially commented on the Natal Indian's grievances. He went on to fight for the Indians before passing in 1948 in New Delhi, India.

### **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY**

Transformational leadership theory, originally proposed by James V. Downton in 1973 and further developed by Bernard M. Bass, suggests that leaders have the ability to inspire and motivate their followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes. This theory emphasizes the leader's capacity to create a compelling vision, foster positive relationships, stimulate individual and collective growth, and promote intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). By analyzing Gandhi's leadership qualities and actions within this theoretical framework, we can assess the factors that contributed to his remarkable achievements.

### **EVALUATION OF MAHATMA GANDHI'S SUCCESS**

To effectively evaluate Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, it's crucial to delve into his journey and assess his achievements through the prism of transformational leadership theory. Widely revered as the Father of the Indian Nation, Gandhi led India's nonviolent struggle for independence from British colonial rule. A key facet of his leadership success was his emphasis on moral authority and ethical conduct. Gandhi was a proponent of leading by example, adhering to high moral standards, and embodying the principles of truth, nonviolence, and self-discipline in his personal life. His consistent alignment of actions with values established a robust ethical foundation, garnering the trust and respect of his followers. His unwavering commitment to nonviolent resistance and peaceful dialogue, even amidst provocation, distinguished him as a leader of exceptional integrity, inspiring loyalty among his followers and earning global admiration.

### **Visionary Leadership**

Gandhi's leadership success is also attributable to his visionary approach. He imagined an independent India free from colonial chains, aspiring for not only political freedom but also social and economic equality for all citizens. This vision resonated with millions, fostering a sense of purpose and unity. Gandhi's inclusivity extended to the marginalized, advocating for the rights of the untouchables (Dalits) and challenging social discrimination. His broad vision for a just and inclusive society emphasized the interconnection of political, social, and economic elements in shaping the nation's future. By articulating this comprehensive vision, Gandhi inspired future generations to continue striving for social justice and equality, laying the groundwork for a more inclusive India.

### **Inspirational Motivation**

As a transformational leader, Gandhi inspired extraordinary outcomes through his dedication to nonviolence, truth, and self-sacrifice. His austere lifestyle and powerful rhetoric, like the "Quit India" speech, ignited nationalism and motivated many to join the independence movement. His ability to connect emotionally and appeal to people's sense of justice transformed him into a symbol of moral authority, inspiring global movements for freedom and justice.

### **Intellectual Stimulation**

Gandhi encouraged his followers to think independently and creatively, challenging the status quo and advocating for self-reliance and economic freedom through swadeshi (self-sufficiency). Promoting handspun Khadi and revitalizing traditional industries, he ignited national pride and self-sufficiency, fostering economic empowerment and personal growth among his followers.

### **Individualized Consideration**

Gandhi's leadership was marked by his attentiveness to the unique needs of his followers, promoting inclusive decision-making and establishing ashrams for collaborative living and working. His empathy for diverse social groups, especially the untouchables, and advocacy for their rights, underscored his commitment to social justice and individualized consideration, creating a strong sense of belonging and dedication among his followers.

## **EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS**

Evaluating Gandhi's success through the lens of transformational leadership theory highlights his remarkable effectiveness and impact. His visionary leadership, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration were crucial in leading India towards independence. Gandhi's ability to forge a compelling vision, inspire action, foster critical thinking, and cater to the unique needs of his followers underscored his extraordinary achievements. In addition, Gandhi's ability to galvanize the masses and cultivate a robust grassroots movement was a testament to his transformational leadership. His strategy of nonviolent civil disobedience encouraged participation across society, empowering ordinary individuals to become change agents and take control of their collective destiny. This involvement in protests, boycotts, and constructive programs united his followers, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and strengthening the independence movement. Gandhi's participatory leadership approach not only solidified the movement but also imbued the Indian populace with self-belief and empowerment, laying the foundation for a sustainable struggle for independence.

Gandhi's leadership was also marked by his adaptability and evolutionary approach to strategy, crucial in the dynamic pursuit of independence. His pragmatic suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement in response to violence underscored his commitment to nonviolence and his ability to reassess and adjust strategies to maintain moral integrity and ensure the movement's long-term success. This adaptability, alongside his resilience and adherence to principles, highlighted his exemplary leadership. Moreover, Gandhi's flexibility in strategy was evident throughout India's independence struggle. He adeptly tailored his methods to meet the unique challenges of each situation, whether it was the Salt March, the Non-Cooperation Movement, or the Quit India Movement. This adaptive leadership not only sustained momentum but also broadened support, even in adversity. Therefore, Gandhi's transformational leadership was characterized by his visionary approach, ability to mobilize and empower the masses, and remarkable adaptability. His commitment to nonviolence, pragmatic strategy adjustments, and openness to learning and evolution were pivotal in India's path to independence and continue to inspire leaders worldwide.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Mahatma Gandhi's leadership success can be evaluated through the lens of transformational leadership theory. His visionary leadership, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration were pivotal in his ability to craft a compelling vision, put it into action, and maintain it over time. Gandhi's unwavering commitment to truth, nonviolence, and self-discipline not only led India to independence but also inspired freedom movements and leaders globally. His leadership journey stands as a powerful example of how transformational leadership can affect significant social and political changes. In addition, Gandhi's leadership success can be attributed to his embodiment of transformational leadership principles. His compelling vision, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration laid the groundwork for India's independence struggle. Gandhi's legacy continues to inspire and influence leaders around the world.

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