

Nelson mandela leadership style research paper

[People](#), [Nelson Mandela](#)



Leadership is a social process through which one person makes use of others' support in accomplishing certain goals. A leader is a person who is moving towards a particular direction while managing to influence others to follow him or her. A leader becomes a coordinator, a commander, a manager, a counsellor, and an initiator in a group, country, or an organisation. Therefore, leadership depends on two key factors namely the leader's ability to guide, direct, organise, and influence others and the readiness of followers to embrace or resist the leadership style applied.

Some of the leaders who depicted clear leadership styles during their tenure of the office include Nelson Mandela, Adolf Hitler, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta, Benito Mussolini, Michael Gorbachev, and Mahatma Gandhi, John F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther. However, this paper focuses on the former leader and his leadership style. Specifically, the paper will give reasons as to why Nelson Mandela is a good leader. Further, the paper presents his leadership style in an effort to confirm that he is indeed an epitome of exemplary leaders.

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela is a renowned and influential leader who was born at Umtata in Transkei district of South Africa. Mandela was born on 18th July 1918. Mandela's father, Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa was a chief¹. Mandela was brought up in close witness of leadership. Consequently, his parents and the Thembu people expected that Rolihlahla would also become a chief like his father. By being brought up in a chief's family, Mandela would end up learning a lot on leadership. His mother Nosekeni Fanny was a long-serving Christian.

Since Mandela was a bright student, he proceeded to Fort Hare University. It is at the university that Mandela's leadership traits began to emerge.

Mandela would fight for equality of all students in college. He would later proceed to spearhead the fight for democracy in South Africa. As a result, he qualified as the first democratically elected president of the republic of South Africa. He later led the country for five years. Today, Mandela is esteemed as an example of an egalitarian leader.

One of the reasons why Mandela was a good leader is that he did not tolerate unfairness, inequality, and oppression of the minority. For example, while Mandela was at Port Hare University, he realised that there was discrimination in the appointment of student representatives². It is out of Mandela's fight for democracy at the university that the authorities expelled him.

Mandela was perceived as being high hardened and stubborn. He believed that students from all races stood equal chances of being nominated as student representatives at the university. However, he was expelled before realising his dream. By having sacrificed his stay and further education at the university for the sake of democracy, one realises that Mandela was a good leader.

Another indicator of good leadership qualities in Nelson Mandela is his determination to fight for democracy in his Thembu community³. When Mandela was in his twenties, his parents together with the community identified a bride for him, but he believed in democracy. Hence, he claimed freedom to choose a wife. Mandela's action set precedence for many young

men in Thembu community who fought for their rights to have a bride of their choice. This act is an indicator of good leadership.

Thirdly, after Mandela joined the African National Congress (ANC) in 1940s, he was able to bring together many educated and uneducated youths to form the ANC youth league. Moreover, Mandela was able to work with his fellow youth leaders like Walter Sisulu and Walter Tambo in ANC youth league in the effort of making it the most influential element of the party. The ability to bring together people from diverse backgrounds into the youth league indicates Mandela's leadership abilities.

Fourthly, by 1947, Mandela's charisma had convinced other leaders and the members of ANC youth league to elect him as the secretary of the youth league. This depicts Mandela as an influential and acceptable leader.

Fifthly, as Mandela continued with his political affairs and leadership at the ANC youth league, he was able to continue with his law degree studies at the University of South Africa where he later graduated. This indicates a leader who sought professional knowledge and skills in his pursuit of influence. Moreover, Mandela was later on elected the deputy president general of ANC in 1952. Promotion of Nelson Mandela into a senior party position further indicates that other leaders and party members had spotted his ability to spearhead the party's affairs.

In addition, Mandela used his position as the deputy ANC party leader to spearhead defiance against the apartheid regime in South Africa⁴. For example, in 1952, Mandela organised and pulled all ANC members, leaders,

and supporters to defy the apartheid regime by organising protests and defiance campaigns. In the same way, Mandela led indigenous Africans in 1952 to defy apartheid regime by boarding buses designated for the Europeans only. Courage is one of the attributes of a good leader.

Moreover, Mandela led the black Africans in defying the segregation rules of the 'all-white' parks⁵. In addition, after ANC was banned in 1960 following the Sharpeville massacre, Mandela led youths in forming, 'the spear of the nation' underground movement. The spear of the nation movement attacked and sabotaged major government facilities in South Africa. For example, they attacked railways, power, and telephone installations. These acts indicate that Mandela was a persistent and persevering leader who could not give up the fight until he and his followers achieved their goals.

Another indicator that shows that Nelson Mandela was a good leader was his ability to sneak out of the country during the apartheid regime to visit various countries in order to solicit for support against colonialists. For example, in 1962, Mandela left South Africa to address the Pan-African Freedom Conference, which was being held in Ethiopia. In this conference, Mandela was able to solicit for all African heads of independent states to support his party and country against apartheid. Mandela then proceeded to London where he appealed to the Labour Party (one of the major political parties in Britain) to assist the ANC in fighting against the apartheid regime.

Mandela's thirst for knowledge and skills was also depicted during his visit to Algeria. During his visit to Algeria Mandela trained on guerrilla tactics under the Algerians nationalists who were then fighting the French. Mandela

proceeded with his diplomatic appeals in Kenya and Tanzania where he was able to garner full support. The impact of Mandela's visit to the international community was witnessed when most of the countries imposed sanctions on South Africa.

Mandela also indicated that he was a committed and dedicated leader during his term of imprisonment at the Robben Island. After Mandela left Kenya, he was arrested on August 5th 1962 where he was charged with leaving South Africa in an illegal way and for inciting South African workers to strike.

Mandela was initially sentenced to a five-year imprisonment before he was later sentenced to life imprisonment after some statements alleged to be incitement statements were seized from the " spear of the nation' offices at Rivonia house". 6

In addition, the statements that were seized from his fellow leaders further implicated Mandela. Mandela sacrificed his freedom for the freedom of his country. It was not until 1990 when de Klerk became the new president of South Africa that he released Mandela besides allowing the operation of political parties. Mandela became the president of ANC where he was elected the first black president of the independent republic of South Africa in 1994. Mandela had achieved his fight for freedom of his people. He further demonstrated tolerance in leadership after he emphasised a rainbow nation, a nation that comprised many races.

Contrary to the expectation of many people, Mandela was accommodative to the colonialists and his former oppressors⁷. It is out of his tolerance that the economy of the independent South Africa grew rapidly through the efforts of

investors from all races. Surprisingly, Mandela supported the peace and reconciliation movement headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. This indicated Mandela's democratic leadership style. His thirst for unity and equal rights also came out strongly during the reconciliation efforts in South Africa.

Mandela is also a convincing diplomat. His ability to influence Colonel Muammar Gaddafi to hand over the individual Lockerbie bombers of the Pan Am Airline to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 1999 indicates his diplomatic ability. Colonel Gaddafi had completely refused to cooperate with the International Criminal Court in handling arrest cases and trial of the bombers. However, with the intervention of President Mandela, Colonel Gaddafi was able to cooperate with the ICC. This saved Libya from becoming a pariah state since it had already started receiving economic sanctions. Immediately after Mandela's diplomatic mission succeeded, economic sanctions against South Africa were lifted.

Mandela further indicated his democratic leadership when he retired from the presidency and handed over power to the elected Thabo Mbeki, his former deputy president. The ANC party won the 1999 general elections. All these cases happened under the democratic eye of Nelson Mandela. The process of the election and the consequent handing over of power were said to be one of the most democratic processes in the world. This democracy still rings in the minds of South Africans and the world. When he left office, and Mandela said, " I step down with a clear conscience, feeling that I have, in a

small way, done my duty to my people and my country” 8. This indicates his passion, dedication, and democratic nature.

Leadership styles are leaders’ ways of offering directions, inspiring people, influencing them, and implementing any relevant plans. The leadership style that a leader adopts depends on his or her philosophy, character, and experience⁹. Different leaders depict different leadership styles in different situations. Leaders may also change their leadership styles depending on the situation of leadership¹⁰. The leadership style that a leader may chose should depend on the prevailing situation and followers. The most adopted leadership styles in the world include the engaging style, Laissez-faire style, autocratic style, narcissistic style, toxic style, task-oriented style, and democratic leadership style.

Although there were various leadership styles that Mandela depicted during his leadership years, only one leadership style features predominantly. The leadership style that Mandela commonly applied was democratic. Mandela depicted various facets of democratic style of leadership. Democracy is the rule of the people by the people and for the people. In a democratic style of leadership, the leader mostly shares the process of decision-making with people¹¹. Therefore, decision-making depends on the followers since democratic style fully takes their interests in reading for their implementation process.

Social equality is also promoted in the participative leadership style. In a democratic leadership style, the leader is ready to share his or her position with other leaders. In addition, the leader openly listens to his or her juniors

where he or she readily discusses with them on various issues of leadership. The leader becomes the implementer of the people's opinions and ideas. Leaders who embrace democratic style of leadership become the people's leaders¹². They hold leadership on behalf of their followers. Nelson Mandela depicted various qualities of democratic leadership style.

Nelson Mandela indicated his initiative to help and guide others in his leadership. For example, while the University of Port Hare, Mandela rose against oppression of indigenous African students by the university administration. Mandela campaigned against discrimination of Africans in nomination of student representatives. Although Mandela was expelled from the university, he was able to help his fellow indigenous Africans at Port Hare University since the university's administration later began nominating Africans as student representatives.

Mandela fought for democracy at the university in a non-violent way. He also used his democratic style of leadership after he was expelled from Port Hare University when Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, and him formed the ANC youth league. Mandela was able to help South Africa in the fight against apartheid by organising and leading non-violent protests. Mandela also led peaceful protests against discrimination of the indigenous Africans by the whites in South Africa. Use of diplomatic methods of agitating for a larger democratic space in the country clearly depicts Mandela as a democratic leader. When Mandela was appointed the deputy president of ANC, he led the party in planning opposition against oppression. Mandela also helped many indigenous Africans who were arrested by the whites as a lawyer.

Nelson Mandela was a charismatic democrat. He used his democratic style to attract and win over loyal followers. For example, Mandela and his friends Sisulu and Tambo managed to form the ANC youth league. Mandela was also able to use the youth league to influence many indigenous Africans into following the activities of the movement¹³. In addition, his activities in the youth league earned him the deputy party leader's position. Moreover, when ANC was banned from operating as a political party in South Africa, Mandela formed, "the spear of the nation" youth subversive lobby group. This movement attracted a large number of followers, with its activities disrupting the apartheid regime.

For example, the spear of the nation movement led indigenous Africans in defying segregation rules in buses and parks. When Mandela sneaked out of South Africa in 1962, he was able to influence many world leaders into supporting ANC and South Africa in its fight for freedom. For example, he marshalled support from the Pan-African freedom conference in Ethiopia and sought support from the labour party in the United Kingdom, Kenya, Algeria, and Tanzania. Mandela was also able to gain support from the United Nations. Although Mandela was jailed until 1991, his release attracted a large number of supporters who elected him as the first black president of South Africa. This achievement is an indicator of the strength of the democratic style of leadership.

Mandela's democratic leadership style also came out through his efforts in seeking other people's opinions especially on apartheid. For example, Nelson Mandela sneaked out of South Africa and travelled to many parts of the

world to solicit for support against apartheid¹⁴. Mandela sought support from African leaders, the United Kingdom, Algeria, Kenya, and Tanzania. Mandela also sought the opinion of the United Nations on South Africa's quest for freedom. He successively garnered support from these organisations, party, and countries. For instance, the United Nations imposed sanctions against South Africa. Algeria offered guerrilla-training skills to Nelson Mandela while other African nations provided financial and social support. When Nelson Mandela came out of the prison in 1991, he waited for the country to carry out a general election where he contested and won the presidential seat.

This was an act of democracy. Mandela only ruled for five years and retired. His dedication saw him hand over power in a peaceful manner to his deputy Thabo Mbeki who was also democratically elected. In addition, Mandela formed a rainbow nation slogan to accommodate people from all races including those who oppressed him. Mandela went ahead to form the national healing and reconciliation movement, which he supported¹⁵. The movement was aimed at reconciling all South Africans. Mandela's fight for democracy and fulfilment of the majority will was also seen in his efforts to reconcile Libya with the rest of the world. Mandela prevailed upon Colonel Muammar Gaddafi until he handed over the bombers of Lockerbie Pan AM airline to the ICC. It is through the efforts of Nelson Mandela that Libya was saved from becoming a pariah state.

Communication is a major aspect of democratic style of leadership. Dialogue is a leading skill in which democratic style of leadership invests. In

democratic leadership, the opinion, ideas, will, and views of other people are listened. The major aspect of democratic style of leadership is the will of the followers. Nelson Mandela relied on communication in his pursuit for leadership. For example, while he was at Port Hare University pursuing a degree in law, he rose against oppression of minority students.

Mandela used campaigns and advocacy in fighting for equality at the university. In this endeavour, Mandela organised and coordinated student groups who voiced their demand to the university's administration.

Mandela's oratory and communication skills enabled him to influence students from the native Africans side and the whites' side to fight for equality of student representatives. Dialogue with various student groups enabled Mandela's voice to reach the administrators who later on expelled him from the university.

In addition, when Mandela was expelled from the university, he joined African National Congress. While working with the ANC party, Mandela took part in the formation of a youth wing. His persuasive communication skills enabled him to influence many young South Africans into the league. Both the ANC and its youth wing advocated for equality of all South Africans. The youth wing under the direction of Mandela was able to organise rebellion campaigns against apartheid¹⁶. Later, Mandela's persuasive skills earned him the post of the deputy president of the Africa National Congress party. As the deputy leader of the party, Mandela spearheaded many discussions and dialogues with various party leaders in a bid to fight against apartheid.

Dialogue and communication skills also feature prominently when Mandela silently ran away from South Africa in order to seek the support of the international community in 1962. Mandela was able to communicate with his party leaders to influence them to finance his movement to various European and African countries to solicit for support against apartheid. Mandela addressed the Pan African Freedom Charter meeting in Ethiopia on matters of South Africa's independence¹⁷. During this summit, Mandela used his communication skills to seek the opinion of other African leaders regarding the apartheid regime. His ability to chat and persuade others enabled him to marshal the support of the African leaders that attended the freedom charter meeting.

Communication that is purposeful and well packaged enables people to persuade others to move towards a particular direction. As Mandela moved to the United Kingdom to meet the labour party leaders, he was sure of the support of African leaders. Dialogue is a very powerful tool for ensuring that democracy is served. Mandela sought the will of the labour party concerning the apartheid regime in South Africa. In addition, Mandela was able to persuade the Labour Party and a considerable number of its followers to recommend for the abolishment of the apartheid regime. Before moving back to South Africa, Mandela visited Tanzania and Kenya. In these African countries, Mandela addressed various leaders and humanitarian organisations seeking their opinion on the prevailing segregation situation in South Africa. His communicative ability enabled him to earn the support of many leaders.

Mandela was able to communicate the bad situation at his home. He would use his communication skills and his knowledge as a lawyer to put forward a clear picture of the troubles of apartheid. Mandela also appealed to the international organisations such as the United Nations for support against the apartheid regime¹⁸. Mandela was very successful in his bid to solicit for support for the fight against apartheid. For example, the international community imposed economic sanctions against South Africa and its government. Imposition of sanctions against South Africa by the international community including the United Nations was an indicator of the success of Mandela's pursuit for democracy. Mandela's communication ability was also witnessed when he was released from jail in 1991. Mandela contested for presidency under his ANC party. Since Oliver Tambo, the party chairperson was still ill and in a foreign country, Mandela became the president of ANC. He was later on elected to the presidency using the ANC party ticket.

One of the key tools that great people such as leaders of states use when they need to settle any disputes is the use of dialogue. This strategy gives each party a chance to express its opinion as far as a certain issue is concerned. At the same time, other parties have the chance to listen and gauge the opinions delivered in the effort to air out theirs, which are also to be heard and gauged by other people. However, the key agenda that these parties seek is the neutral point when they will all agree on a certain way out so that the burning issue can be ended to pave way for progress.

Mandela was one of such leaders who upheld the role of dialogue in their leadership. The application of dialogue was also seen in the leadership of

Mandela since he founded and supported the peace and reconciliation movement under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu¹⁹. The reconciliation movement used dialogue to bring various races and communities together. Contrary to the expectations of many whites in South Africa, Mandela advocated for a rainbow nation. He advocated for peace and reconciliation of all South Africans.

Democratic leadership style focuses its efforts on people. In a democratic leadership style, the leader holds his or her position on behalf of the people²⁰. Leadership belongs to the people. To begin with, when Mandela was at Port Hare University, he was expelled due to his agitation for equality in the appointment of student representatives. He used his leadership skills to fight for the indigenous Africans at the university. Priority of student leadership at the university was accorded to the white students. It was for the predicament of the aboriginal Africans that Mandela was expelled from the university thereby dropping from his law class. The fight for democracy is sacrificial.

Democratic leaders sacrifice themselves for the sake of followers. Mandela also depicted his democratic leadership style during his early twenties when he refused to marry a bride that was identified and selected for him by his family. He believed that all people should be given the free will to choose their bridegroom. In addition, Mandela also suffered in prison for the sake of people. When he sneaked from South Africa in 1962 and came back, Mandela was arrested and imprisoned. Mandela was charged with sneaking out of the country illegally.

Later, he was charged with incitement to violence. Mandela suffered in prison for 26 years for the sake of his democracy. He sacrificed his time and freedom for the people of South Africa. In addition, when Mandela was released from prison and elected for the presidency, he only ruled for five years before handing over leadership to the people in a democratic way. This indicates his ability to sacrifice himself for the sake of people.

When Mandela handed over leadership to his deputy in 1999, it was an indication of how democracy can enhance a smooth transition in the country. Democratic leadership style enhances equality and accommodation of others. Although many people expected Nelson Mandela to remain in the presidency for many years owing to his many years of struggle for independence, Mandela announced his retirement only after ruling for five years²¹. Mandela gave people a chance to elect a president of their own through a democratic election.

In conclusion, a leader is a person who is moving in a particular direction while managing to convince others to follow him or her. A leader is a coordinator, a commander, a manager, a counsellor, and an initiator. One of the good leaders who are highly appreciated across the world for their leadership style and demeanour is the former president of South Africa, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. Mandela is rated one of the best leaders in the world due to his dedication during the struggle and freedom in South Africa. Mandela exhibited leadership qualities such as being a good communicator, for instance, when he rose against discriminative appointment of student representatives at the university.

Mandela also depicted his ability to suffer for the sake of his people when he was expelled from the university and/or when he was imprisoned for 26 years. He also ruled the nation in a manner that united people of all races by seeking peace for the larger Africa. Mandela adopted democratic leadership style. Mandela depicted various characteristics of democratic leadership style. In fact, he offered help and guidance to others. He built trust in his followers, sought other people, nations, and organisations' opinions by adopting communication as a key driver in his leadership.

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